

# panorama



Official Newsletter of Brighton Art Society Inc.

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

**Dear BAS members,**

Apart from the five day lockdown in February which saw the suspension of some of our classes, activities at the studio are now returning to a normal rhythm. It's a pleasure to be able to get back to the painting, drawing and social engagement that this offers us and which was much missed during last year's closure.

We do have a more restricted space in the studio now with the new internal office and this is particularly relevant for the classes that have a full enrolment of students. With as many as twelve participants in some sessions and meeting the social distancing requirements, it is more important than ever, that the studio is kept as tidy and uncluttered as possible.

With this in mind, we ask that you return your easels and tables to their correct locations at the end of your session. The easels *must* be placed in a tidy way that maintains access to the easel room for others. Sometimes there is such a jumble, that it is difficult for people in the next group to get to them.

The small white tables are designed to be stacked, so it is good to keep them together in a few stacks, rather than scattered about with one here and one there.

The studio belongs to us all and we *all* have a responsibility to maintain its tidiness. With a little extra effort, we can keep the space more usable and pleasant for everyone. Thanks for your help.

**LYNTON DAEHLI**

[brightonartsociety.com.au](http://brightonartsociety.com.au)

# ARTHUR STREETON - REPRESENTATION AND THE LOVE OF PAINT

**T**he Art Gallery of New South Wales, recently staged a comprehensive major exhibition of the work of the Arthur Streeton. Streeton was a member of the so-called Heidelberg School of Australian Impressionist painters, who along with his compatriots: Tom Roberts and Fredrick McCubbin, worked from the later C19th into the first half of the C20th.

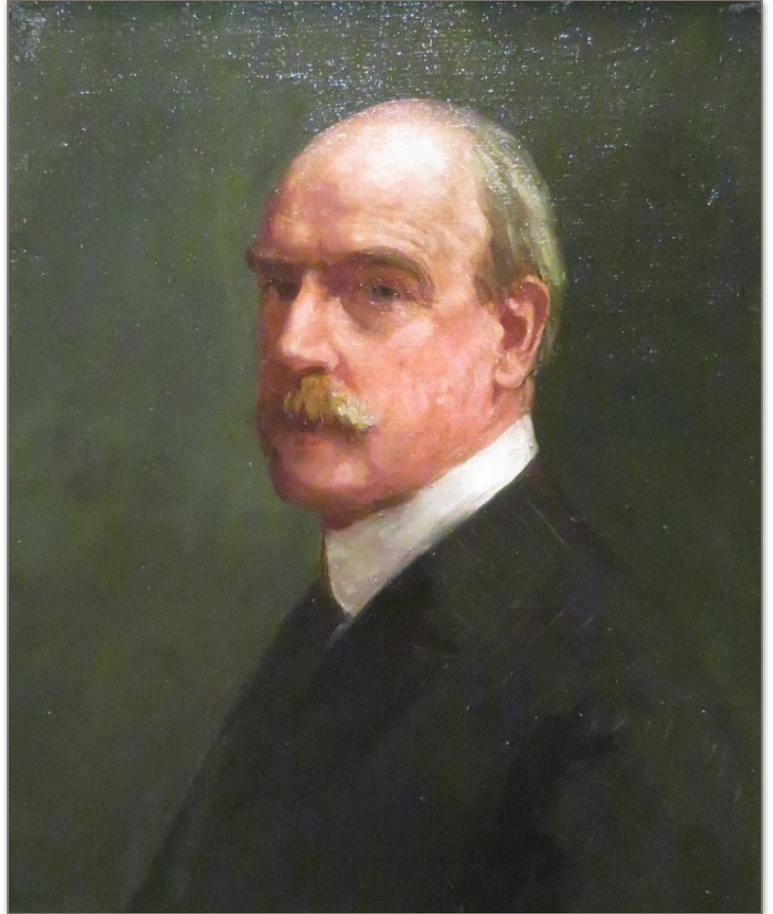
The name “Heidelberg School” was given to the group, as a result of work produced in and around what is now the Melbourne suburb of Heidelberg. In the late C19th of course, it was much more rural in character. Initially they travelled by horse drawn coach, on day trips from Melbourne. Later, one of the group’s members, David Davies, inherited an old farm dwelling at Eaglemont, where the artists were able to stay for extended stretches in the late 1880s, to sketch and paint the landscapes of the district.

In keeping with their French contemporaries, this was the time where the practice of painting “en plein aire” was to become firmly established and legitimised as a working method for finished pictures. Much landscape painting prior to this, was studio produced work, albeit with preparatory sketching done on location.

The value of seeing actual paintings, was again reinforced by this exhibition. Even being able to see a work at its true size influences our experience of it. Reproductions may list the dimensions and we can as a result imagine the size or even physically measure it out. However, when we see the painting itself, the relationship between its scale and what it depicts is much more assertively understood and we can gain a closeness to what the painter was thinking and experiencing, that would otherwise not be available to us.

This consideration though is overshadowed by what we can discern about the picture surface and the process of applying and building up the paint to achieve the final effect, that we are able to observe when standing before an actual painting. This will elude us in even the finest of reproductions.

Streeton’s work stands firmly within the Representational idiom of painting. That is to say, at the top of his priorities is the capturing of a recognisable likeness of his subject. Most often, a chosen tract of landscape. It is however, the relationship between the subject matter with which he commences and the marks he puts down on the surface of the canvas to bring this subject to us, that I want to focus on here. At its best, the relationship is an almost magical one. Artist as alchemist perhaps. With the opportunity to closely examine the picture’s surface that we are given when standing before the actual picture, it can be full of surprises.







GOLDEN SUMMER - EAGLEMONT 1889

“Golden Summer Eaglemont” from 1889, now housed in the NGA Canberra, is a well known and loved painting, produced when Streeton was twenty-two years old and painting regularly in the Heidelberg district. At 81x152cm, it is amongst his larger works, compositionally strong and skilled in execution.

The Sydney exhibition however, coupled it with the more modest “Impression for Golden Summer”, which is less often seen. At 28x58cm and painted the previous year, this was obviously an initial plein air sketch from which the larger painting was developed. It is an early example of what an assured understanding Streeton had of his subject matter, that he can with the most cursory of brushstrokes, lure the observer into understanding what is being depicted.



IMPRESSION for GOLDEN SUMMER 1888



The detail from the painting’s lower right-hand corner, allows us to see what we had easily discerned from a distance, as a wandering flock of sheep and shepherd. At close quarters however, we can see what a rough set of brushstrokes he achieves this appearance with.





VILLERS-BRETTONEUX 1918

**D**uring WW1, Streeton was engaged as an official war artist and a section of the exhibition was focused on work from that engagement. Villers-Brettoneux 1918, brings us a sweep of soft green Flanders fields, with the orange clay beneath exposed by a scarring excavation of a battle trench running across the foreground. An even fringe of leafless trees, crowns the distant bluish hill spanning the upper canvas. Various smoke plumes rise in the landscape, suggesting the aftermath of the recent explosions of battle. The legs of a dead soldier, are seen collapsed across the trench edge toward the picture's right and some stretcher bearers can be seen performing their melancholy duty in the middle distance. Conflict here has not long ceased.

The control displayed by the artist in capturing spatial recession is assured. From the exposed earth mounds and multi-coloured pasture grasses in the near foreground, through the middle distance to the feint buildings and line of trees on the distant hill's ridge, all silhouetted against a heavy grey sky.

Streeton is at complete ease with the representational function of this painting. It is however, what is offered to us, by being able to move in to the distance from which he would have been laying down his paint strokes, that proves a revelation.

This is no tedious and laboured "illustration" of the subject, such as we are too often forced to endure for example, in the painstaking reproduction of photographs featured in some well known portrait prizes of recent years. No party tricks here. Streeton's use of paint is joyous. He loves the material and the language of representation he employs, is firmly his own. The brush-marks are simply beautiful for us to gaze on.

He is able to capture his subject matter with complete assurance, but on close examination, the means by which he does this are often counterintuitive. How does he know that these vigorous and sometimes seemingly random dashes of paint, will produce a totally convincing rendition of the complex space of a grand landscape?

My contention is that it starts with a deep affection for the subject and a sharp and skilled eye, which enables him to see its essence with discernment and a rich clarity. He then brings to this an individual language of mark-making and a joy in his materials. From these, an assured and magical balance between the painter's craft and the capturing of the subject is achieved.





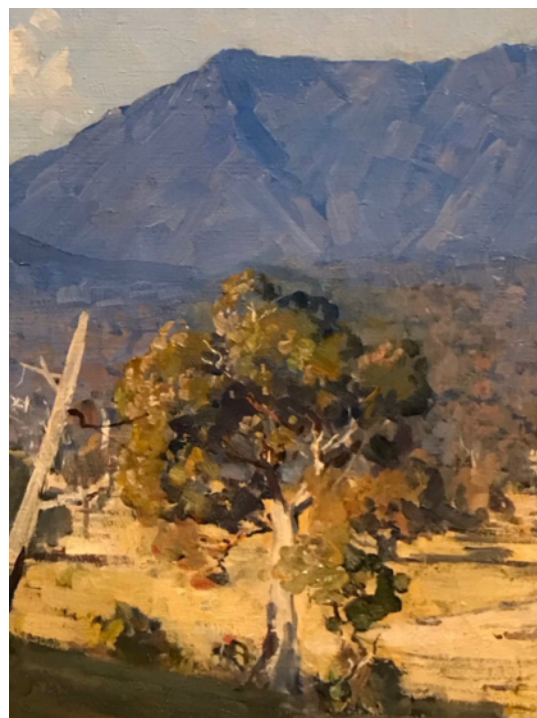


“Land of the Golden Fleece” was painted in 1926, when Streeton had returned permanently to Australia after a long period of living and working in London. This is in fact one of three large scale versions of the scene and measures 92x146cm.

Throughout his career, and at a time when travelling long distances in Australia was not always easy, Streeton made the effort to explore more distant locations of the country in search of fresh subjects. From remote Queensland, to the Alpine regions of north-east Victoria and in this instance, the Grampian ranges of western Victoria. Because of his early and ongoing professional success, he acquired a number of wealthy patrons with rural properties where he was able to take extended stays and produce suites of works. It was at one such location that he painted this picture.

His use of a progressive cooling of colour to achieve sweeping recession in the picture is clear here. The picture was painted in the southern Grampians near the town of Dunkeld and for those of us who know the area, the characteristic jagged escarpments of this east facing aspect of the range, are quickly recognisable.

Standing back, they are detailed and totally convincing. On moving in close however, we are left to gasp at how economically he achieves this illusion. Using his preferred broad chisel shaped brushes, he swiftly lays down the paint. Standing back, we perceive a considerable variety of tone, but close up, this seems less so. Each stroke evidences a brush loaded with a mixture of tones, but the main contrast is with the blocks of darker blue thrust in along the upper edge of the main escarpment and at its right hand end. This is in fact the primary tonal contrast, but the effect is rich and triumphantly convincing. The character of the distinctive range is confidently captured.



I will finish with a closer look at the the lower right hand corner of this painting. We first recognise a flock of sheep emerging from the shadows on the lower left. Here the sheep are individualised and rendered in more detail. By the time our eye has travelled to the clustering at the right, detail is jettisoned. It is observable from the actual painting, that a generous passage of umber has been placed on the canvas prior to building up the lighter marks which identify individual members of the tightly grouped flock. Almost without exception however, the sheep are captured with the most blunt and simplified of marks. Once again, the illusion is convincing and once again, we see the rich and assured understanding of his subject matter Streeton displays, enabling him to deliver his representation to us so persuasively.

