



# Streeton

works from the  
Queensland Art Gallery Collection

education resource

## Information for teachers

This education kit includes contextual information, focus art works and points for discussion and debate. The material can be used with students in the Gallery or in the classroom. To enhance your exhibition visit, we encourage you to use this material with your students, before and after your Gallery visit. We suggest you use this education kit in conjunction with the room brochure, which provides background information about the exhibition, the artist and the historical period in which the artist was working. Please feel free to adapt and build on these materials in any way you wish.

## The exhibition

Although Sir Arthur Streeton's paintings in this exhibition were made around a century ago, they remain relevant today. They provide us with an opportunity to investigate the complex relationships that Australians have with their landscape, and with artistic and cultural centres abroad.

This kit provides a foundation for understanding these relationships, as well as Australian visual culture and national life. It is designed to encourage critical responses to sentimental ideas of the Australian landscape and the 'native born'. The art works provide an opportunity to study Australian art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and to reflect on the ways in which this period of cultural life has shaped Australia's cultural identity today.

*Sunny cove* 1893  
Oil on wood panel  
53.4 x 21cm  
Purchased 1961

*The bathers* 1891  
Oil on canvas  
31.2 x 62.6cm  
Purchased 1951. Maria Therese Treweeke  
Bequest



## *Spending time in the bush*

Towards the end of the late nineteenth century, Australians were enjoying a growing familiarity with the landscape. City dwellers travelled to the bush surrounding Melbourne to spend their leisure time picnicking, camping, sketching and painting. This was in stark contrast to the early settlers' view of the landscape as a harsh and uncompromising, even sinister, place. The establishment of colonial settlements required extensive clearing of dense vegetation. For the settlers, the bush was something to be conquered: a barrier to settlement and progress.

Arthur Streeton's group of friends worked in the city and took camping trips on weekends to paint, talk and relax. However, they didn't stray too far from the security of urban life. Some of the places where Streeton and his friends 'went bush', such as Box Hill and Eaglemont, were just on the outskirts of Melbourne, and are now heavily populated suburbs. In this painting, we can see that the relationship between Australians and the bush was changing. The portrayal of these swimmers conveys some of the atmosphere of these artist camps, and suggests a rapport with the landscape.

### Issues for primary students

- + Have you ever been to a camping ground? Was it like the place in this painting?
- + Imagine you lived before Arthur Streeton's time. Write a story about going to the bush. How has our understanding of the bush changed since this art work was painted?

### Issues for secondary students

- + What are some of the cultural stereotypes of the bush and the city? For example, stockmen, farmers, office workers and business people. Write a short story about a character from the bush or city who unexpectedly finds themselves in a very different environment.
- + Swimming has become a great Australian pastime. Research and compile a timeline of Australia's relationship with swimming. For example, you could include public bathing, lifesaving clubs, bikinis and Olympic successes.

*Sketch for 'Still glides the stream and shall forever glide' 1895*  
Oil on cedar panel  
42 x 26.5cm  
Gift of Lady Trout 1978



## Painting and poetry

In this sketch for *Still glides the stream and shall forever glide*, Streeton painted the Yarra River below Eaglemont. The Melbourne suburb of East Ivanhoe now stands here, and has many buildings and streets, including Streeton Crescent. While this painting is of an Australian scene, the title and ideas portrayed are borrowed from the poem *After-Thought* by the English poet William Wordsworth.

In his landscape painting, Streeton commented on the grand ideas of the English **Romantic** poets. The references made to nature and time were not seen as inappropriate or unpatriotic for an Australian painter, but as a necessary part of the visual language of **Romanticism**. While artists embraced the unique Australian landscape, the country's national identity continued to be largely defined and measured by European traditions.

### Issues for primary students

- + Search for William Wordsworth's poem, *After-Thought*, from his 'Sonnets from the River Duddon' on the internet or in the library. What can you see in both the poem and Streeton's painting?
- + Draw a picture about a favourite poem or story. In your picture, you might like to show something that has happened to you.
- + What can you find out about the place where *Sketch for 'Still glides the stream and shall forever glide'* was painted? What does it look like now?

### Issues for secondary students

- + Write a response to an art work — it could be a painting, sculpture, video, photograph or installation. You might like to write a poem or story. Think about how the art work is relevant to you or something connected to you.
- + Search for William Wordsworth's poem *After-Thought*, from his 'Sonnets from the River Duddon' on the internet or in the library. Then find a poem written by an Australian poet and relating to the Australian landscape. How are the ideas presented in the Australian poem similar or different to those in Streeton's painting? Compare these ideas to those in the Wordsworth poem.



