

**Large print booklet**

# Streeton

ART  
GALLERY  
NSW



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Welcome to *Streeton*, a landmark exhibition of the work of Arthur Streeton featuring more than 150 paintings, drawings and watercolours.

Three years in the making, the exhibition is the most comprehensive since Streeton's lifetime retrospective at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1931.

As many of Streeton's most-loved works were painted in picturesque locations across Sydney, the Blue Mountains and the Hawkesbury, Streeton provides an opportunity for visitors to see the beauty of NSW through the artist's eyes.

Exclusive to Sydney, this exhibition is proudly supported by the NSW Government through its tourism and major events agency, Destination NSW.

I hope you enjoy *Streeton*.

**The Hon Gladys Berejiklian, MP**  
Premier of NSW



It is with the greatest pleasure that the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales is a partner for this exhibition.

Due to the generosity and loyalty of our members, this is the third exhibition the Society has supported in recent years. Members' positive feedback and strong support of these exhibitions is based on the excellence of their curation and the diverse programming organised by the Society in tandem with the Gallery.

Arthur Streeton is one of Australia's most-loved painters, and this opportunity to view works – many not seen publicly since they were created – and to engage in an artist's development and output of over five decades is rare.

Streeton's story is a rich one and this exhibition enables a greater knowledge of a multi-talented artist whose paintings helped to forge a deep love of the Australian countryside and a curiosity for the places he painted overseas.

**Brian Greenacre**  
President, Art Gallery Society  
of New South Wales

The President's Council is proud to lend our support to this exhibition of one of the great innovators of Australian painting, Arthur Streeton. The Art Gallery of New South Wales has the noble claim of having been the first to purchase a major work by Streeton in 1890, and the first to hold a retrospective of his work in 1931, so it is fitting that the Gallery has chosen to revisit his work in 2020–21.

This exhibition is a wonderful realisation of the Gallery's independent scholarship and research, led by head curator of Australian art Wayne Tunnicliffe, and shines a light on lesser-known areas of Streeton's work. The environmental message that is manifest in Streeton's later Australian landscapes – in his images of extreme drought and destruction – is now more pertinent than ever, and I hope will lead a new generation of viewers to examine Streeton's works afresh.

**David Gonski**  
President, Board of Trustees  
and President's Council



PRESIDENT'S  
COUNCIL

Macquarie Group is delighted to be the major partner of *Streeton*.

The exhibition's celebration of the Australian landscape – particularly viewed through Streeton's eyes upon his return from living abroad – resonates strongly with Macquarie Group. We admire Streeton's deep appreciation of the land and environment, as well as his concern for its conservation. Indeed, our own corporate collection is curated under the theme 'the land and its psyche' and features the Australian landscape through the work of emerging artists.

Our longstanding commitment to Australian art is also reflected in our close partnership with the Art Gallery of New South Wales, which in 1890 purchased a work by Streeton – *'Still glides the stream, and shall for ever glide'* – who was then a 23-year-old emerging artist. You'll find this painting along with a rich selection of his works in this exhibition, which we hope you enjoy.

**Shemara Wikramanayake**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Macquarie Group





**Audio guide:**

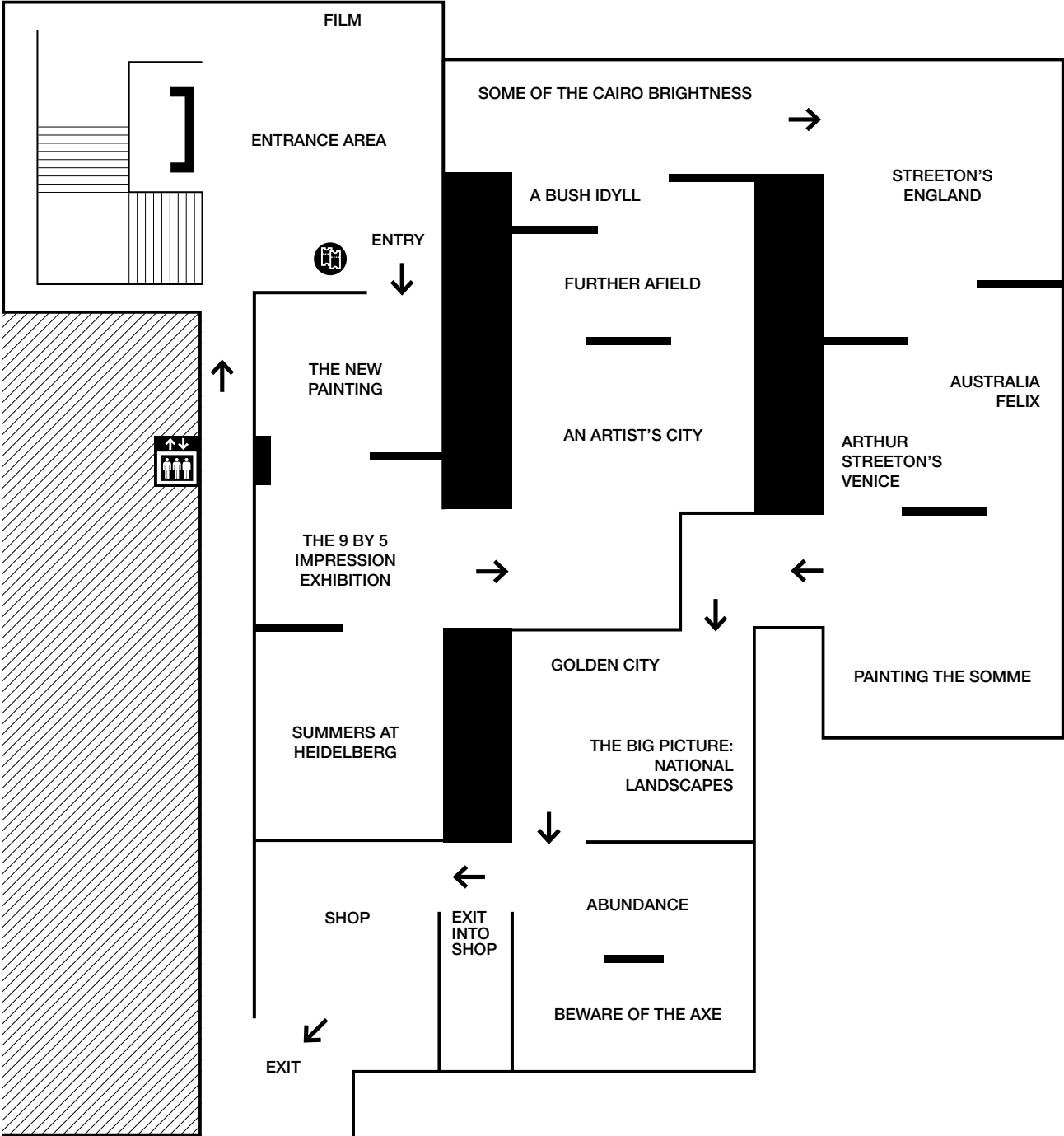
Hear our curators discuss Streeton's key artworks

Scan here to access the full audio guide

**[agnsw.art/streetonguide](https://agnsw.art/streetonguide)**



# Exhibition floorplan



ARTHUR  
STREETON

1867–1943



Arthur Streeton's remarkable evocations of light, land and sea are among the most highly regarded and popular paintings in Australian art. His sun-drenched impressionist landscapes from the 1880s, joyful depictions of Sydney beaches and harbour in the 1890s, and expansive pastoral scenes from the 1920s and 1930s continue to shape an image of our unique environment for many Australians.

*Streeton* features these much-loved paintings while enriching this narrative with an extensive group of works brought together from Streeton's 25 years painting internationally in Egypt, England, Italy, and on the battlefields of France during the First World War.

The deep concern Streeton had for the preservation of our natural environment in the last two decades of his life is expressed directly in paintings that lament the logging of old-growth forests. We continue to grapple with the same conservation issues almost a century on.

This is the most significant retrospective since his 1931 lifetime survey at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

*Streeton* presents more than 150 works from 42 public and private collections, some not exhibited for more than a century.

THE  
NEW  
PAINTING

The 1880s was an exciting time in Australian art, characterised by camaraderie and optimism as younger artists confronted a barely established cultural status quo. Plein-air painting – painting outdoors in front of the subject – was embraced and a new style developed that was aligned with art practices in Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States. A desire for change converged with cosmopolitan influences that led away from the carefully detailed studio painting of more conservative artists.

The younger painters adopted a freer style based on direct observation, experimenting with heightened colour and evident brushstrokes, and focused on the life and landscapes around them. Distinctively local and demonstrably international, it became known as Australian impressionism. Arthur Streeton turned 13 in 1880. He began his art education early in the decade and by its end he was one of the leaders of the new painting movement that delivered its manifesto in *The 9 by 5 impression exhibition* in August 1889.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Half-length male nude c1885

drawing in black pencil with stump work

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
purchased 1977

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Female nude study 1887

pencil on laid paper

Private collection, Melbourne

Streeton drew and painted from an early age but his financially modest background meant he had to balance his drive to be an artist with earning a living. Streeton worked full-time from the age of 13, limiting his formal art education to evening drawing classes at the National Gallery of Victoria's school of design in Melbourne.

The school offered the closest to an academic art training in the Australian colonies, though life drawing – drawing from a nude model – proved controversial and was often unavailable. Frederick McCubbin became the school's popular drawing master in 1886 and under his tutelage Streeton progressed quickly. These drawings are finely worked in an academic realist style, observed from live models. They may have been included in the April 1887 student exhibition when Streeton received an honourable mention for his life drawings.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Australian December 1886

(inscribed 1887)

oil on canvas

Newcastle Region Art Gallery, gift of the Newcastle Region Art Gallery Foundation 1993

In contrast to his careful studio life drawings, Streeton's earliest landscape oils are freely painted outdoors. Streeton's natural abilities were honed by advice from Frederick McCubbin and a new friend Tom Roberts, back in Melbourne after studying at the Royal Academy Schools in London.

On the weekends in the summer of 1886–87, Streeton joined McCubbin, Roberts and Louis Abrahams at a rented cottage at Mentone on the coast near Melbourne. *Australian December* was painted nearby, with a pale golden colour-range reminiscent of senior artist Abram-Louis Buvelot's admired landscapes painted in a French Barbizon-school style.

The influential critic James Smith hedged his bets when he wrote in March 1887:

Mr Arthur Streeton, a young impressionist, gives us a rapid and vigorous sketch of a harvest field in an 'Australian December,' the peculiar qualities of which will commend themselves to artists, on account of the promise which is disclosed, rather than to the general public.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## June evening, Box Hill 1887

oil on canvas laid down on composition board

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane  
Gift of the family of the late Hon TC Beirne MLC through  
the National Gallery Society of Queensland 1954

In 1887 Streeton joined Frederick McCubbin, Tom Roberts and Louis Abrahams on the weekends at the artists' camp they had established over the summer of 1885–86 at Box Hill on the outskirts of Melbourne on the land of the Wurundjeri people. Streeton thrived on the stimulus of these close artistic friendships and the experience of painting in nature. The camps were an Australian version of the European and American artist colonies where painters escaped from their city studios in summer for a temporary life of rural simplicity and outdoor painting.

*June evening, Box Hill* was painted near the camp site and edits out encroaching development to focus on the remnant bush. The twilight winter sky is influenced by Roberts, who recommended Streeton look away from the sunset in the west to 'the exquisite and delicate variation in colour and tone of the eastern sky at sunset, and the rosy flush of the afterglow'.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Evening with bathers 1888

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
bequest of Sunday Reed 1982



# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Settler's camp 1888

oil on canvas

Private collection, Jugiong, NSW

This is the first, and one of only a handful, figure-in-landscape painting in which Streeton portrays a national 'type'. Art critic James Smith described it as 'a poetical interpretation of a prosaic passage in the daily life of one of the pioneers of agricultural settlement'. Streeton was inspired by paintings of rural life by his friends Frederick McCubbin and Tom Roberts and the discussion of distinctive Australian subjects in art brought about by the 1888 centenary of colonisation.

