

2017

Front Matter

Antipodes Editors

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Cover Art

Landscape, Cremorne (1894)

Tom Roberts

Oil on canvas on plywood

Dimensions: 18.6 × 42.4 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Tom Roberts (1856-1931) is arguably one of Australia's best-known and most loved artists, standing high among his talented associates at a vital moment in local painting. His output was broad-ranging and includes landscapes, figures in the landscape, industrial landscapes, and cityscapes. He was Australia's foremost portrait painter of the late nineteenth century with an ability to create a sense of living presence in his images of men and women. In addition, he made a small number of etchings and sculptures.

Roberts studied at the National Gallery School, Melbourne, and spent almost half of his life in Australia. His new country was the key subject of his art, and indeed, he made a major contribution to the creative depiction of this land and of our understanding of it.

Working together with Frederick McCubbin, Arthur Streeton, and Charles Conder in between 1885 and 1897, Roberts was part of the legendary group of Australian artists: the Australian Impressionists. With one or other of them he painted outdoors at Box Hill, Mentone (Beaumaris), Eaglemont (Heidelberg), and Sydney, producing some of Australia's most loved works of art. In many of his views of Sydney he was clearly determined to transcend the commonplace picturesque.

Roberts travelled widely around Australia, and particularly to sheep stations in rural New South Wales. There he produced some truly iconic works—*Shearing the Rams*, *A break away!*, *The Golden Fleece*, and *Bailed up*—that are now embedded in the Australian psyche, as he intended.

An original thinker, Roberts had a breadth of view. He was a born leader and mentor to younger painters, having an impact on his contemporaries, McCubbin, Streeton, Conder, and Jesse Truill, and also on later Australian artists such as Elioth Gruner, Lloyd Rees, Fred Williams, and Arthur Boyd.

He died at his home, aged 75, on September 14, 1931. The obituaries described Roberts as “a great artist and a charming and big-hearted personality” and “a leading artist and one of the pioneers in the modern school of Australian open-air landscape painting.” *The Sydney Morning Herald* made a more individual comment, remarking that Roberts “was able to transfer to his canvas with exquisite delicacy the transient effects of light and shade,” and that “he was the most modest of men, an excellent friend.”

— Anna Gray, Emeritus Curator, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra