

The Artists' Trail

The City of Whitehorse Artists' Trail celebrates a significant phase in the municipality's artistic heritage. This brochure and the interpretative panels located at various points along the trail acknowledge the artists who painted regularly at the Box Hill artists' camp.

The Artists' Trail begins in Main Street, near Box Hill Station, and finishes at Blackburn Lake. The trail is best undertaken by car, although there are sections – Gardiners Creek and Blackburn Lake in particular – that are pleasant to walk.

You will notice that the landscape around Box Hill and Blackburn has changed dramatically since the 1880s, when Tom Roberts and his companions set up camp at Gardiners Creek.

Take care, whether following the trail by car or on foot, and remember to observe parking restrictions. The trail also takes you along a number of residential streets, so please respect the privacy of residents.



John Llewelyn Jones
Summer landscape, droving sheep, c.1883-90
oil on composition board
14.5 x 23.5cm
Purchase, 2001
City of Whitehorse Art Collection

En Plein Air In The Open

During the late nineteenth century, a small number of European master painters were teaching new painting techniques to young artists in Melbourne.

Tom Roberts (1856–1931) and Frederick McCubbin (1855–1917) were students of the Swiss painter Louis Buvelot (1814–1888) at the Carlton School of Design in 1869. Roberts and McCubbin later studied together at the National Gallery Art School. Buvelot, who had arrived in Australia in 1865, is probably the unidentified painter remembered by McCubbin in an unpublished memoir for having taught him and his peers to 'see the paintable qualities of that which lay immediately around us'. Painting en plein air (in the open) – rather than making paintings in the studio, working from sketches or studies made out of doors – was a novel way of capturing the landscape. The young Tom Roberts sought to discover plein-air painting for himself and travelled throughout Britain, Spain, Italy and France between 1881 and 1885. After returning home, Roberts was brimming with enthusiasm for what he had seen. During the week, Roberts worked for Barrie and Brown Photographers, then, restless to paint outdoors, he would camp on weekends at Box Hill. The small bush settlement had become accessible to city dwellers via a railway station, which opened in 1882.

Roberts established the camp in 1885 and was joined by McCubbin and their friend Louis Abrahams (1852–1903). Arthur Streeton (1867–1943) also

became a member of the group, following a chance encounter with McCubbin on the beach at Beaumaris or Mentone. Charles Conder (1868–1909) first stayed at the artists' camp in 1888, after meeting Roberts in Sydney. Among casual visitors to the camp were Jane Sutherland (1855–1928) and local artist Theo Brooke Hansen (1870–1945).

At the camp, the friends explored the possibilities of painting en plein air, rendering nature quite differently from the way in which it had been represented by their predecessors. Instead of painting proud mansions sitting amid tamed landscapes, this new generation of artists captured the bush in intimate studies. The 'broken brushstrokes', intense colour and a generally lighter palette in these works reflected the practices associated with French Impressionism.

Bestowing a distinctly Australian flavour on their work, the artists took popular local narratives such as 'the prospector down on his luck' or 'lost children' as subject matter and celebrated native flora such as silver-leaved stringybarks and other local tree species.

The Artists' Camp

Almost every Saturday, for some four years (1885–1888), a group of Melbourne artists raced to the Lilydale line to catch a steam train, leaving behind the bustling metropolis for an idyllic weekend of camping and painting.

Lighting at Box Hill, now part of the City of Whitehorse, the artists tramped south for two kilometres to their camp at the farm of local resident David Houston.

Wasting no time, they secured their blank canvases against trees or on portable easels and set to work making paintings that were rendered spontaneously, capturing the changing effects of light on the landscape.

Native trees and grasses thrived on the banks of Gardiners Creek (known at the time as Damper Creek). The artists took full advantage of their bushland surroundings, painting the appealing scenes available to them. Many of the compositions included local settlers or itinerant workers clearing the land, farm animals and rudimentary settler huts, or children on their way to school.

At the end of a busy day's painting, the artists would return to their camp, on the rise above the creek, and would boil a billy for tea and cook local farm produce for dinner.

Around the campfire, the artists drank with pipes or cigars in hand, chatting and singing late into the night. Each of the four core members of the group had a nickname conferred upon him at the campfire. Roberts, 'Bulldog', was active in local art politics and a natural leader of the group. McCubbin, 'the Prof', was a much-loved and



Frederick McCubbin
Bush Idyll
signed and dated 'F. McCubbin 1893'
oil on canvas
47 x 87in. (119.5 x 221.5cm.)
Private collection.
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respected art teacher who was also a fine tenor. Streeton was renamed 'Smike' at the camp and Abrahams became known as 'the Don'. These nicknames were never forgotten and for years were used affectionately among the friends, especially when they reminisced about their camp at Box Hill, and its environs.