The composition of *Settler's camp* is close to a reverse image of a painting by Roberts *The artists' camp* 1886 (National Gallery of Victoria) which shows the Box Hill camp set-up with the artists cooking dinner over a fire. Streeton's replacement of the artists with a settler boiling his billy at twilight reveals the constructed nature of settler imagery painted as their history was receding into the past.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)



## Early summer – gorse in bloom

1888

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
Gift of Mrs Andrew Tennant through the  
Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 1982

Streeton's enigmatic painting has a high, curved horizon line that focuses attention on the rising landscape crossed diagonally by a path. The child wearing a bonnet leaning against the section of fence and the other figures suggest narrative content, but with no further clues the painting becomes a record of an ambiguous moment in time.

The high-keyed colour and strong light are a precedent for the next phase of Australian painting. American critic Sidney Dickinson lectured in Melbourne in November 1888 on Australian art from an international perspective, advocating for the embrace of 'Latin' rather than 'Germanic' style:

The climate, atmosphere, and formation of the country [Australia] favouring the light and brilliant practices in vogue in Italy and Spain, or even France ... The Australian school ought to be especially strong in colour, and a tendency in that direction was already observable.



THE

9 BY 5

IMPRESSION

EXHIBITION

Mr Arthur Streeton is busily engaged in preparing his contribution of 'impressions' for the forthcoming exhibition at Buxton's Art Gallery, and all his spare time is devoted to watching for likely subjects, and reproducing them in colour as soon as found.

Sophie Osmond, *Table Talk*, 26 July 1889

The now legendary *9 by 5 impression exhibition* was carefully staged by the key instigators Streeton, Tom Roberts and Charles Conder in August 1889. The '9 by 5' in the title refers to the dimensions of the cigar box lids that some works were painted on, which determined the scale of most exhibits. The artists had the broad timber frames made, which gave a unified modern appearance to their display in a gallery decorated with Japanese screens and draped with 'Liberty silks' in the taste of the British Aesthetic movement, which emphasised visual beauty above all else.

Critic James Smith, cautiously admiring of these artists' previous plein-air paintings, rose to the provocation of quickly painted sketches exhibited as complete artworks. Decrying their lack of 'finish', he likened their 'slap-dash brush work' to 'primeval chaos'. The *9 by 5* paintings were closer to the tonal panels exhibited by James Abbott McNeill Whistler in London in 1884, where Roberts is thought to have seen them, than the vivid colour and broken brushwork of the French impressionists.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## **A road to the ranges 1889**

oil on cardboard

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, gift of Robert Albert AO 2013. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Evening game 1889

oil on cardboard

Private collection, Sydney

## Twilight 1889

oil on cardboard

Private collection, Sydney

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Pastoral in yellow and grey: a colour impression of Templestowe 1889

oil on cardboard

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
purchased 1972

## The national game 1889

oil on cardboard

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1963



## Yellow and grey 1889

oil on wood

University of New England, Armidale, NSW,  
gift of Sir James McGregor 1948



# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## **The dying day** 1889 (inscribed 1887)

oil on cardboard

Private collection, Port Stephens, NSW

## **The long road** 1889

oil on wood

Shepparton Art Museum collection,  
purchased 1958

## **Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

### **Windy and wet c1889**

oil on cardboard

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
purchased 1955

### **Sandridge c1888 (inscribed 1884)**

oil on wood

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
purchased 1969

### **Hoddle St, 10 pm 1889**

oil on cardboard

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
purchased 1974

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Princess & 'Burke & Wills' 1889

oil on wood

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
purchased through the NGV Foundation with the  
assistance of The Hugh DT Williamson Foundation,  
Honorary Life Benefactor, 2005

## The road up the hill c1889

oil on cardboard

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane,  
purchased 1956

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Impression for 'Golden summer'

c1888

oil on canvas, later mounted on composition board

Benalla Art Gallery, gift of Wooleen Pty Ltd 1980

The terms 'impression' and 'impressionist' were often used interchangeably in the 1880s. Critics and artists used 'impression' for broadly painted plein-air views rather than the time-consuming detailed realism of studio painting. The term 'impressionist' derived from French impressionist painting of the 1870s and 1880s, though at the time critics outside France used it for anyone they saw as painting 'impressions', which often had more in common with Barbizon school plein-air painting. Australian critics had no firsthand experience of French impressionism, but knowing it threatened traditional art, they used the term liberally to describe art and artists breaking with conventions in the 1880s.

This painting was exhibited some months after the large-scale *Golden summer, Eaglemont* 1888 (displayed in the following room). Streeton's use of colour in the larger painting was admired but was also criticised for its lack of finish, so Streeton was being deliberately provocative in exhibiting this much sketchier version a few months later.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## An impression from the deep

1889

oil on canvas on wood

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. MJM Carter AO through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation in recognition of the abilities of Antonietta Itropico for

## Residence of J Walker, Esq, Gembrook 1888

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest 1942

SUMMERS AT  
HEIDELBERG

Oh the long hot day, Oh the gift of appreciation.  
I sit on our hill of gold, on the north side,  
the wind seems sunburnt & fiery as it runs  
through my beard.

Streeton to Tom Roberts, early 1891

Streeton took 'artistic possession' of the old Mount Eagle homestead at Eaglemont near Heidelberg in the summer of 1888. Located on the land of the Wurundjeri people, with elevated views overlooking the Yarra River (Birrarung, or 'river of mists'), it was some 13 kilometres from Melbourne. Now 21 and able to paint full-time after recent sales, Streeton camped out in the large empty house and was joined by Charles Conder, occasionally by Tom Roberts, and on the weekends by many other artist friends who came to paint, picnic and party into the night.

Sydney Dickinson coined the term 'Heidelberg School' in 1891, writing of the artists that 'their work has been done chiefly in this attractive suburb, where, with others of like inclination, they have established a summer congregation for out-of-door painting'. Streeton thrived in the close company of other artists. His bold brushwork and by now skilled use of colour captured light and atmosphere with energy and sensitivity in a group of paintings that remain among the great achievements of Australian impressionism.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Butterflies and blossoms 1889

(inscribed 1890)

oil on canvas, later mounted on hardboard

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the Government of Victoria 1979

The lighthearted atmosphere at the Mount Eagle homestead is conveyed in this painting, with young visitors playing in the ramshackle gardens around the house. It also shows how closely Streeton had been painting with Charles Conder. Conder had met Tom Roberts when he visited Sydney in 1887 and they had painted together at Coogee Beach in Sydney. On the strength of their friendship, Conder moved to Melbourne in October 1888, bringing with him paintings of young women in orchards that have a similarly joyful feel.

Spring blossoms and butterflies were also common motifs in Japanese art, which had been popular since the Japanese Court featured at the Melbourne International Exhibition in 1880. The Japanese-influenced English Aesthetic movement was embraced by fashionable Melburnians who decorated their houses with fans and kimonos and attended productions of Oscar Wilde plays and Gilbert and Sullivan comic operas. The style influenced the décor of *The 9 by 5 impression exhibition*.



# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Near Heidelberg 1890

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest 1943

The last summer at Eaglemont was to me more intense than anything I have up to the present felt. It would surprise you how often I think of it and oh, it is a great comfort. Its suggestion is a large harmony, musical, rose. Fancy if you could grasp all you feel, and condense your thought into a scheme which would embrace sweet sound, great colour and all the slow movement sometimes quick with games and through all the strength of the great warm and loving sun.

Arthur Streeton to Tom Roberts, 1890

This painting captures a moment in time intensely felt, a pleasurable day soon to pass. Streeton painted many small works in which paths and roads lead into the landscape. They invite us into the painting, in this instance to join the well-dressed group walking across a summer field to observe the view into the valley.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## At Templestowe 1889

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide,  
Elder Bequest Fund 1941

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## The selector's hut (Whelan on the log) 1890

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
purchased 1961

This painting and the dry landscapes nearby suggest a harsh experience of Australia, affected by the severe drought in Victoria in 1889–90. An image of settler labour, it was described by one reviewer as ‘a captivating study of a hardy pioneer resting on the bole of a tree which he has felled for building materials and fuel’.

In reality it was the caretaker at Mount Eagle homestead, Jack Whelan, who had posed for Streeton and Charles Conder on the same day. Streeton’s painting edits out homely details for an image of the pioneer resting in action, holding his axe ready to resume work. Another reviewer thought Streeton was inspired by the line ‘Muscle and pluck forever!’ from American poet Walt Whitman’s ‘Song of the broadaxe’. The image of a cut log is one Streeton returns to in the 1920s and 30s, though no longer in celebratory mode.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## **‘Above us the great grave sky’**

1890

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
purchased 1978

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)



## **‘Still glides the stream, and shall for ever glide’ 1890**

oil on canvas, later mounted on hardboard

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1890

There is a sense of time visible in every element of this painting: the moon rising, the river flowing, magpies gliding on a warm breeze, cattle taking their evening drink. The title is taken from William Wordsworth’s sonnet ‘After-thought’ of 1820, written in contemplation of the River Duddon:

I see what was, and is, and will abide;  
Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide;  
The Form remains; the Function never dies

Streeton quotes from the poem to emphasise the timelessness of this Heidelberg landscape; Streeton’s painting has itself become an enduring creative act.

The Art Gallery of New South Wales bought this painting in 1890, a week after Streeton turned 23. It was the first by Streeton to be purchased by a public gallery and it joined the finest collection of Australian art in the colonies, a ringing endorsement of the new Australian impressionism. The purchase was not completely straightforward, however, as one influential Gallery trustee insisted Streeton rework the foreground to make the flora more distinctly Victorian.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Spring 1890 (inscribed 1889)

oil on canvas, mounted on plywood

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
gift of Mrs Margery Pierce, 1978

In this painting Streeton has come down from the Heidelberg hills to the valley below. The rich greens suggest the abundant growth of the season of renewal. It adds to the sense of an idyllic and verdant scene, with naked men bathing in the river as immersed in nature itself as they are in the water. One reviewer however failed to recognise the beauty of man in his natural state, remarking on ‘a painfully pronounced suggestion of the absence of clothes’.

Streeton often includes amusing details in his paintings, such as the cicada emerging from its shell on a stem of grass in the foreground. Conservation work has revealed even more detail, with minute messages inscribed into the wet paint that are invisible to the naked eye. Streeton had become entranced with a young woman named Florry Walker and the secret inscriptions include ‘Florry is my sweetheart’ and ‘Florry/Smike’.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Golden summer, Eaglemont 1889

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
purchased 1995

The first of Streeton's three wide-format canvases painted at Eaglemont, this pastoral view is imbued with what he called 'the coppery light' of a long afternoon. The finely painted foliage in the foreground was inspired by the work of Jules Bastien-Lepage, a French artist whose work combined elements of naturalism and impressionism and was well known to Australian artists from engravings in art magazines.

Streeton's freely handled paint concerned critics who otherwise admired the painting. Streeton later sent it overseas where it was hung at the Royal Academy in London in 1891 and the Salon in Paris in 1892. Displayed in the most prestigious position at the Salon, at eye level, it was awarded a *mention honorable*. It was reported back in Melbourne that it was impossible to miss because 'it is utterly different from any picture in the vast collection ... the picture is full of atmosphere, and seems to radiate heat'.

## **Tom Roberts**

(1856–1931)

## **Arthur Streeton (Smike) 1890**

charcoal on off-white laid paper on thin cream card

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1934



# Tom Roberts

(1856–1931)

## Smike Streeton age 24 1891

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1945

*Tall, slim, blue-eyed, with the faint promise  
of a golden beard, full of jests, and tags  
from Shelley and Keats.*

Julian Ashton recalling Arthur Streeton  
in the 1890s

While migrant artists had brought knowledge of recent European art to Melbourne in the late 1870s, Tom Roberts was to be particularly influential when he returned from studying in London in 1885. His firsthand experience of new developments in international art, and entrepreneurial skills in promoting his and his friend's practice would lead Streeton to later describe him as 'Australia's first modern revolutionary artist'.

The young artists painting together at Box Hill acquired nicknames they would use among themselves throughout their lives: McCubbin was 'Prof' on account of his teaching, Roberts was 'Bulldog' given his English tenacity, and Streeton had become 'Smike' after a character in Charles Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby*. While Dickens's Smike was an ill-treated waif, Streeton quickly achieved independent recognition. This portrait was retained by Roberts throughout his life.

