



Core units: Exemplars – Year 8

Illustration 3: Representations of landscapes in Australian art

Australian landscape art

For tens of thousands of years the people occupying the Australian landmass have recorded, in an artistic form, the elements of the environment significant to them. Aboriginal Australians painted on rock, bark and leaves, engraved rock, carved wood, and decorated ceremonial clothing. Of particular interest is Indigenous aerial landscape art. It is a map-like (or birds-eye) view of the desert landscape. In the distant past, the common media for such artwork was rock, sand or body paint. Today, the tradition continues as paint-on-canvas dot-art (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Timmy Payungka Tjapangarti's dot painting, *Untitled, Kiwirrkura, Western Desert, Western Australia (1989)*. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 183 x 122 cm.

Source: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased with the assistance of the Sun family, 2009. Retrieved January 2013, from: <http://artsearch.nga.gov.au/Detail.cfm?IRN=181491>.

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Colonial artists

Early European-born landscape artists such as John Eyre, Joseph Lycett (Figure 2), Conrad Martins, John Glover (Figure 3), and Eugene von Guérard (see Figure 4) have been criticised for applying European perspectives and techniques to their artistic depiction of the Australian landscape.



Figure 2: Joseph Lycett's *Entrance to Sydney Harbour* (1824)

Source: Dixon Library, State Library of NSW – DL F82/16. Retrieved January 2013, from: http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/discover_collections/history_nation/macquarie/artists/lycett/index.html.



Figure 3: John Glover's *Natives on the Ouse River, Van Diemen's Land* (1838),
Oil on canvas, 78.0 x 115.6 cm.

Source: Art Gallery of New South Wales. Purchased with assistance from Mr and Mrs J K Bain, 1985. Retrieved January 2013, from: <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/48.1985/>.

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Figure 4: Eugene von Guérard's Govett's Leap and Grose River Valley, Blue Mountains, New South Wales (1873), Oil on canvas, 68.5 x 106.4 cm.

Source: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased 2000. Retrieved January 2013, from: <http://cs.nga.gov.au/Detail.cfm?IRN=22939>.

The impressionists

It was not until the emergence of the celebrated Heidelberg School that artists were able to capture something of the essence of the Australian landscape. Frederick McCubbin (Figure 5), Tom Roberts (Figure 6) and Arthur Streeton (Figure 7), idealised the Australian landscape and romanticised the bush tradition and the pioneer way of life. Their portrayal of the Australian landscape helped shape the country's national identity.



Figure 5: Frederick McCubbin's *Down on His Luck* (1889), Oil on canvas, 145 x 183.3 x 14cm.

Source: State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia. Purchased 1896.

Retrieved April 2013, from: <http://collection.artgallery.wa.gov.au/search.do?id=1687&db=object&page=1&view=detail>



Figure 6: Tom Roberts' *A Quiet Day on Darebin Creek* (1885), Oil on wood panel, 26.4 x 34.8 cm.

Source: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Retrieved January 2013, from: <http://www.nga.gov.au/Exhibition/OceantoOutback/Detail.cfm?IRN=41399&BioArtistIRN=24504&>.

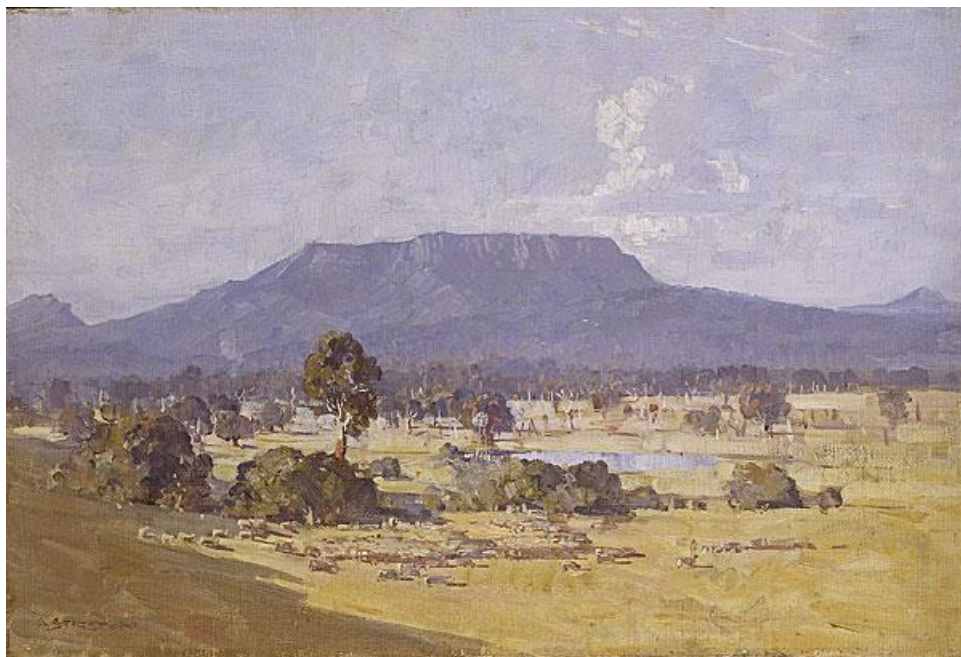


Figure 7: Arthur Streeton's *Land of the Golden Fleece* (1926), Oil on canvas, 50.7 x 75.5 cm.

Source: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. The Oscar Paul Collection, Gift of Henriette von Dallwitz and of Richard Paul in honour of his father, 1965. Retrieved January 2013, from: <http://nga.gov.au/federation/Detail.cfm?WorkID=45168>.

Symbolic realism

The symbolic realists (also known as the Angry Penguins) sought to modernise the Australian creative arts by challenging more traditional approaches. Arthur Boyd (Figure 8), Sidney Nolan (Figure 9), John Perceval and Albert Tucker (Figure 10) were among the most notable of these artists.



Figure 8: Arthur Boyd's *Boat Builders, Eden* (1948), Oil and tempera on composition board, 85.6 x 101.7cm.

Source: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased 1976. Retrieved January 2013, from: <http://cs.nga.gov.au/Detail-LRG.cfm?IRN=31777>.

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Figure 9: Sidney Nolan's *Ku-ring-gai Chase* (1948),
Synthetic polymer paint on composition board, 91 x 102 cm.

Source: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased 1976. Retrieved January 2013, from:
<http://cs.nga.gov.au/Detail.cfm?IRN=38656>.

© The Sidney Nolan Trust.



Figure 10: Albert Tucker's *Parrots in Bush* (1973)

Source: Cbus. Retrieved January 2013, from:
<http://www.cbusartcollection.com/works/?id=282>.

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Russell Drysdale's landscapes portray Australia's changing vision of the bush. It is no longer a place of freedom and opportunity, but reflected lost hopes and decay.



Figure 11: Russell Drysdale's *Emus in a Landscape* (1950), Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 127 cm.

Source: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased, 1970. Retrieved January 2013, from: <http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/OCEANtoOUTBACK/Detail.cfm?IRN=71164&BioArtistIRN=23218&mystartrow=49&realstartrow=49&MnuID=1>

© Estate of Russell Drysdale.

Abstractionists

In the 1950s and 1960s the abstractionists added another artistic interpretation of the Australian landscape. John Olsen's most important works include his *Lake Eyre* paintings and *Golden Summer, Clarendon*. His famous *Salute to Five Bells* decorates the Sydney Opera House.

Examples of John Olsen's works can be found on many Australian art gallery websites, for example, Art Gallery NSW, <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au>. His *Golden Summer, Clarendon* can be seen on <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/167.1985/>

Other resources

An excellent resource to view the evolution of Australian landscape painting is the National Gallery of Australia's *Ocean to Outback: Australian landscape painting (1850–1950)* website. Retrieved January 2013, from: <http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/OCEANtoOUTBACK/Detail.cfm?IRN=47105&MnuID=2&HD=True>.