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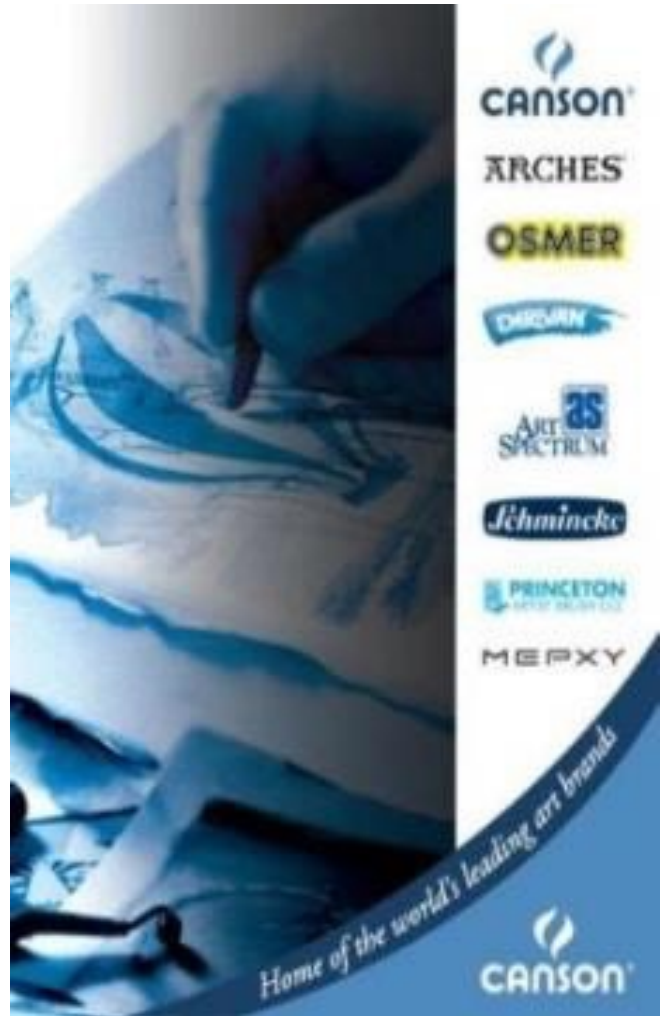
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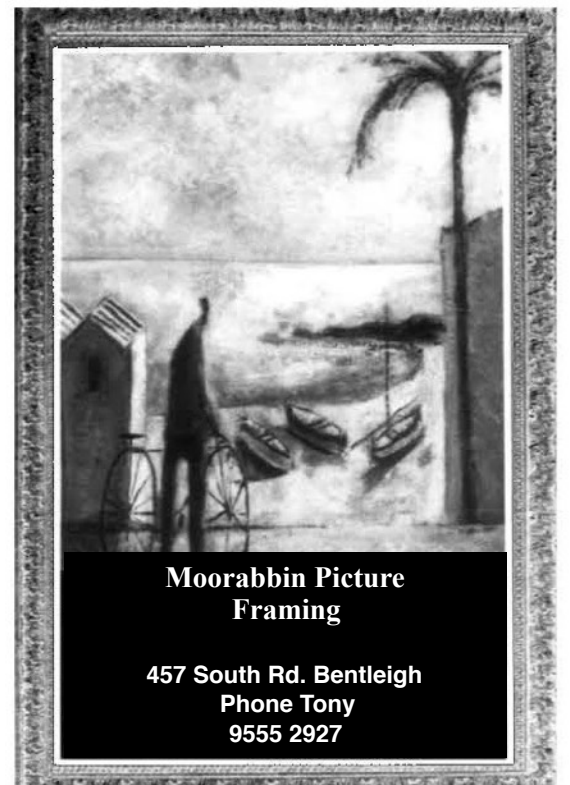
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BAS OFFICE 9553 8506

## Dates to remember:

TERM ONE - Friday January 29th - Thursday April 1st

TERM TWO - Monday April 26th - Friday June 25th

SATURDAY MARCH 6th - Saturday Portrait Group resumes. 2-4pm

[brightonartsociety@icloud.co](mailto:brightonartsociety@icloud.co)