AN  
ARTIST'S  
CITY

Streeton first visited Sydney in June 1890 after the sale of '*Still glides the stream, and shall for ever glide*' to the Art Gallery of New South Wales earlier in the year. He became entranced with the harbour and beaches and particularly with the changing effect of light on water during the course of a day and in differing weather conditions. Streeton supercharged the colours he had used previously for bush subjects near Melbourne, creating saturated tones including the rich ultramarine that became known as 'Streeton blue'.

On his second visit in 1891, Streeton enthused in a letter to a Melbourne friend 'Sydney is an artist's city – glorious ... a land of passion-fruit and poetry'.

From 1892 Streeton lived at the Curlew Camp on the harbourside at Mosman, on Cammeraigal and Borogegal land. His bold use of colour and experiments with format and cropping during this time encapsulated the energy of late 19th-century Sydney. In 1896 he held *Streeton's Sydney sunshine exhibition* in Melbourne, which was a resounding success, and in 1900 *The Bulletin* asserted that Streeton was the 'discoverer of Sydney Harbour'.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Beach scene 1890

oil on canvas board

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased from the Estate of Henrietta Tuson 1954

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## The blue Pacific 1890

oil on canvas

Private collection, Port Stephens, NSW

This and the nearby *Beach scene* were painted at Coogee on Streeton's first visit to Sydney in 1890. Writing to Tom Roberts, he observed 'the ocean is a big wonder ... the slow, immense movement of this expanse moves one very strongly'. Roberts and Conder painted together at Coogee in 1888 and Streeton likely painted his own scenes with a sense of friendly rivalry.

*The blue Pacific* is one of his most ambitious Coogee paintings, with its tilted-up scene of cliff edges accentuated against the intense blue of the ocean. Streeton painted a toy yacht on the rocks in the foreground as if it were sailing to the right, while in the water an actual yacht sails off to the left. People stroll along the clifftops looking down to the waters below or out to sea, in a leisurely scene of wonder at the views from this striking location at Coogee.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Manly Beach 1895

oil on wood

Bendigo Art Gallery, gift of Mr Bert Levy 1900

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## At Coogee 1895

oil on wood

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
purchased 1959

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)



## From McMahon's Point — fare one penny 1890

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
purchased 1972

One of the most ambitious of Streeton's early responses to Sydney's harbour depicts movement: boats steaming across water, smoke billowing, people rowing and gulls flying overhead. Painted from an elevated position above the ferry stop, the tilted blue expanse of water dominates the painting with dazzling impact.

The ferry was the only way to cross Sydney Harbour in 1890 and Streeton paints it with a newcomer's sense of delight. With typical whimsy, he has included a black cat on the roof of the building and a small boy holding his toy yacht in the foreground. Streeton wrote to Tom Roberts how he had painted the little yacht in 'Blue & Gold & the rudder Emerald Green', to the delight of the boy. Both this painting and the smaller sketch hanging next to it were among 10 works Streeton exhibited at the Art Society of New South Wales in September, but only the smaller *Morning sketch* sold.



**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**Morning sketch (also known  
as McMahon's Point ferry) 1890**

oil on canvas

New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, NSW,  
gift of Howard Hinton 1944

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Circular Quay 1893

oil on wood

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
purchased with the assistance of a special grant  
from the Government of Victoria, 1979

Circular Quay with many steamers busy  
& bright – towering behind 'em Metropole  
customs and Morts, & beautiful Sydney all  
glowing & oriental – Little steamers puffing  
hard and skipping over the blue water clouds  
of smoke ... all the bright harmony the warm  
palpitating sky of the Sunny South.

Arthur Streeton to Theodore Fink,  
September 1891

Circular Quay was both the transport and mercantile hub of Sydney in the 1890s and Streeton was fascinated by its bustling energy. Painting it numerous times, either as the main subject or in the background of harbour scenes from a greater distance, Streeton often employed an elongated horizontal format. He painted on discarded draper's boards, the timber panels around which bolts of cloth were wound. They were ideally suited to a wide view of the harbour, a format emulating panoramic photographs that were popular at the time.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Circular Quay 1892

oil on wood

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
purchased 1959

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**A midwinter morning,  
Sydney Harbour 1893**

oil on wood

Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**View of Sydney Cove 1894**

oil on wood

Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Cremorne pastoral 1895

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1895

It seems likely that charming Cremorne is to pass away and leave a dismal eyesore ... Where once was youth with their sweethearts in white muslin gathered joyfully for merriment and sport, making Cremorne a happy pastoral, we would have instead a numerous fleet of grimy coal ships, hulks, smoke and darkness.

Arthur Streeton, letter to the *Daily Telegraph*,  
9 December 1893

Both the industrial and the idyllic character of 1890s Sydney inform one of Streeton's largest harbour compositions. It is an elegiac image of what Streeton believed would be lost, as trees were being cleared from Bradleys Head for a proposed coalmine. Streeton's earlier protest letter and this painting were part of a public backlash that led to the abandonment of the coalmine in 1895. The Art Gallery of New South Wales purchased *Cremorne pastoral* in the year it was painted, recognising its significance as Streeton's most ambitious Sydney landscape, and endorsing his position on preserving the harbour and adjacent lands.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## The railway station, Redfern

1893

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
gift of Lady Denison 1942

Contrasting with his light-saturated harbour paintings, Streeton painted rain-soaked street scenes of crowds, transport and buildings in the city. This painting shows the streets outside Redfern railway station, then on Devonshire Street just south of where Central Station is now located. In *Fireman's funeral, George St* 1894 (adjacent) crowds gather outside the recently completed Sydney Town Hall, against the backdrop of the empty construction site where the Queen Victoria Building was soon to emerge.

Railways were one of the markers of industrial modernity in the 19th century, favoured as subjects by French and British impressionists, as were elevated street scenes showing people moving through public urban spaces. Both paintings are exercises in colour and atmosphere with a subdued palette dominated by grey tones and enlivened by reflected light and colour. Tonal paintings of cities were exhibited alongside the brightly hued scenes of sunlight and heat in the bush during this period, capturing differing contemporary experiences of place.

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**Fireman's funeral, George Street**

1894

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, purchased 1980



# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Near Streeton's camp at Sirius Cove 1892

oil on canvas on cardboard

New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, NSW,  
bequest of Howard Hinton 1948

Curlew Camp was located on the foreshore at Little Sirius Cove in Mosman, directly across the harbour from this Gallery. Streeton first stayed there with Tom Roberts in November 1891 and the two of them in the camp, on and off, from 1892 to 1896. Established around 1890, the camp provided inexpensive accommodation for artists, writers and musicians and was staffed with a cook and an attendant – the 19th-century equivalent of 'glamping'.

Streeton thrived in this harbourside milieu, the creative camaraderie recalling his earlier experiences at Box Hill and Heidelberg near Melbourne. Artist colonies provided sanctuary from city studios in Europe and the United States during the 19th century, but in no other place was there a colony only a ferry stop from the centre of the city. Streeton responded to this unique location and painted some of his most innovative works near the campsite.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## The Point Wharf, Mosman's Bay

1893

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 2017 with the assistance of Allan and Maria Myers, John and Rosanna Hindmarsh and Maurice Cashmere and Claire Parkhurst in memory of Sarah Cashmere

Streeton and Tom Roberts shared a studio in Pitt Street in the city, where they painted and held art classes to support themselves between sales and commissions. They travelled to Circular Quay by steam ferry from Point Wharf, a short row from Curlew Camp across the bay and around Curraghbeena Point. This local transport hub is the subject for one of Streeton's most poetic paintings of the harbour.

*The Point Wharf, Mosman's Bay* 1893 is a colour study of golden reflections from sandstone in blue water, of steam and smoke rising in puffs of rose madder, and of lapping waves in darkened ultramarine ripples. Streeton has painted from the water's edge, looking up and across to the ferry stop as two small boats head towards him. His low perspective allows almost two-thirds of the painting to be shimmering harbour, focusing our attention on colour, light and movement.

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**Sirius Cove** c1895

oil on wood

Private collection, Sydney

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Sirius Cove c1895

oil on wood

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
purchased 1973

During the 1890s Streeton travelled in regional New South Wales, producing large-scale, carefully composed landscapes. Back on Sydney Harbour between trips he painted some of his most experimental works in small panel paintings. Dramatically cropped and influenced in composition by Japanese prints and the art of the British Aesthetic movement, they also stem from Streeton's deep familiarity with the harbour waterways and landscape.

Streeton painted his cherished view from Curlew Camp many times: the rocks, tides, changing light of day, and passing steamships – a motif of the modern harbourside city. In this panel, the rhythmic zigzag of rocks against water recalls the flat overlapping planes in Japanese art. In the very narrow panel (left), a close-up view of gum trees, undergrowth, rocks and sky is so tightly cropped it becomes a near-abstract colour pattern.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## From my camp (Sirius Cove)

1896

oil on plywood

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
bequest of Mrs Elizabeth Finley 1979

Saturday 9 pm. In our tent at Mossman's Bay – the front of our tent thrown open wide, & the night sky is deep green blue, & below the great hill the bay reaches down into a deep wonderful gulf, under the sea – picnic parties pulling about quietly through the rare phosphorescence, steamers puffing, breathing heavily & fluting away, & all with me is melody.

Arthur Streeton to Theodore Fink, January 1896

*Near Streeton's camp at Sirius Cove 1892 and From my camp (Sirius cove) 1896* bookend Streeton's experience of the Curlew Camp over five years, and yet hold time still as if nothing had changed during this period. Streeton was always deeply nostalgic for the recent past as a place of remembered happiness. In his paintings and letters, he captured moments he would later recall with pleasure tinged with sadness – in this instance as he readied himself to leave for Europe.

# FURTHER AFIELD

Streeton's greatest 1890s landscapes were painted in regional NSW – in the Blue Mountains, at Gloucester in the Manning district, and on the Hawkesbury River near Richmond and Windsor. Streeton was spurred on by a well-funded acquisitive competition for watercolours of the state's scenery, initiated in 1891 by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. By this time Melbourne's boom-time economy had collapsed, and, as Streeton wrote to Tom Roberts early in 1891, 'this country is full of wealth but somehow can't afford Artists yet'.

In the same letter he expressed his desire to travel more deeply into the Australian landscape to find subjects for his painting:

I picture in my head the Murray & all the wonder & glory at its source up towards 'Kosciusko' [sic] ... & the great gold plains, & all the beautiful inland Australia & I love the thought of walking into all this & trying to expand and express it in my way. I fancy large canvases all glowing & moving in the happy light & others bright decorate & chalky & expressive of the hot trying winds & slow immense Summer.

His emphasis on painting distinctive Australian subjects corresponds with a growing nationalism in the lead-up to Federation.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## The valley of the Nepean 1891

(inscribed 1892)

watercolour on paper mounted on cardboard

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
purchased 1977

Streeton returned from Melbourne to Sydney in September 1891 and soon left for the Blue Mountains, looking for subjects for the Gallery's watercolour competition. He did not seek the great forested gorges or spectacular waterfalls near the main towns that were already famous from earlier paintings and popular illustrations. Working in Darug Country around the foothills of the mountains, Streeton produced two exhibition watercolours.

*The valley of the Nepean* was painted near Lucasville railway station, an elevated view looking across Emu Plains to Penrith. Streeton described his subject to Tom Roberts:

one's eye sweeps a great extensive plain  
fertile with crops & orange groves, & the pure  
'Nepean' water running straight through it,  
such a grand sight this evening.



# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Blue Mountain tunnel 1891

(inscribed 1892)

pencil, watercolour, opaque white highlights on paper

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
gift of Howard Hinton 1937

There is a cutting through the vast hill of bright sandstone; the walls of rock run high up and are crowned by gums bronze-green, and they look quite small, being so high up, and behind is the deep blue azure heaven, where a crow sails along like a dot with its melancholy, hopeless cry ... Right below me the men work, some with shovels, others drilling for a blast.