*Tulips* 1930  
Oil on canvas  
61 x 50.8cm  
Gift of J.W. Fletcher through the National  
Gallery Society of Queensland 1953

## *Flowers and forests*

Arthur Streeton was passionate about both native and introduced flora and fauna. His work is often associated with ideas about nationalism and the Australian landscape, yet he painted numerous still lifes of European flowers throughout his career. This subject proved both popular and profitable. Streeton's general interest in plants and flowers became more pronounced later in his life, when he became an avid gardener. His garden provided subjects for many still lifes, including the exotic *Tulips* 1930. He also painted roses, hyacinths, zinnias, lilies and other European flowers.

Streeton was also passionate about the **conservation** of the Australian bush. He wrote letters to newspapers protesting the logging of the bush outside Melbourne, and painted pictures of how the landscape might look if the trees were cut down and the animals disappeared.

'I'd like to come back and haunt my Blackwood trees — and scare the life out of anyone who cuts down any of the trees I've planted.' (letter from Arthur Streeton to Tom Roberts, 19 February 1930, in Galbally, Anne & Gray, Anne (eds). *Letters from Smike: The Letters of Arthur Streeton 1890–1943*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989, p.195.)

### Issues for primary students

- + Think about the plants in your schoolground. Discuss with your classmates which ones are 'native' and which ones are 'introduced'. Check your answers on the internet or in the library.
- + What is your favourite flower? Is it an introduced or native plant? Why is it your favourite?
- + Draw a picture of a place where there are lots of trees. Now draw what it would look like if all of them were cut down.

### Issues for secondary students

- + How do you think the debates about conservation issues have changed in Australia from the early twentieth century to now?
- + Streeton's paintings relating to conservation issues are considered political. Explore some of the political issues that Australian artists deal with in their art today. Do some research on these artists: Joan Grounds, Mike Parr and George Gittoes.

from top  
*Sydney Harbour, across Cremorne* c.1907  
Oil on wood panel  
17.5 x 66.3cm  
Gift of Jack Manton 1970

*Sydney Harbour* 1921  
Oil on panel  
16.5 x 66cm  
Gift of Miss Maria Therese Treweeke 1934



## *Selling Sydney's harbour*

An **icon** can be described as an object, building, place or person that is seen as particularly significant to a group of people. It could be said that, for many Australians, Sydney Harbour is an icon. Since colonial times, even before Arthur Streeton was painting and long before the Sydney Harbour Bridge was built, many artists have painted Sydney Harbour.

Although it frustrated him at times, Streeton painted subjects that he knew would appeal to buyers. Between 1907 and 1927 he painted 145 pictures of Sydney Harbour. He used a broad spectrum of colour including rich, dark hues in the foreground and light, muted colours in the background.

While Streeton was criticised for painting a commercially desirable subject, in an often quick and seemingly unimaginative way, it may be argued that financial security was his motivation. At the time when Streeton was painting multiple harbour pictures, he was supporting a wife and young child and a steady income would have been a priority. He wrote to Tom Roberts in 1907, 'They only want their harbour'.

### Issues for primary students

- + Do you think Sydney Harbour is as important now as it was in the early twentieth century? Why?
- + What other Australian icons — consider objects, places and people, not just landmarks — can you think of?

### Issues for secondary students

- + Does it challenge an artist's integrity when the decisions they make about the art they produce are affected by what will sell?
- + Can you think of any contemporary artists who have been criticised for prioritising commercial success?
- + Does the commercial success of an artist challenge the credibility of their work? What factors should be considered in relation to this issue?



## *A new vision*

After working for some time in Australia and living the life of the **bohemian** artist, Streeton went overseas in 1897 in an attempt to enter the European art market. In England and Italy, Streeton examined the work of the English painters Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851) and John Constable (1776–1837). Stylistically, Streeton's work changed dramatically after the turn of the century.

*St. Mark's, Venice* 1908 depicts a typical view of the Venetian tourist site of St Mark's Cathedral with its forecourt filled with people. While the artist's choice of subject matter is obviously influenced by his travel, equally interesting is the new technique emerging in this painting. Streeton has created a highly worked surface, which differs from his earlier, sketchy 'impressions'. In this picture, if we look closely at the brushstrokes, we can see that he has swapped his square-bristled brush for a round one. The paint is thick and blended, and the colours are glossy. Clearly, the artist's travel has affected his choice of painting style, as well as his subject matter.

### Issues for primary students

- + If you could go to any place in the world, where would you go and what would you want to learn about? Compare your answer with a friend.
- + Paint a picture of something using as little paint as possible on your brush, and painting as quickly as you can. Paint the same picture again using lots of paint, and take your time to work on each section. How are the two paintings different? Which one do you prefer?

### Issues for secondary students

- + Explore the work of English painters Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851) and John Constable (1776–1837). What evidence can you find of their work influencing Streeton?
- + Look at the paintings of some of the other **Heidelberg School** artists. How did their work change over the course of their lives? Consider style and subject matter.

*St. Mark's, Venice* 1908  
Oil on canvas  
81.2 x 101.7cm  
Purchased 1972



## Portraits and images — from bohemia to knighthood

The discoverer, the first to look into the heart of our landscape as with the eyes of a child, and reveal its essential mystery, its truth and its beauty, was Arthur Streeton.

Lindsay, Lionel. 'Arthur Streeton's place in Australian art', *Art in Australia*, no.2, 1917.

This quote emphasises the fact that Arthur Streeton was born in Australia. This was considered significant as nearly all of our famous artists up to this point had been born overseas and travelled to Australia during their careers.

As a young man, Arthur Streeton decided to give up a traditional weekday job for the life of an artist, to go camping and painting and sell pictures for an income. In 1897, Streeton left Australia, craving recognition and sales from audiences in Europe. This plaster bust by Harold Parker depicts the young Streeton in London, where he lived and eventually married.

Streeton's reputation as one of Australia's greatest artists was firmly established when William Beckwith McInnes painted this portrait. A major book on Streeton's work had been published in 1919 and, when the expatriate returned to Australia in 1923, he was lauded by fellow artists and critics alike. Streeton's self-published monograph of 1935, which featured the rapturous prose of Lionel Lindsay, confirmed his stature, as did his knighthood, which was conferred in 1937. The accomplishments of the 'native born' Streeton proved the success of the idea that Australia could produce its own great artists.



from top  
Harold Parker  
*Arthur Streeton* 1906  
Plaster with buff patination  
24.5 x 15 x 9.5cm  
Gift of Mrs Anthea Wieneke 1993

W.B. McInnes  
*Arthur Streeton* c.1930–39  
Oil on canvas  
81.5 x 68cm  
Purchased 1947

### Issues for primary students

- + What do the clothes we wear say about us? Draw Arthur Streeton wearing different outfits — start with what he may have worn when camping with his friends. Then draw him wearing a Hawaiian shirt, a school uniform, a punk outfit, and a police uniform.
- + Arthur Streeton decided that he didn't want to work in the city each day like everyone else. He painted every day instead. Can you think of other jobs that don't involve a desk and a computer?

### Issues for secondary students

- + Analyse the Lionel Lindsay quote above. What kind of assumptions does it make?
- + Portraits usually convey some clues about the identity of the sitter and what they do. What are the **accoutrements** of the artist that you can see in this work? Why do you think he does not display any obvious ones, such as a paintbrush or one of his works?
- + Analyse the term 'native born'. Do you think people have to be born in Australia to be successful here?

June evening, Box Hill 1887

Oil on canvas laid down on composition board

55.9 x 76.3cm

Gift of the family of the late Hon. T.C. Beirne, MLC,  
through the National Gallery Society of  
Queensland 1954



## *Technique and materials*

From the age of 15, Streeton studied drawing at the National Gallery School of Design in the evening, and worked during the day. We can see his early exploration of oil painting as a young man in the work *June evening, Box Hill 1887*, painted when he was just 20. His technique progressed very quickly to his characteristic freely executed broad brushstrokes and light-filled works. In 1889 he contributed 40 'impressions' to the '9 x 5 Impression Exhibition'. These **impressions** were painted on recycled boards from cigar box lids, and captured fleeting effects of atmosphere and light. Using square brushes gave a sweeping effect with emphasis on colour and light rather than painstaking detail. Later in his career, after living in Europe, his technique became more influenced by the art and landscapes he saw, and he also began using round paintbrushes.

### Issues for primary students

- + Experiment with using square brushes and round brushes for different effects like Streeton.
- + How many different kinds of effects can you make using just one paintbrush? Fill up a sheet with these different marks.

### Issues for secondary students

- + Try painting an 'impression' of light effects on a landscape. Experiment by painting the light and the shadows of clouds and trees at different times of the day. Use a 9 x 5 inch board, the same size used for *The road up the hill*.
- + Examine the paintings illustrated in this kit. Discuss the differences in technique between the earlier and later works.

# Glossary

**Heidelberg School:** an Australian art movement that takes its name from the Heidelberg area in Melbourne where many of the artists painted. The term has, over the last century, taken on a wider meaning and covers Australian artists of the late nineteenth century who followed *plein-air* painting.

**Bohemian:** a nonconformist writer or artist who lives an unconventional life.

**Impression:** a quickly executed sketch, usually completed outside.

**Romantic, Romanticism:** a European movement in literature and the arts (c.1780–1850) characterised by particular interests in nature, emotion, the value of individual expression and the belief in the importance of spiritual aspects of the environment.

**Icon:** an important and enduring symbol or sign, which can be an object, building, place or person.

**Plein-air:** French term meaning 'out of doors'. Relates to an art movement, originating in France about 1865. Concerned with capturing the effects of outdoor light and atmosphere.

**'Native born':** belonging to a place by birth.

**Accoutrements:** accessories of equipment or dress.

## Further reading

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## Online resources

**Heidelberg School Artists Trail:**  
<http://www.hsat.info/index.html>

**William Wordsworth:**  
<http://www.bartleby.com/145/index.html>

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