At the camp, the artists slept, not uncomfortably, on makeshift bedding. In the morning, they prepared for another busy day of painting. Then, at dusk, they would grudgingly pack their belongings and run to the station to catch the last train back to their digs in the city and to their weekday jobs and other commitments.

Moving On

A country house at Eaglemont was an attractive alternative to a tent at Box Hill, and by early 1889 the artists' camp had been disbanded.

where the majority of the 9 by 5 paintings were created. On the day of the exhibition's opening, James Smith, an influential critic writing for the *Argus* newspaper, labelled the works 'too ephemeral for consideration' but the public eagerly snapped up the inexpensive art, and the paintings were all sold.

During 1890, the artists who had been working at Eaglemont went their own way. Sidney Dickinson, in a review for the *Australasian Critic*, dubbed them 'the Heidelberg School' in 1891 – negating the fact the artists had painted in the Box Hill area for some four years and in the Heidelberg area for just 18 months. The artists who first camped at Box Hill in 1885, then briefly moved to Heidelberg and beyond in the late 1880s, are now referred to as the Australian Impressionists.

Even though much of the native bush has long since vanished from Box Hill and Blackburn, there are still pockets of native foliage that enable us to envisage the area as it was during the years of the thriving artists' camp, which the City of Whitehorse commemorates with this Artists' Trail. Additionally, a captivating park for children, Artists' Park, and a local school, Roberts McCubbin Primary School, in Box Hill South, honour this significant group of artists who painted in the area so long ago.

Artist Biographies



Frederick McCubbin

1855	Born West Melbourne
1872	Enrolled at National Gallery Art School, Melbourne
1885	Established Box Hill artists' camp with Tom Roberts and Louis Abrahams
1889	Exhibited at the 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition
1893	Lived in Wolseley Crescent, Blackburn
1917	Died South Yarra

Arthur Streeton

1867	Born Duneed, Victoria
1882	Enrolled at National Gallery Art School, Melbourne
1887–88	Painted at Box Hill artists' camp
c.1889-90	Lived at Eaglemont
1889	Exhibited at the 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition
1897–1919	Lived in London, travelling to Egypt, Italy and France with trips home 1906–07 and 1913–14
1943	Died Olinda

John Llewelyn Jones

1866	Born Carlton
c.1883	Enrolled at National Gallery Art School, Melbourne
1885-86	Appeared to have accompanied Tom Roberts on painting expeditions, possibly including Box Hill artists' camp
c.1889	Painted with contemporaries at Eaglemont
c.1903	Moved to Sydney
1927	Died Sydney

Tom Roberts

1856	Born Dorchester, England
1869	Arrived in Melbourne
1874	Enrolled at National Gallery Art School, Melbourne
1881-85	Lived in London and travelled to Europe
1885	Established Box Hill artists' camp, with Frederick McCubbin and Louis Abrahams
c.1889–90	Painted with contemporaries at Eaglemont
1889	Exhibited at the 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition
1903–19	Lived in London and travelled to Europe
1921–23	Lived again in London and travelled to Italy
1931	Died Kallista

Theo Brooke Hansen

1870	Born Carlton
1888	Enrolled at National Gallery Art School, Melbourne
c.1890	Painted at Box Hill and Blackburn
1893–97	Lived in Paris and London
1898–1945	Lived in Surrey Hills
1945	Died Surrey Hills



Jane Sutherland

1855	Born New York
1864	Arrived in Sydney
1870	Moved to Melbourne
1871	Enrolled at National Gallery Art School, Melbourne
c.1888	Painted at Box Hill artists' camp
1928	Died Kew

Further Reading

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Biography image credits.
Frederick McCubbin image courtesy National Library of Australia, Canberra
Jane Sutherland image courtesy State Library of Victoria

A portion of the uncredited images in this brochure were sourced from the State Library of Victoria, private collections, Council's art collection and local historical societies in Whitehorse. For more information about artworks by Australian Impressionists in the City of Whitehorse Art Collection, please visit www.whitehorseartspace.com.au

Whitehorse
ARTSPACE

To view our art gallery, visit
www.whitehorseartspace.com.au

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Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, Whitehorse City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the traditional custodians of the land. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

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Whitehorse Heritage Artists' Trail

1. Box Hill Station

Cnr Station and Main streets, Box Hill
Melway: 47 D9
(panel sited near entrance to Box Hill Central)
Parking: car park

Frederick McCubbin
Box Hill Railway Station, 1890

oil on canvas on board
19.0 x 29.0 cm
Gift of Louis McCubbin, c.1950
City of Whitehorse Art Collection

Box Hill Station opened in 1882, on the south side of Main Street. In painting this 'impression' of the station buildings, Frederick McCubbin, by 1890 a drawing master at the National Gallery Art School, may have been recalling the experience of waiting for the train on a Sunday evening after spending the weekend at the Box Hill artists' camp. In the 1980s the railway line was lowered beneath Station Street, and Box Hill Central was built above the station, on the site where McCubbin had produced this work.