Streeton to Frederick McCubbin, 1891

For his second exhibition watercolour, Streeton turned his back on the big views from the Blue Mountains to focus on workers tunnelling to eliminate the zigzag ascent of the railway near Lapstone. Streeton's painting of the cut is both factual in its depiction and abstracted as it replicates a landscape reduced to elemental forms by the blasting. Neither this painting nor *The valley of the Nepean* were acquired by the Gallery trustees. This disappointed the *Sydney Morning Herald* reviewer who thought this watercolour 'startingly realistic'.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Blue Mountains 1891

pencil, watercolour, opaque white on ivory wove paper  
on board

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, purchased  
with funds provided by Don Mitchell Bequest Fund  
and the Australian Prints, Drawings and Watercolours  
Benefactors Fund 2014

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)



## Fire's on 1891

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1893

Next morning I'm perched on my rocky point  
of sight from which I retreat as usual at the cry  
of 'Fire! Fire's on' – all serene – Boom.

Arthur Streeton to Theodore Fink,  
14 October 1891

Streeton's painting of a railway being built radiates heat and light. Named after the distinctive cry warning explosives had been ignited, it is one of the great achievements in Australian landscape painting. The trolley of rocks being wheeled from the tunnel in the earlier watercolour (displayed nearby) has been replaced with men carrying the body of a labourer killed in an explosion, a scene Streeton witnessed.

This accident was not mentioned in reviews when it was exhibited in Melbourne in 1892 and Sydney in 1893. Critics were perplexed by Streeton's subject, with one reviewer writing:

The painting is free, spirited, and masterly, but it is the qualities of light and air the artist has infused into the picture that give it pre-eminence. If Mr. Streeton were not, however, a born colorist, no power on earth could make the subject attractive.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## **The Gloucester Buckets (also known as Landscape: the AA Co's million acres) 1894**

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, purchased 1918  
The conservation of this painting and frame was supported by Peter & Judy Howarth and AGNSW Conservation Benefactors

In 1893 Streeton set off by train to Taree and then on horseback over thirteen days to the small regional town of Gloucester to paint the distinctive mountain range known to settlers as the Buckets, a corruption of the Biripi name Buccan Buccan, meaning 'many rocks'. Streeton described the scene as 'a noble rugged range of rock – standing a firm barrier 'gainst the Western sky – below, a rich gold plain with peaceful herds.'

When he returned to Sydney, Streeton exhibited one of two large paintings of the Buckets to acclaim, a work that was subsequently lost and whose story is told later in this exhibition. *The Gloucester Buckets* 1894 was sent to Paris, with Streeton aiming to emulate the 1892 success of *Golden summer, Eaglemont*, but it arrived too late to be submitted to the Salon. Less assertively contemporary than *Fire's on*, this painting's controlled gold, mauve and blue tonalities recall earlier Heidelberg landscapes.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Sunlight (Cutting on a hot road)

1895

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
bequest of Mary Meyer in memory of her  
husband Dr Felix Meyer 1975

This work and the adjacent bleached landscapes were painted at Kurrajong on the lower slopes of the Blue Mountains and in the surrounding districts. All share a road or path leading into the scene and a single distant figure, a gum or small cluster of gums linking through the composition, and brilliant sunshine beating down on summer landscapes. Yet Streeton captures a differing atmosphere in each: blazing light in *Sunlight (Cutting on a hot road)*, dispersed heat haze in *A road to the Kurrajong*, and the intensity of brooding weather in *Oncoming storm*.

When works from this group were exhibited in 1896 a reviewer commented:

The stifling heat, painful stillness, clear-cut transparent purple shadows, and high lights almost blinding in their brilliancy, are given by the artist with a vivid realism so characteristic of purely Australian landscape.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Oncoming storm 1895

oil on wood

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
purchased with the assistance of a special grant  
from the Government of Victoria, 1979

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**A road to the Kurrajong c1896**

oil on wood

Private collection, Port Stephens, NSW

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Traveller's Rest (also known as The old inn, Richmond, Hawkesbury River) 1896

oil on canvas

New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, NSW,  
gift of Howard Hinton 1932

Streeton's largest group of rural landscapes after his Heidelberg works were painted on the lower slopes of the Blue Mountains near Richmond and Windsor on the Hawkesbury River, during a productive time in 1895–96. They can be divided into intimate scenes of inns, paddocks and pumpkin fields; roads into hot summer landscapes; and expansive elevated views of the Hawkesbury River. Streeton befriended George Matcham Pitt, a surveyor who lived in a house called Sunnyside at North Richmond and who often provided a base for visiting artists. The watercolour *Surveyor's camp*, hanging nearby, shows Pitt at work.

*Traveller's rest* 1896 depicts the old inn near Sunnyside, where Streeton stayed when he first visited the region. Three-quarters of the painting is dominated by the rich verdure dotted with flowers, set against blue-grey skies. Streeton uses the zigzag path familiar from his Heidelberg works to satisfying aesthetic affect.



# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Surveyor's camp 1896

pencil, watercolour on cream wove paper

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1896

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Summer noon, Hawkesbury River 1896

oil on canvas, later mounted on hardboard

New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, NSW,  
bequest of Howard Hinton 1948

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## The river 1896

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
purchased with the assistance of a special grant  
from the Government of Victoria, 1979

Painting around Deerubbin, the Hawkesbury River, in Darug Country, Streeton produced works focussed on the flowing waters and riverbanks, as well as his two great elevated views over the region, *The river* and '*The purple noon's transparent might*' 1896. They were almost equally admired when first exhibited.

*The river* has a simplified composition and grey-toned palette, and one reviewer described it as an 'an exquisite transcript of silvery light'. Its reduced colour range is sophisticated, and Streeton's style has evolved as he now has considerable technical facility in painting with finer brushstrokes that meld the overall image. He has pulled back from both the experimentation of *Fire's on* and the more conventional *The Gloucester Buckets*, achieving a satisfying tonally modulated yet contemporary approach.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## ‘The purple noon’s transparent might’ 1896

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
purchased 1896

Streeton painted this work on a high terrace overlooking the Hawkesbury River during a heatwave. It is one of his finest achievements, in which his technical ability and facility with colour merge to almost transmit the heat of summer.

It was titled after a line from a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley, though it was misquoted when first exhibited as *‘The purple noon’s transparent light’*, understandably perhaps given the light that suffuses the painting. The painting was never varnished and retains the rich depth of its original matt surface. Exhibited in Sydney and Melbourne in 1896, it was lauded as confirming Streeton’s reputation as an exceptional colourist. One critic noted that:

Mr. Streeton exhibits a big Hawkesbury landscape that almost dazzles the eye with the brilliancy of its colouring ... the cognoscenti have testified to his boldness by prostrating themselves before the picture.

It was the first Streeton sold to the National Gallery of Victoria.



A

# BUSH IDYLL

Beginning in France, Symbolism quickly grew into an international avant-garde movement in art and literature that spread across the globe during the last two decades of the 19th century. The Symbolists rejected naturalism in favour of the subjective representation of an idea or emotion, with images of women being the central focus in conveying their concepts.

By the 1890s the Symbolist movement had reached Australian shores and developed its own local inflection. Despite the growing awareness and discussion of the changing social status of women focussed on the women's suffrage movement, artists (usually male) began to depict women through imagery that fluctuated between virtuous, ethereal beings and deceitful characters of consuming sexuality. Symbolism provided a pretext for more overtly erotic imagery of women than had previously been publicly acceptable in Sydney and Melbourne.

In a handful of paintings produced around 1895, Streeton explored the image of the Symbolist woman, placing her in an antipodean landscape to elaborate on the poetry of place in his own distinct interpretation of the movement. The Symbolist conception of woman as an expression of destruction and desire became a brief platform for artistic experimentation in Streeton's late-century practice.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Scheherazade 1895

oil on wood

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
The Joseph Brown Collection, presented through  
the NGV Foundation by Dr Joseph Brown AO OBE,  
Honorary Life Benefactor, 2004

Streeton depicts a Symbolist female figure embodying an eroticised Orientalist fantasy. Scheherazade was the Persian narrator from *One thousand and one nights*, who each day recounted stories to impress the murderous monarch Shahryar and stave off her execution. Mystically haloed, yet scantily clad, Streeton's Scheherazade is a fusion of Symbolist depictions of woman as both sinner and saint, and is one the most explicitly depicted of the era's femme-fatale figures. This work was first exhibited in *Streeton's Sydney sunshine exhibition* in Melbourne in December 1896, where it captured the attention of a reviewer:

'Scheherazade', painted on panel, is Mr. Streeton's only other figure picture, and she, in pose and expression, fully conveys the impression of the beautiful, clever and rather cunning woman who successfully held the attention of the brutal Caliph and saved her own and other lives.



**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**Design for large decoration  
(also known as Pastoral) 1894**

oil on wood

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1970

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Ariadne 1895

oil on wood

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
purchased with the assistance of the  
Members Acquisition Fund 2016 and 2017

This beach scene has the immediacy of Streeton's plein-air sketches however, he imbues this landscape with a mythical dimension, reinterpreting the Greek legend of Ariadne abandoned by her lover Theseus on the island of Naxos. In Streeton's antipodean rendition of unrequited love, the white sail darting across the horizon suggests Theseus's flight, while Ariadne stands forlorn and alone on an Australian beach. The vertical strokes of her draped garment appear to merge with white sand as she is overcome by despair.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)



## The spirit of the drought c1896

oil on wood

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
Joseph Brown Fund 1983

This painting evokes the intense light and searing heat synonymous with the Australian bush in summer. The bleached tonality of the parched hillside topped with spindly gum trees against a rosy sky is typical of the landscapes for which Streeton was renowned in the 1890s. This landscape, however, is charged with drama and destruction, with the masked fiery enchantress in the centre summoning a whirling veil of pink flames, incinerating the land around her.

Streeton was inspired by artist and friend Charles Conder, who in 1889 had embodied Australia's destructive weather events in Symbolist dream-like imagery. In *Hot wind* he had depicted a westerly wind in the guise of a temptress, just as Streeton's femme fatale personifies the threats of drought and fire. Indeed, the composition of *The spirit of the drought* is so close to Conder's Symbolist works that it was previously attributed to him and was also considered a collaboration between the two artists.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

**‘What thou among the leaves  
hast never known’ (also known  
as ‘What thou amongst the  
leaves hast never known’  
and A bush idyll) 1896**

oil on wood

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
gift of Dr Joseph Brown 1991



SOME OF THE  
CAIRO  
BRIGHTNESS

By the end of 1896 Streeton was regarded as one of Australia's leading landscape painters. No longer an impressionist outlier, he was embraced as a colourist and imitated by other artists. While his paintings were still occasionally described as French in style, Streeton rejected this when interviewed in November 1896, claiming that his work 'is purely and absolutely Australian, not only as regards colour, but in idea and expression'.

Despite strongly identifying as an Australian artist, Streeton joined the exodus of his talented peers to the art centres of Europe. He departed Sydney in January 1897, travelling to London via Cairo and Naples.

Recent research has revealed Streeton held xenophobic views before leaving Australia. He was transfixed by Egypt however, extending his one-week stopover to over two months. He enthused in a letter published in *The Bulletin*: 'I've been so excited endeavouring to get some of the Cairo brightness in my work'. His paintings of the city's men and women, lively bazaars and impressive mosques, are engaging while participating in western conventions in depicting the 'orient'. The firsthand experience of another culture appears to have changed Streeton, who never repeated his previously held views.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Cairo street 1897

oil on canvas, mounted on paperboard

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
The Oscar Paul Collection, gift of Henriette von Dallwitz  
and of Richard Paul in honour of his father 1965

At sunset I left the Mosque of Sultan Hassan  
to return to my rooms in the Wag-el-Birget,  
the rosy light of the horizontal sun was caught  
by the graceful minaret with its hawks circling  
against a turquoise sky.

Streeton wrote this reminiscence in the 1920s,  
recalling the gleaming light of the late winter sun  
bathing the mosque depicted in *Cairo street*.  
The sizable portal to the mosque caught  
Streeton's eye:

ones admiration is instantaneous ... one looks  
with the wondering eye of a child ... this  
impressive entrance is 60 feet high ... four great  
walls rise up in their strength & simplicity.

Many of Streeton's Cairo scenes were painted  
in London from sketches and photographs taken  
on location, and at times he edits elements from  
different places together to present a perfected  
Orientalist vision. In so doing, he omits any  
signs of the modern westernised city that  
Cairo was becoming.