Tom Roberts
A Sunday afternoon picnic at Box Hill, c.1887

oil on canvas
38.6 x 28.7 cm
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1984

Friends of the core group of painters associated with the artists' camp regularly travelled by train to Box Hill to enjoy a picnic or to pose for paintings. This impression of a couple enjoying a relaxing afternoon picnic in an unthreatening natural landscape of gum trees and native grasses is typical of Tom Roberts' Box Hill paintings. The male picnicker depicted in this work is the artist Louis Abrahams, and his female companion may be his future wife Golda Brasch.



2. Roberts McCubbin Primary School

Birdwood Street, Box Hill South
Melway: 61 D2
(panel sited near corner of Duncan Street)
Parking: on street

Tom Roberts
'Evening when the quiet east flushes faintly at the sun's last look', 1887-88

oil on canvas
50.8 x 76.4cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
W.H.Short Bequest, 1944 (1375-4)

According to Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts was the first to draw his friends' attention to the variations in colour and tone of the eastern sky at sunset. The point from which this landscape is believed to have been painted is above the artists' camp, in the vicinity of Roberts McCubbin Primary School. The piles of split wood were on what is now Haig Street, and the cottages in the distance were on Middleborough Road.



3. Gardiners Creek Trail

Enter via cnr Riversdale Road and Sycamore Street, Box Hill South
Melway: 61 D3
(panel sited on trail north of golf course car park)
Parking: on street

Tom Roberts
A summer morning tiff, 1896

oil on canvas, 76.5 x 51.2 cm
Art Gallery of Ballarat,
The Pinkerton Bequest Fund, 1943

This is one of the earliest works Tom Roberts painted at the artists' camp. Frederick McCubbin's sister Harriet posed for the painting, as Roberts recalled in a letter to his future wife Lillie Williamson:

McCubbin's sister stands for us in sunlight among some exquisite young white firm saplings. She is a little downcast – up the hill a youth in the same state about to let his horse through the slip panel.

The gum trees and native grasses of Box Hill and Blackburn were familiar motifs in the works that the artist friends painted near Gardiners Creek.



4. Gardiners Creek Trail

Enter via cnr Riversdale Road and Sycamore Street, Box Hill South
Melway: 61 D3
(panel sited 200m north of previous panel)
Also sited on this Trail (400m east of this panel) is a panel representing Tom Roberts' painting The Artists' Camp – part of the Whitehorse Heritage Trail.
Parking: On street

Frederick McCubbin
Lost, 1886

oil on canvas
115.8 x 73.9 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1940 (1077-4)

This work is Frederick McCubbin's earliest known painting on the subject of lost children and is often considered his first 'great' picture. The model for the painting is believed to be one of McCubbin's sisters Mary Anne, also known as 'Dolly'. Scholars have noted the influence of Tom Roberts's theories of tonal values on this and other works by McCubbin. In capturing the different qualities of the light and shade, the artist has applied his colours directly to the canvas, rather than over a layer of underpaint or ground.



5. Gardiners Creek Trail

Enter via Hay Street, Box Hill South (or continue along trail)
Melway: 61 F2
(panel sited a short distance south of Hay St)
Parking: on street

Arthur Streeton
Butterflies and blossoms, 1889; 1890 (dated)

oil on canvas on composition board
45.6 x 66.0 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the Government of Victoria, 1979 (A33-1980)

Arthur Streeton joined the artists' camp after Frederick McCubbin met him painting on the beach at Mentone or Beaumaris in 1886. Although the camp had disbanded by early 1889, Streeton still made occasional excursions back to the Box Hill-Blackburn area, where he painted this work.

(image bottom left)



6. Sutherland Place, Box Hill South

Melway: 61 F5
(panel sited cnr Conder Ave and Sutherland Pl)
Parking: on street

Jane Sutherland
Obstruction, Box Hill 1887

oil on canvas, 41.3 x 31.1 cm
Art Gallery of Ballarat,
Purchased with funds from the L.J.Wilson Bequest, 1976

Jane Sutherland is the best-known and most professional female artist who painted at the established artists' camps around Melbourne in the late nineteenth century. Sutherland studied at the National Gallery Art School and won a prize in 1883 at the annual exhibition of students' work. Obstruction, Box Hill is one of several pictures that Sutherland painted in the Box Hill-Blackburn area. Her work generally focused on scenes from daily life and often featured children in the landscape. Sutherland's association with the Box Hill artists' camp is remembered in the naming of nearby Sutherland Place. She is buried in Box Hill Cemetery.

John Llewellyn Jones
Summer landscape, droving sheep, c.1883-90

oil on composition board
14.5 x 23.5cm
Purchase, 2001
City of Whitehorse Art Collection

(image overleaf)

Like Jane Sutherland, John Llewellyn Jones was a contemporary of the plein-air artists and is known to have painted at artists' camps around Melbourne. Various sources suggest that Llewellyn Jones joined Tom Roberts on painting expeditions and thus was possibly a visitor to the Box Hill artists' camp. This work, with its view of a mountain range in the distance, clearly shows the influence of European Impressionism. Unlike his contemporaries who produced both large and small-scale works, Llewellyn Jones painted small pictures, a factor that may have contributed to his lower profile. After his death in 1927, his work was rarely exhibited. In 1999, a national touring exhibition brought together many of the 300 oil paintings and watercolours attributed to Llewellyn Jones.

7. Blacks Walk Reserve

Middleborough Road, Blackburn
Melway: 47 G11
(panel at pedestrian entrance to Blacks Walk)
Parking: Garie Street

Tom Roberts
Dewy Eve, c.1888

oil on canvas
62.9 x 74.0cm
State Art Collection,
Art Gallery of Western Australia
Purchased with funds from the Great Australian Paintings Appeal with funds presented by TVW Enterprises Ltd as the major donor, 1978

The landscape depicted in this work was possibly painted near the point at which Gardiners Creek crosses Middleborough Road. The view in the painting looks north towards the eastern boundary of Box Hill Cemetery. After spending the weekends painting the bush landscape around Gardiners Creek, Tom Roberts and his artist companions returned to the city on Sunday nights, often making a quick dash up this hill to catch the train at Box Hill Station. In a letter of 1901 to Frederick McCubbin, Arthur Streeton recalled 'the run for trains on Sunday night and Prof [McCubbin] far up ahead, mopping his brow near Jack Ganges' [property]'.



8. Morton Park

Central Road, Blackburn
Melway: 48 A11
(panel sited opposite Wolseley Crescent)
Parking: car park

Frederick McCubbin
A bush burial (detail), 1890

oil on canvas
122.5 x 224.5cm
Collection: Geelong Gallery
Purchased by public subscriptions, 1900

By early 1889, many of the artists associated with the artists' camp had relocated to the Eaglemont-Heidelberg area. After the camp disbanded, Frederick McCubbin continued to paint at Box Hill and Blackburn. This poignant graveside scene, a common theme in narrative painting, was probably painted at Box Hill, although the location was for many years believed to be McCubbin's backyard in Wolseley Crescent, near Blackburn Lake. The models for the painting were McCubbin's wife, Annie; the artist Louis Abrahams as the younger bearded man; and, according to varying accounts in the art historical literature, either John Dunne (an acquaintance of Tom Roberts) or David Houston (on whose property the artists' camp had been located) as the grey-bearded man.



9. Blackburn Lake

Central Road, Blackburn
Melway: 48 B11
(panel sited at entrance to Hakea Circuit)
Parking: car park

Frederick McCubbin
Bush Idyll

signed and dated 'F. McCubbin 1893' (lower right)
oil on canvas
47 x 87in. (119.5 x 221.5cm.)
Private collection.
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(image overleaf)

The body of water in the background suggests that this romantic image may have been painted in the vicinity of Blackburn Lake. The young girl in the painting has been identified as Mary Jane Lobb, who was born in Castlemaine in 1881. The identity of the boy is a mystery. This painting captures the mystical quality of the Australian bush and is unique among Frederick McCubbin's works. The young couple are relaxed and, unlike the figures in some of McCubbin's other narrative paintings, are not depicted in a landscape that is in any way threatening.

10. Blackburn Lake

Central Road, Blackburn
Melway: 48 B11
(panel sited at entrance to car park)
Parking: Car park

Theo Brooke Hansen
Lake near Blackburn, 1890

oil on canvas
127.0 x 76.0cm
Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT), Darwin

Theo Brooke Hansen studied at the National Gallery Art School under Frederick McCubbin and won numerous prizes. This painting shows the refreshment rooms that were built in 1889 on the edge of Blackburn Lake, in the vicinity of what is now Duck Point, to cater for the large groups of picnickers who frequented the lake at that time. Describing this work, a contemporary critic said:

The landscape is soft in colouring, the haziness of the sky and trees in the background being well [depicted], while there is a poetical feeling in the luminous water, almost yellow under the influence of the last rays of sunlight.