**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**Cairo street scene  
(Azbakiya Gardens) 1897**

oil on canvas on board

Private collection, Sydney

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## House builders, Cairo 1897

oil on canvas, later mounted on paperboard

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
purchased 1971

Streeton's Australian landscapes ablaze with light and heat, such as *Sunlight (Cutting on a hot road)* 1895, had well equipped the artist to depict the vibrant light of Egypt. In *House builders, Cairo*, a group of Egyptian workers are high up on the roofline of a domestic dwelling under the hot sun. The stark yet decorative composition with flattened space is dominated by a tall unembellished wall punctuated only by spindly trees. Below the workers, a brightly coloured awning juts out, injecting vibrant notes of red and yellow into the otherwise austere urban view.

Streeton has focused on capturing the light, shadows and glare above all else. In 1931, JS MacDonald, then director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, wrote:

[Streeton] found the Egyptian colour and key much like our own. He sent back impressions of Cairo which, unlike the work of Europeans in that city, plainly said: 'I am familiar with these appearances'.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)



## Fatima Habiba 1897

oil on canvas on cardboard

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide,  
gift of Douglas and Barbara Mullins through the  
Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 1997

In Streeton's portrait of Fatima, he presents a close-up, frontal view of a veiled woman. Her eyes sparkle and crinkle slightly from behind her veil, as if caught in a moment of laughter. Not quite meeting the viewer's gaze, Fatima looks out to the left of the picture and into the distance. This compelling portrait was made by Streeton for a western audience, following Orientalist visual conventions in portraying Egyptian womanhood as inaccessible and mysterious.

Yet Streeton's direct style and the sense of character in his subject moves this painting beyond cliché. He captures Fatima's likeness set off by areas of flat colour, harnessing the sharp contrast between the triangular silhouette of her dark clothing and the pale chalky wall behind her to create a dynamic portrait. While Streeton is unlikely to have had access to someone to sit for him, he invests considerable presence into his imaginary subject.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Egyptian drink vendor 1897

oil on canvas, later mounted on paperboard

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
The Oscar Paul Collection, gift of Henriette von Dallwitz  
and of Richard Paul in honour of his father 1965

In 1898, after settling in London, Streeton sent a number of his Cairo paintings to Sydney for exhibition, including images of drink vendors, described by the *Sydney Morning Herald* critic as ‘clever studies of water carriers, porters and other inhabitants of Egypt – strongly drawn and richly coloured’.

Streeton had visited local cafes in Cairo and was transfixed by the drink vendors in their distinctive dress carrying the vessels of their trade, including cymbals for summoning customers. Egyptian drink sellers were familiar to European audiences from paintings by visiting artists who represented a traditional, pre-industrial way of life. The vendor’s face is composed in warm browns, highlighted with a daub of blue at his forehead and cheekbone suggesting heat beating down from above. Streeton depicts his typical dress ensemble with direct, minimal brushwork.

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**Minarets, Cairo 1897**

oil on board

Private collection, Sydney

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Cairo street scene c1897

oil on board

The Gwinnett Collection, Art Gallery of South Australia,  
Adelaide

## Grace Joel

(1865–1924)

### Arthur Streeton – a sketch-portrait c1900–05

oil on canvas, later mounted on hardboard

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
bequest of Miss Joel 1925

Streeton was often painted and sketched by his artist friends. As he became more aware of the need to promote himself and his work to survive financially, he commissioned portrait photographs that became part of his commercial arsenal. The nearby image by Melbourne photographer Alice Mills is probably also a commission: Streeton often worked with professional women photographers.

New Zealand-born artist Grace Joel may have met Streeton when she studied in Melbourne in the 1880s. She moved to London in 1899 and painted this sombre-toned portrait soon after. In her article 'Australian artists in London', published in Sydney in 1906, she noted Streeton's difficulties in England: 'Arthur Streeton, too, has not yet established the eminence his Australian admirers expected of him ... his intensely sensitive nature has suffered from London life'.

**Alice Mills**

(1870–1929)

**Untitled**

**(Portrait of Arthur Streeton) 1907**

platinotype gelatin silver photograph

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1983



# **George W Lambert**

(1873–1930)

## **Arthur Streeton 1906**

pencil on buff wove paper

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
Edward Stinson Bequest Fund 1999

STREETON'S  
ENGLAND

Arthur Streeton arrived in London in 1897 and in 1898 seven of his paintings were exhibited in a large survey of contemporary Australian art at the Grafton Galleries organised by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Streeton was singled out in the British press and *'The purple noon's transparent might'* was reproduced in *The Magazine of Art* and *The Studio*, whose reviewer commented that 'its admirable drawing and aerial perspective, and its splendid force of colour, would hold its own in any London Gallery'.

Interest in his Australian paintings suggested Streeton would soon establish himself in London, but he became overwhelmed by the competitive London art scene, and his confidence faltered being away from his friends and the scenes of his early successes.

His hardest and hungriest years followed. Yet he found motivation in the famous art from past and present that surrounded him, and in painting a new landscape and light, and doggedly worked through the influence of John Constable, JMW Turner, James Abbott McNeill Whistler and contemporaries such as John Singer Sargent and Philip Wilson Steer. The resulting large-scale, muscular landscapes are supreme examples of Edwardian English painting.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Sussex harvest 1898

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1902

Streeton painted his first English landscapes in the summer of 1898 in Sussex, including this painting of a harvest scene. He was adapting to the English light and vegetation, aided by working *plein air* and his astute observational abilities. He used a similar composition to some of his Australian paintings, such as *'What though among the leaves hast never known'* 1896 (in the section of this exhibition titled 'A bush idyll'), whose landscape with figures is also framed by overarching trees.

The rich colours and rambunctious clouds suggest Streeton was looking at the work of English contemporary Philip Wilson Steer and as well as earlier works by John Constable, such as *The Cornfield* 1826 in London's National Gallery. *Sussex Harvest* was exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in May 1899 and sent back to Sydney for exhibition at the Society of Artists in late August. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reviewer considered it the 'chief success' among Streeton's exhibits.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## **Chepstow Castle** c1902

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
gift of Elizabeth Finley 1976

The conservation of the frame for this painting was supported by AGNSW Conservation Benefactors

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)



## The centre of the Empire (also known as Foggy morning)

1902

oil on canvas

Private collection, Sydney

Originally titled *Foggy morning*, this is one of two depictions of Trafalgar Square in London that Streeton painted over the winter of 1901–02. The other is titled *Frosty noon* and together they embody the impressionist interest in painting similar scenes under differing weather conditions and times of day. Painting two versions proved good for his career, as each was dispatched to differing exhibitions with *Foggy morning* hung in the Salon in Paris.

Streeton thought highly of his paintings of London in silvery winter light. He wrote to Tom Roberts in February 1902: 'Trafalgar Square 4 feet square – Best I've done yet in England – from top of St Martin's Church.' *Foggy morning* was later retitled for exhibition in Melbourne at the suggestion of Streeton's patron Walter Baldwin Spencer, the new title reinforcing the importance of its subject to the remote colony where it was now displayed.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Blue and gold c1904

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide,  
Morgan Thomas Bequest Fund 1907

The subject of this Thames evening scene is essentially light and atmosphere. While the title recalls the bright colours Streeton made his own while painting landscapes in Australia, here the tones are much softer and nuanced. The rich painterly surface flecked with yellow captures the textures of the golden autumn foliage, while the reflection in the river provides a liquid echo.

With its softly outlined trees and crepuscular light, *Blue and gold* recalls earlier paintings by French Barbizon artist Camille Corot, as well as Monet's various views of the Seine at Giverny from the 1890s. Streeton is likely to have encountered both artists' works in London and Paris by this time. He would have been curious about Monet, as one of the leaders of the French impressionist movement that critics in Australia had associated with Streeton in the 1880s and 90s.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Corfe Castle 1909

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest 1914

This bravura painting shows Streeton painting at his showy Edwardian best and displays everything he had learned from Constable and Turner as well as his English contemporaries. Streeton visited Corfe Castle while on a cycling tour of Dorset with Tom Roberts in 1909 and made several paintings of varying size and from differing vantage points. Here a complex interplay of light and shade, form and subject give a strong sense of drama to a painting made for public exhibition.

Displayed at the New English Art Club in London in November 1909 and in several international exhibitions, the painting was later exhibited in Streeton's solo show in Melbourne in 1914.

A reviewer wrote:

Corfe Castle is rendered with more reserve and power than perhaps any other work in the exhibition, and apart from the mastery of execution, is distinct with a certain fitting sense of presence.

It was promptly purchased for the National Gallery of Victoria's collection.



# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Malham Cove c1910

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1914

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Victoria Tower, Westminster 1912

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide,  
gift of the artist 1943

By 1912 Streeton's brushwork had become more evident, applied in thick rough brushstrokes and here accentuated by chalky colours. Viewed in fleeting afternoon sunlight, the tower pierces the cumulus clouds that cast deep shadows over the building. One critic commented that 'the treatment of the sky is impressive in its freedom and vigour'. While the subject is the tallest tower at the Palace of Westminster, completed in 1860, it is also the workers highlighted in the foreground who animate and energise the scene.

Streeton probably saw the much-discussed *Manet and the post-impressionists* exhibition organised by artist and critic Roger Fry at the Grafton Galleries in London in 1910. Fry invented the term 'post-impressionist' to describe the work of artists Cézanne, Van Gogh and Matisse, among others, and Streeton's chunky brushwork and reduced forms may be in part a response to the art in that exhibition.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Chelsea 1905 1905

oil on canvas

State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, purchased through the Great Australian Paintings Appeal 1983

Mid-decade Streeton painted a series of oils and watercolours of the River Thames at Chelsea, near where he lived. Their grey-toned fogs, mists and reflections were painted at a low point in Streeton's life, when he was struggling to establish and support himself. His fiancé Nora Clench would not marry him until he had a steady income, and at times he could not afford heating or even food.

Whistler had died in 1903 and a large-scale memorial exhibition was held in London in 1905. Streeton and Tom Roberts, who had moved to London in 1903, renewed their interest in Whistler's work and both painted in a subdued palette for a period. In this painting and the nearby watercolours form is secondary to light and colour, as Streeton sought a sense of stillness and visual poetry through tonal harmonies. Industrial buildings often dominate the views across the river.

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

## **Morning mist on the Thames**

**c1906**

pencil, watercolour on wove paper

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
bequest of Doris Edith Tighe 1973

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**St Pauls from the river Thames**

c1918

pencil, watercolour on wove paper

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
gift of Elizabeth Finley 1979

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Worbarrow Bay 1909

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, purchased 1951

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Windsor c1904

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest 1907

Streeton painted castles soon after arriving in England, initially influenced by Turner's paintings on display at the National Gallery, conveying their romantic and dramatic qualities in works such as *Chepstow Castle* c1902. In *Windsor*, the ancient royal castle and River Thames are counterposed with a modern train pulling into Windsor station. Streeton has painted it as 'seen in the shimmer of a June day', as reported in *The Studio* magazine.

The blue, grey and brown colour harmonies in this work show great control of tone across the painting, from the watery reflections to the steam merging with morning mist, to the castle silhouetted against the sky in a play of light and shadow. It was aptly described as a 'fresh and original work' when exhibited at the Royal Academy in the summer of 1904.

AUSTRALIA  
FELIX



In 1906, after nearly ten years away, Streeton returned to Australia. The impetus for his temporary return was his awareness of a growing regard and market for his work, and a sense that he could support himself overseas by capitalising on his popularity at home. Seeing his family and friends would have undoubtedly also been an incentive, after a difficult period establishing himself in London.

Streeton's sojourn was a fulfilling and productive time in his career. He reconnected with fellow artists and patrons, organised three commercially successful solo exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne, and painted new Australian works. These show Streeton responding to place by re-engaging with subjects he had tackled earlier in his career. They also reveal how Streeton's style had matured while he was away, immersed in the new and old art he saw in London and on visits to the continent.

Streeton's stay in Australia in 1906–07 provided the funds, confidence and inspiration he needed to continue in London. It also encouraged Streeton's intermittent return to Australia, exhibiting British and European works alongside new Australian paintings, until he re-settled in Melbourne in 1923.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)



## Australia Felix 1907

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide,  
Morgan Thomas Bequest Fund 1920

*Australia Felix* was painted while Arthur Streeton was staying at patron Carl Pinschof's home at Mount Macedon in early 1907. The sweeping view of Mount Towrong is more elevated and expansive than his earlier Heidelberg landscapes and Streeton returned to this panoramic composition for some of his most ambitious and well-received landscapes in the 1920s. Streeton was also to repeat the green, bronze and grey palette that gradually lightens into pale blue in the distance.

This work's title, 'Australia Felix', was borrowed from colonial explorer Thomas Mitchell's description of south-western Victoria in 1836 and translates to happy or fortunate Australia. It also expressed Streeton's contentment in being home. *Australia Felix* was exhibited in solo shows in Sydney and Melbourne in 1907, and again at the Paris Salon in 1909, where it was awarded a bronze medal. The Art Gallery of South Australia purchased the painting in 1920.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Coogee Bay 1907

oil on canvas

Private collection, Sydney

This view of Coogee Beach showing the sweep of the bay from the north end is painted from a similar position to the works by Tom Roberts and Charles Conder from 1888, which Streeton had competed with in friendly rivalry on his first visit to Sydney in 1890. Streeton discovered that this location had not changed since he was there in the 1890s, and he wrote to Roberts with some irony:

Coogee is lovely as ever – & thanks to the stodgy & conservative easy going folk here – it's not improved since I last saw it 11 years ago.

A comparison with Streeton's earlier strongly hued and vigorously painted Coogee works reveals how he had refined his impressionist style while living in England. The abrupt compositions and flickering brushwork which alarmed critics in 1890 have developed into the elegant, fluid and easy naturalism evident in this charming painting.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## The harbour, from 'Penshurst', Neutral Bay 1907

oil on wood

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1962

Streeton painted a series of harbour views on narrow wood panels when he visited Sydney in 1906–07. They were painted quickly and from direct observation, recalling his vivid scenes painted on draper's boards while living at the artists' camp at Mosman during the 1890s. Streeton responds to his own personal history and practice in Sydney, but paints in the richer colours and fuller style he has developed in England. They also catered to a demand for his Sydney paintings which were popular with collectors.

This work was painted from Penshurst at Neutral Bay, the home of Streeton's patron Leonard Dodds who owned both *The railway station, Redfern* 1893 and the more modern composition *Sunset and the pines* 1907, displayed nearby. Streeton painted at least three pictures looking out from Dodds's house in 1907, with each work capturing the city and its harbour in a different light and mood.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## **The wharf, Mosman's Bay 1907**

oil on wood

New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, NSW,  
bequest of Howard Hinton 1942

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**Sunset and the pines 1907**

oil on wood

Private collection, Sydney

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Sydney Harbour 1907

oil on canvas, later mounted on plywood

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest 1910

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Sydney Harbour 1907

oil on canvas

Taylor family collection, Brisbane

Streeton painted this glorious view from an elevated position near where he camped and painted in Mosman in the 1890s. It is dominated by the saturated blue of the expanse of water, while Cremorne Point runs out into the harbour just as it does in many of his smaller panel paintings from the 1890s.

Streeton's portrayal of bustling harbour activity and newly built Federation-era houses highlights Sydney's transformation into a modern metropolis. While he had returned to familiar locations, driven by happy memories as well as an established market for paintings of harbour scenes, Streeton paints the view he sees, not one from memory.

The larger but more laboured version displayed nearby is dominated by the foreground vegetation. It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in 1908 and the Salon in Paris in 1909.





ARTHUR STREETON'S  
VENICE

The financial success of Streeton's Australian exhibitions in 1906–07 meant he could marry his long-term sweetheart, the Canadian-born Nora Clench, whom he had met soon after arriving in London. Nora was an independent, successful violinist leading an all-female quartet, whose business acumen helped Streeton build his own career. Following their marriage in London, the Streetons honeymooned in Venice in May–June 1908.

Streeton took a risk in painting Venice, following in the footsteps of great European and American artists. Yet he was an experienced painter of Sydney's waterways and relished the challenge of tackling in his own style Venice's opulent buildings, liquid canals and 'oriental' colour and light. Streeton produced an astonishing 80 works on this visit and a subsequent one in September–October.

He was right to back himself and when he exhibited his Venetian views in London in March 1909 he achieved recognition that had eluded him. *The Observer* critic wrote:

Mr Streeton has caught the opalescent glitter of the Venetian canals and marble palaces in bright moments of sunshine as few artists have done before him.

In July 1909 this success was emulated in Melbourne when he sent works back for the exhibition *Arthur Streeton's Venice*.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Bridge of Sighs, Venice 1908

oil on canvas on board

New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, NSW,  
gift of Howard Hinton 1942

# **Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

## **Venice, bride of the sea 1908**

oil on canvas

Carrick Hill Trust, Adelaide, Hayward Bequest 1983

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Santa Maria della Salute (sunny)

1908

oil on canvas

Collection of Allen Hunter and Carmel Dyer

In Venice, Streeton continued his impressionist practice of painting a subject at differing times of the day to capture its likeness in varying light and weather conditions. One such subject was Venice's baroque basilica, the Santa Maria della Salute. From the opposite side of the Grand Canal, Streeton painted the Salute's façade in bright sunshine and on an overcast day. In his 'grey' version, gondolas are tied up at a wharf, with the tall mooring posts closing off the composition. In the 'sunny' version Streeton has added the distinctive rusty orange sails of the *bragozzi*, flat-bottomed boats used for transport and fishing.

A comparison of Streeton's two depictions of the Salute demonstrates his versatility as a plein-air painter and skill at rendering a scene in different keys and harmonies, recording distinctive visual impressions of moments in time.

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**Santa Maria della Salute (grey)**

1908

oil on canvas

Geelong Art Gallery, gift of TS Hawkes 1914

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## St Mark's, Venice 1908

oil on canvas

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane,  
purchased 1972

After Grand Canal views, the Piazza san Marco was one of the most painted subjects in Venice. Here Streeton shows St Mark's Basilica late in the afternoon as the sun casts a large shadow across the piazza. Streeton later recalled the view:

On the eastern side rises up the sumptuous façade of the church of St Mark. Half of the great space was in shadow in the late afternoon, and the richness of the church at that time defies description.

In the foreground a crowd of convivial people escape the heat in the shade, probably after a long day of sightseeing.

In a letter written to his friend and patron Walter Baldwin Spencer, Streeton recounted how painting in front of about 40 onlookers, 'took some nerve'. While he toiled away, Nora read Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* nearby at Caffè Florian.



# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)



## The Grand Canal 1908

oil on canvas

Collection of Susan Clarke, Victoria

This is one of two views of the Grand Canal that Streeton painted at this scale and which he considered his best Venetian works. This painting has only recently been rediscovered, in the collection of a descendent of the original owner who had purchased it in 1914. Painted from the top floor of Palazzo Foscari in the Dorsoduro district of Venice, it is a *veduta* type composition, a large-scale landscape with an encompassing distant view and plenty of architectural detail. The famous Rialto Bridge is partially visible as the canal's passage narrows at the distant bend.

Although Streeton's depictions of Venice mostly conformed to artistic conventions, his bravura brushwork and individualistic impression of the city's heady atmosphere during summer and autumn set his works apart. He expressed Venice's bright light and humidity with aplomb, an approach the critic for *The Craftsman* described as 'virile and unhackneyed'.

PAINTING THE  
SOMME

Streeton was in Australia when Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914. He lost his booked passage to England and was unable to return until February 1915. Too old to fight, he enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps and worked as an orderly at the Third London General Hospital at Wandsworth. Streeton attended to gassed and wounded soldiers, but the long hours and gruelling work took its toll on his health and he was discharged with a War Badge in 1917.

In 1918, after he had lobbied extensively for the appointment, Streeton became an official Australian war artist attached to the 2nd Division, Imperial Force, with the rank of honorary lieutenant. Streeton made two tours to the Western Front in France and witnessed several defining moments during the final stages of the war. He produced over 180 paintings, drawings and watercolours, far in excess of the number he was obliged to make.

Streeton's closely observed and poignant depictions of ravaged landscapes, damaged buildings and the machinery of war do not explicitly represent warfare or make it heroic. Rather, they describe the incredible damage wrought by mechanised war.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Boulogne 1918

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
gift of the artist 1926

Streeton was initially deployed to the port city of Boulogne, an operational hub for the Allied Forces en route to the Western Front. He received basic training and made drawings of organised activities such as mobilising troops and of a locomotive puffing plumes of smoke into the air. These studies informed *Boulogne*, painted when Streeton returned to London. Its depiction of people and machinery in motion set against an energetically painted sky and rose-tinted buildings, conveys the charged atmosphere Streeton experienced as he prepared for his tour to the Front.

Streeton's war paintings were well reviewed in London and Australia, but sales were slow as people did not want depictions of the war at home. Recognising their historical significance and value to the community, Streeton donated 117 works to ex-service organisations, war heroes and state galleries, including this painting to the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1926.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## French siege gun 1918

oil on canvas

Australian War Memorial, Canberra, purchased  
from Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1985

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)



## Villers-Bretonneux 1918

oil on canvas, later mounted on hardboard

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1920

This deftly painted work depicts the aftermath of one of the most significant campaigns during World War I. On 24 April 1918 Australian and British troops recaptured the hilltop village of Villers-Bretonneux by launching an audacious night-time counterattack on German forces. This victory was a defining moment that helped change the course of the war by stalling Germany's advances toward the strategically important city of Amiens.

Streeton visited Villers-Bretonneux after the fact and made several drawings which were later reworked into this painting – arguably his most visceral and impactful wartime image. Streeton has painted Villers-Bretonneux the way he imagined it looked the morning after the offensive: a calm and tranquil scene disturbed by a corpse's leg slung over a trench, medics carrying a wounded soldier on a stretcher and smouldering ruins in the distance.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Balloons on fire 1918

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Gilbee Bequest, 1918

*Balloons on fire* shows four observation balloons plummeting to earth after being shot down by German aircraft. Streeton based it on a watercolour he made that is probably of a balloon attack that took place near Glisy on 1 August 1918. Two of the soldiers manning the balloons are descending by parachute, while the other two likely perished. Streeton paints the scene as he would have witnessed it, at a distance with the strange sight of smoking debris spiralling down against a big sky and still landscape.

Streeton's fascination with the simultaneously serene and surreal spectacle of war is explored again in the nearby work *Troops bathing, Glisy* 1918, which portrays shells exploding dangerously close to diggers while they take a dip in a lake. This painting also echoes the idyllic scenes of men bathing that Streeton and Tom Roberts painted at Heidelberg and Mentone during the late 1880s and early 1890s.

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**Troops bathing, Glisy 1918**

oil on canvas

Private collection, Sydney



# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Amiens, the key of the west 1918

oil on canvas

Australian War Memorial, Canberra,  
purchased 1936

Addressing the threat German forces posed to Amiens during the Spring Offensive in 1918, Streeton presents an aerial view of the Somme with Amiens in the distance. Billowing clouds cast shadows across the foreground, signifying Germany's encroachment on 'the key of the west'.

Streeton draws heavily from his influences and repertoire of pictorial devices. The sweeping view echoes his Yarra Valley and Hawkesbury landscapes of the 1880s and 90s, while the low horizon and cloudy sky recall the works of 17th-century Dutch artists Jacob van Ruisdael and Philip de Koninck.

This painting has endured as a poignant reminder of Australia's significant involvement in the war, with Australian forces commanded by General Monash playing a vital role in the Battle of Amiens on 8 August 1918. The 11-kilometre advance by the Allies on the first day was a decisive turning point in the war and shifted morale on both sides.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Nocturne, Amiens 1918

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide,  
gift of artist 1943

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**Damaged buildings, Péronne**

**1918**

watercolour with pencil on paper

Max and Nola Tegel collection, Sydney

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## **Péronne, Oct 1918** 1918

watercolour on paper mounted on card

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide,  
gift of Miss E Waite 1954

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## The stairway, Péronne 1918

watercolour, pencil on paper

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
gift of the artist 1926

As the Allies closed in on victory in late 1918, Arthur Streeton requested and was granted a second deployment to Front between mid October and late November 1918. While touring the partially destroyed town of Péronne, which had been captured by Australian battalions in September, Streeton produced a striking series of pencil and watercolour drawings. These rapidly executed works, which present abstracted views of buildings damaged by intense gunfire and shelling, are surprisingly modern in their simplicity and starkness.

Streeton wrote to his wife Nora:

I'm getting some watercolours of ruins, in some ways much more striking than the ones I did before – they are bolder & I think more decorative. Heavens how one realizes things here in these fresh ruins ... I'm getting good things.

**John Longstaff**

(1862–1941)

**Portrait of Arthur Streeton c1912**

oil on canvas

National Library of Australia, Canberra

# George W Lambert

(1873–1930)

## Arthur Streeton 1917

oil on canvas

Australian War Memorial, Canberra,  
purchased 1983

This portrait of Corporal Arthur Streeton, executed by fellow Australian artist George W Lambert, was painted while Streeton was enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps and working as an orderly at the Third London General Hospital at Wandsworth.

Lambert has portrayed Streeton in uniform but at ease, with a stolid expression that tells of his resolve during the war. Although Streeton's work at the hospital took a severe toll on his health, he later described it as 'the hardest and the finest work [he] ever performed'.

Lambert also served as an official Australian war artist, touring Palestine and Gallipoli between 1917 and 1920. Lambert was one of the most successful expatriate artists in London and he and Streeton had a close friendship that became even more important to Streeton when both had returned to Australia in the 1920s.

# GOLDEN CITY



When Streeton visited Australia in 1920, he was struck by Sydney's urban growth. The following year he told a *Daily Telegraph* journalist:

The harbour has been frequently painted, but I am surprised that the artists do not paint more pictures of the city – that is, the streets and buildings. There are fine subjects everywhere.

During the 1920s Streeton produced a series of paintings of urban Sydney punctuated by glimpses of the harbour. These postwar paintings were created during a time of rapid expansion and documented the changing skyline as the country settled into a renewed prosperity and Sydney became the commercial heart of Australia.

In 1936 Streeton extolled the beauty of Sydney's architecture and surrounds writing in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

Her architecture towers up in golden brown stone, and the scarf or belt blowing about her waist is the magic blue harbour.

By that time, Sydney had been a source of inspiration for his paintings for almost 50 years.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Golden city, Sydney 1921

oil on wood

Private collection, Sydney

Streeton painted this urban view of Sydney from the rooftop of Cliveden, then the tallest building in Bridge Street. In the foreground he has captured the Victorian sandstone architecture of Bridge Street: the Chief Secretary's building at far left, the Department of Education (where he showed this work in his November 1921 solo exhibition) in the centre, and the Lands Department building with its clock tower dominating the skyline. The rich blue water of Farm Cove is visible to the left.

In *Golden city, Sydney* Streeton was able to paint from a height unthinkable in any of his earlier city paintings, creating a fresh viewpoint and keeping pace with the vertical growth of the city. This new perspective, from 12 storeys above ground, places the viewer among the city rooftops and reveals the expansion of the modern metropolis. Streeton records Sydney as a site of exuberant growth, expressed through swift brushstrokes and dappled with sparkling light.

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**St Mary's, Darlinghurst  
and North Head 1921**

oil on wood

Private collection, Sydney

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)



## Town Hall and domes of the market 1921

oil on wood

Denis M Savill and Anne Clarke Collection

Painted on Streeton's 1921 Sydney trip, this elevated view faces towards Darling Harbour and features Sydney Town Hall to the left and the Queen Victoria Building (known as the George Street Market when Streeton lived in Sydney in the 1890s) to the right.

The stark white building of Murdoch's Men's & Boys' Outfitters on Park Street occupies a central position, and other buildings crowd the skyline. An overall grey tonality conveys an overcast day, while the glare from the sun behind clouds illuminates the sides and rooftops of some of the buildings and casts the rest into shadow. The buildings are painted in a blocky manner and the entire scene is composed of repeated rectangles, squares and semicircles. Combined with the flat colour and high vantage point, they make this painting relatively modern for Streeton's practice.

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**Entrance to Sydney Harbour  
from Vaucluse 1921**

oil on wood

New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, NSW,  
donated through the Australian Government's Cultural  
Gifts Program in 2015

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## The harbour from Mosman 1926

oil on canvas

Private collection, Perth

Streeton returned to Sydney in 1926 to revisit his favourite harbour locations. In the years he had been absent, urban development thrived and new apartment buildings appeared across the lower north shore. Streeton painted this harbour view from one of his patron's homes in Mosman and discovered the outlook had dramatically changed: there were now almost 20 000 flats across Sydney, compared with 2000 in 1910.

Streeton has included the new apartment buildings and red-roofed houses perched atop Bradleys Head, with the city visible in the distance, painted in the bright colours and simplified style he used for his city paintings at this time. Despite the modern built environment, he has focused on the atmospheric effects he recorded in earlier Sydney harbour scenes: an expanse of rippling blue water, voluminous clouds and a smoky haze hovering above the city. When first exhibited, a critic somewhat surprisingly described this painting as 'Turneresque'.



THE BIG PICTURE:

NATIONAL  
LANDSCAPES



Streeton's pre-eminent place in Australian landscape painting was secured in the first decades of the 20th century. During and after the First World War, discussions of Australian impressionism evolved from representing a national school of art to embodying an ideal of nationhood itself. In 1919 critic and artist Lionel Lindsay wrote of *'The purple noon's transparent might'*: 'It is a great portrait of our birth place, and blazons high the claim of Arthur Streeton to the status of a great national painter'.

Streeton brought his Somme battlefield scenes to Australia in 1920 and exhibited them alongside Australian paintings from the previous decades, sensing our evolving identity was closely linked to the fighting in Europe. With the death of 60 000 Australian soldiers and with another 15 000 Australians dying during the Spanish flu pandemic in 1919, it is little wonder audiences also responded to the familiar pastoral scenes of Streeton's new Australian works, painted in a style they now trusted. Streeton's 1920s landscapes were widely celebrated and occasionally criticised for being conservative or glibly painted. While they are not modernist, they participated in the making of a modern Australia shaped by both progressive and traditional cultural values.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Blue depths 1917

oil on canvas

Private collection, Sydney

This is the most ambitious landscape Streeton completed during the First World War prior to becoming an official war artist. He had sketched and painted at the popular tourist destination of Mt Buffalo in Victoria's Great Dividing Range during his visit to Australia in 1914. Back in London, he painted *Blue depths* while he was stationed at the hospital at Wandsworth – remembering this spectacular natural scene must have offered an escape from his grinding work on the wards.

Streeton emphasises a vertiginous viewpoint at the edge of a crevasse, falling away into a deep valley and distant view over plains painted with a hazy blue summer tonality. It is one of Streeton's most dramatic landscape paintings and he hoped it would secure him membership of the Royal Academy in 1915, but this did not occur. He did further work on it before dating it in 1917.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Blue vista from the sundial 1920

oil on canvas

National Australia Bank, Melbourne

During his extended stay in Australia in 1920–22, Streeton painted as he had on previous visits in 1907 and 1914: near Melbourne, around Sydney Harbour, and in the Victorian countryside. In November 1920 he held an exhibition of new paintings of the Grampians National Park (Gariwerd) and the Dandenongs (land of the Wurundjeri people).

*The Daily Telegraph* critic aptly described this painting as ‘a big landscape, painted in a big way’. The blue of the title refers to the atmospheric effect of eucalypt oil particles interacting with light, giving the distinctive coloured haze that appears over the Australian bush on sunny days. It is also the colour that became most closely associated with Streeton, one he knew his market wanted. As it was described later in the decade:

the beautiful atmospheric ‘Streeton Blue’ varies from the almost unbearably brilliant blue of midday to the soft ‘love-in-a-mist’ blue of late evening with an astounding fluency and ease.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## The digger and his log 1920

(inscribed 1922)

oil on canvas

Bendigo Art Gallery, purchased 1957

Streeton's elevated vistas were balanced by paintings that bring the viewer down from the mountain tops onto the valleys and plains.

*The digger and his log*, *Beneath the peaks*, *Grampians* 1920–21 and *The creek* 1925 are painted from low vantage points looking into the matter of the land itself: earth, water and vegetation. All three also portray environmental degradation, whether this was intended as their main subject or not.

*The digger and his log* shows a returned serviceman standing next to a newly felled eucalypt tree. The large tree has been ripped out of the earth, and the root ball covered in rich brown soil dominates the foreground. The digger is clearing land awarded to him under the Soldier Settlement Scheme, but the failure of many of these farms due to their small size, often infertile land, and the inexperience of the returned servicemen gives this painting added pathos.

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**Beneath the peaks, Grampians**

1920–21 (inscribed 1920)

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1920 and completed in 1921

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## The creek 1925

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
Edward Stinson Bequest Fund 2004

The conservation of the frame for this painting  
was supported by Antoinette Albert

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Ocean blue, Lorne 1921

oil on canvas

Geelong Gallery, purchased with funds generously provided by Geelong Art Gallery Foundation, Robert Salzer Foundation Art Program, Geelong Community Foundation, Will & Dorothy Bailey Charitable Gift and numerous individual donors, 2011

**Arthur Streeton**

(1867–1943)

**The Barron Gorge and  
sugar plains 1924**

oil on canvas

State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia,  
Perth, purchased with funds from the Hackett Bequest  
Fund 1928



# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## The valley from Olinda top 'Let the rose glow intense and warm the air' – Keats 1925

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest 1925

Streeton returned to Australia permanently in September 1923. After he resold *Golden summer, Eaglemont* 1889 for the record price of 1000 guineas in 1924 he was able to build a house on land he had purchased in 1921 at Olinda in the Dandenong Ranges. Dividing his time between Melbourne and Olinda, he developed an intimate knowledge of the local landscape. This painting is a fine example of the many views he painted from his property and nearby locations.

The title is from John Keats's unfinished poem 'Hyperion' (1818–19). As with his other literary citations, Streeton is interested in the line itself rather than the poem. Critic JS MacDonald identified the rose as being 'the landscape itself, taking on the colour of the smouldering fire of evening'. The *Argus* critic, however, felt Streeton's 'very mastery at times overwhelms the atmospheric effect aimed at, and makes it difficult to forget the painted surface'.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)



## Land of the Golden Fleece 1926

oil on canvas

Private collection, Sydney

Painted near the southern end of the Grampians, this is one of Streeton's most significant 1920s pastoral scenes. Its title paid homage to Tom Roberts' painting of a shearing shed in full swing, *The Golden Fleece* 1894, and evoked the same Greek myth of the Argonauts voyaging to the end of the world in search of the fleece. Streeton's landscape populated by grazing sheep embodied the wealth generated by farming in the 1920s.

The idea of Australia as an inheritor of classical Greek democratic values grew in response to the destruction of the First World War. JS MacDonald, then director of the Gallery, wrote in 1931 that Streeton's paintings contain 'music akin to great overtures; golden, morning stuff, melodious and Grecian', showing how 'life should be lived in Australia, with the maximum of flocks and the minimum of factories'.

Though it is easy to empathise with this vision of an idealised agricultural life, MacDonald's essay also echoed ideas that gave rise to fascism in Europe in the same decade.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Afternoon light, Goulburn Valley, Victoria 1927

oil on canvas, later mounted on hardboard

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,  
The Oscar Paul Collection, gift of Henriette von Dallwitz  
and of Richard Paul in honour of his father 1965

This painting won the 1928 Wynne Prize after it was entered without Streeton's knowledge by the collector who had bought it. Streeton was thrilled and claimed incorrectly it was the first prize ever awarded to him. As the title suggests, its subject is light as much as land and the strong afternoon sun and shadowing is impressively observed.

It is reductive to think Streeton painted landscapes only for a city audience – even though Australia's population was predominantly urban – or for a landowning elite who could and did buy Streetons for their rural properties. His paintings could be seen in all of Australia's major public galleries and were widely reproduced. They also spoke to regional audiences and to anyone who lived and worked in the countryside. Streeton was never afraid of being popular, and his ability to choose subjects that communicated to many is part of his paintings' enduring appeal.

ABUNDANCE

Streeton had a passion for gardening and throughout his life he delighted in propagating and caring for plants – from growing lemon-scented gum trees and auratum lilies at St John's Wood in London to tending five acres of native and introduced species at Longacres, his Olinda property. Arrangements of flowers and fruit, often from his own garden, meant he could paint directly from nature without needing to travel to his subjects or work outdoors. In these still-lives Streeton continued his keen observation of nature while exploring in his studio formal questions of colour, light and shade.

In 1934 Streeton shared his thoughts on gardening in *The Argus*:

Gardening is the very devil. It should be studiously avoided by those who delight in an easy seat and a cigar ... Doing one's own gardening, like painting pictures, has its own reward – the secret pleasure of doing it.

In the 1920s and 1930s Streeton painted over 150 flower paintings. These domestic subjects, although overshadowed by his grand pastoral landscapes, dominated his later exhibitions and received praise from critics.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)



## **Lilium auratum** c1909

oil on canvas, later mounted on hardboard

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
gift of Mr Frank Rickwood in memory of  
Justin Robert Rainey (1924–85) 1995

The conservation of this painting was supported  
by Philippa Warner, Cameron Williams and  
Philip & Elizabeth Ramsden

This magnificent flower painting was rapidly executed with broad strokes of thin, translucent paint. Two plumes of white flowers with orange speckles and stamens, in a brass Middle Eastern jardinière, stand out from the deep green background. Remnants of blue sky can just be made out near the lilies on the left, hints of an earlier landscape concealed beneath the showy lilies.

An X-ray has revealed a view of the Gloucester Buckets mountain range in New South Wales. It matches a 1894 line engraving of the painting exhibited in Sydney and reviewed as ‘amongst the best pictures of the year’, which by 1935 Streeton had listed as ‘disappeared’ from his studio. Streeton painted the lilies directly on top of this canvas which, if rotated to the right, reveals the mountain range more clearly. It is difficult to know why Streeton painted over one of his most notable 1890s landscapes, but many of his still-lives have earlier paintings underneath.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## The melon c1920

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1937

The conservation of the frame for this painting  
was supported by Guy & Marian Paynter and  
AGNSW Conservation Benefactors

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Roses c1929

oil on canvas

Art Galley of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1930

In 1927 Streeton purchased a house on Grange Road in Toorak as a town residence for himself, his wife Nora and son Oliver. He spent many hours in its rambling garden tending to his treasured rose bushes.

In December 1929 in an article in *The Argus* Streeton wrote of the rose as the most difficult of all flowers to paint. Yet roses were Streeton's most frequent flower subject and critics often praised the accuracy of his representation. In 1931 Harold Herbert wrote of 'a quality which almost enables them to be smelt and touched'. *Roses* was considered to be particularly fine and was purchased by the Gallery directly from its first exhibition.

X-rays have revealed two other paintings beneath this one, a still life of wisteria in a vase over the top of a portrait of a man whose white shirt and collar can just be made out beneath the vase.



# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Tulips 1930

oil on canvas

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane,  
gift of JW Fletcher through the National Gallery Society  
of Queensland 1953

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Lilies and bells 1935

oil on canvas

Private collection, Melbourne

The certainty with which Streeton sets down brush strokes, full brisk, correct in tone and colour, is amazing ... Illusions of light are finely painted particularly in No 7 'Lilies and Bells'.

Artist and critic Harold Herbert gave a glowing review of *Lilies and bells* in Streeton's exhibition at the Athenaeum Gallery, Melbourne, in 1935. Streeton's late flower paintings reveal an energetic freedom that differs considerably from the restraint shown in some of his earlier carefully arranged still-lives. In *Lilies and bells*, Streeton has used a vibrant palette to capture the variety of colourful blooms growing outside in his garden. There is a sense of movement and warmth in this scene, in which the flowers are captured at close range in their natural environment under the springtime sun.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Tea in the garden, Grange Road

1930

oil on canvas

Private collection, Melbourne

In the 1930s Streeton had his new garden at Toorak to tend along with the extensive gardens he had established at his property in the Dandenong Ranges. Throughout the decade Streeton produced a significant group of paintings that drew inspiration from both his domestic environment and his appreciation for gardening.

This painting offers a rare glimpse into Streeton's home life, enjoying tea served in the secluded and tranquil Toorak garden under the shade of established trees. In 1930 when this painting was exhibited, the artist and critic Howard Ashton wrote:

His pictures are not states of emotion, but states of actual fact, beautifully felt and rendered ... His paintings are, this time, of a more intimate order of subject, a tea party on the lawn at the back of a villa.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Toorak garden 1936

oil on canvas

Private collection, Port Stephens, NSW

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Self portrait 1923

oil on canvas, later mounted on hardboard

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
gift of the artist at the request of the Trustees 1924

The Art Gallery of New South Wales trustees asked a number of prominent artists in the 1920s to contribute a self-portrait to the collection. They invited a broad spectrum of painters, including those not known for portraiture, such as Margaret Preston. Streeton was invited in 1921 and completed his portrait after he had returned permanently to Australia in 1923. He was 56, secure in his standing as an artist, and a strong advocate for the importance of art, and yet this portrait suggests a more introspective figure than such a strong cultural contribution might suggest.

As a public-facing image, it shows a mature, thoughtful man who has had an eventful life, with mistakes as well as successes, and has lived it on his own terms, becoming an artist against the odds. As he replied to a patron who had criticised his paintings during the war, 'I just go on with my work, believing in myself, that's all'.

# Jack Cato

(1895–1971)

## Arthur Streeton c1932

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Gwynneth White Adamson Bequest 1997

This photograph was taken soon after Streeton's huge retrospective exhibition had opened at the Art Gallery of New South Wales on 20 November 1931. With 173 works from 41 collections, it was the most ambitious loan exhibition the Gallery had ever undertaken and set the template for modern artist retrospectives in Australia. It is even more remarkable that it happened at the height of the Great Depression. The president of the trustees, Sir John Sulman, noted in his opening speech:

Our choice of Streeton's works for a first loan exhibition of this kind is also I think very appropriate to our present conditions. We are living in very troublous times, but we are striving to find an honest way out of our difficulties, and one of them will undoubtedly be by the increase of our primary industries and produce from the land.



BEWARE OF  
THE AXE



Streeton believed that artists should participate in public life and that their opinions mattered. He did not hesitate to express his own ideas on a wide variety of topics and was often published in the major newspapers of the day. Acceptance by the establishment mattered to him later in life, and his roles as an artist and cultural commentator lead to a knighthood from King George VI in 1937. He was proud of what he had achieved, but he also used his public platform to campaign on issues he felt were significant.

Streeton's life-long love of nature led to his speaking out against the destruction of Australia's old-growth forests from the mid 1920s. He was equally concerned about urban planning, and in 1925 campaigned to prevent a tramline being built through Melbourne's Botanic Gardens. He titled a drawing of the gardens *Beware of the axe*. From the late 1920s Streeton exhibited many paintings which sought to bring attention to the logging of old-growth forests and predicted a desolate future for Australia if deforestation continued. It is remarkable that almost a century on we are still having the same debates.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Last of the messmates 1928

oil on canvas

Private collection

Streeton had painted a woodcutter before, in *The selector's hut* 1890, where the figure with his axe resting from cutting firewood seemed more at one with his environment. In *Last of the messmates*, Streeton portrays a man cutting up a newly felled *Eucalyptus obliqua*, or messmate, while a lone mature tree stands behind him growing up and beyond the canvas. The timber worker uses a gasoline-fuelled cross-cut saw, new technology in the 1920s that was said to cut 'ten times as fast as two men by hand'.

The messmate can grow to 90 metres tall with a girth of 3 metres. There were still messmates at Olinda in 1921, near where Streeton bought his property Longacres, but by the end of the decade they had all been felled. Streeton wrote that in the 1880s the Dandenongs had appeared 150 feet (46 metres) higher due to the messmate forest and that it was now a reduced landscape.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## **The cloud (also known as Storm over Macedon) 1936**

'I wield the flail of the lashing hail,  
And whiten the green plains under,  
And then again I dissolve it in rain,  
And laugh as I pass in thunder'

– 'The cloud', Percy Bysshe Shelley  
oil on canvas

Private collection, Perth

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## **A mountain side** 1935

oil on canvas

Westpac Corporate Art Collection, Sydney

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)



## The vanishing forest 1934

oil on canvas

On loan to the Art Gallery of Ballarat  
from the Estate of Margery Pierce

This painting of Sherbrooke Forest, a few kilometres from Olinda, is in the large square format that Streeton used for some of his most significant works. The felled tree and rent earth recall the tree in *The digger and his log* 1920, a work that portrays land clearing with seeming dispassion. *The vanishing forest*, by contrast, condemns and laments the logging of mountain ash, *Eucalyptus regnans*, the world's tallest flowering tree and one that dominated Sherbrooke Forest.

The many standing dead trees in the painting have been killed through ringbarking, though Streeton shows enough of the forest intact to illustrate what will be lost if the destruction continues. Sherbrooke was state forest rather than national park and had been logged as late as 1930. Its unprotected status in 1934 was a matter of public controversy.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Our untidy bush 1934

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,  
Felton Bequest 1934

Streeton had painted eucalypts since the mid 1880s, usually within a greater landscape setting. In the 1920s and 30s he painted singular gum trees as symbols of endurance and natural beauty, partially in response to the popularity of Hans Heysen's gum paintings. By this time the eucalypt had been embraced as Australia's national tree, though in a parochial twist it was sometimes felt that only Australians could really see its beauty.

JS MacDonald promoted this idea in an essay in 1929, also citing the ability to truthfully depict a gum tree as the measure of the development of Australian art. According to MacDonald this was achieved only by the 1880s Melbourne plein-air painters, namely Streeton and his friends. When Streeton became deeply concerned about conservation issues he painted old-growth gums in forest settings as in *Our untidy bush* 1934, the title of which suggests collective ownership and collective responsibility.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Silvan Dam 1939

oil on canvas

Melbourne Club

The Silvan Dam was completed in 1932 as a major source of Melbourne's water supply. It also became a spectacular feature in the landscape looking east from Olinda and Streeton included it in his views from the Dandenongs. Even though the title states the dam as the subject, it merges into a vast landscape, its far reaches defined by Mount Donna Buang, the tallest peak near Melbourne, which appears in the background of many of Streeton's Dandenong paintings.

Half of the work is filled by the sky, with billowing clouds on the right and a sudden shower on the left, favourite subjects for Streeton late in life. He used paint-laden thick brushstrokes to quickly depict the scene, and as the result of a lifetime of experience they cohere into a satisfying composition. Streeton was also celebrating a landscape he felt was under threat.

# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Silvan Dam and Donna Buang, AD 2000 1940

oil on canvas

Private collection, Hope Island, Qld

Streeton was 73 years old when he painted this work and was to die three years later. It was one of his last major paintings and forecast a desolate future for Australia if land clearing continued. It depicts the same view as the adjacent *Silvan Dam* 1939 but here, projected into the year 2000, the landscape has become a desert of bones and dead trees. A 1936 concession to log this area for paper pulp had appalled Streeton.

Streeton said this painting was 'a protest to the citizens and Parliaments of Victoria'. When it was exhibited *The Age* dismissed it as 'a bit of propaganda for the preservation of Australian forest lands', but *Art and Australia* said Streeton

turns prophet and shows us ... the barren and scarified desert, dominated by gaunt peaks, to which our short sighted policies will ultimately lead us ... this picture is one of the most authentic in the exhibition.



# Arthur Streeton

(1867–1943)

## Passing shower 1937

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,  
purchased 1937

By 1937 when this was painted, Streeton had lived through extraordinary world events since his early successes: boom-and-bust cycles, prolonged drought and times of abundance, Australian Federation, the First World War, the Spanish flu pandemic, bushfires and bush recovery, the Great Depression. By the late 1930s Streeton was anxious that the world was irrevocably heading to war again, yet in a small group of late paintings he captured the joy he still felt from the landscape near his home in the Dandenong Ranges.

Streeton painted directly in front of this view, with the observational naturalism of the committed plein-air painter he had been since the 1880s. The technical virtuosity he had achieved by mid-career has receded, replaced instead by the vitality that painters often arrive at late in life. It is a scene that celebrates the enduring natural world, with every moment being followed by another, of rain passing and life renewed. It seems apposite for our moment.

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