

The museum of choice is the National Gallery of Victoria from the exhibition, "She-Oak and Sunlight: Australian Impressionism" in Melbourne, Australia. The chosen art is "The Artist's Camp" by Tom Roberts painted in 1886.

The display of the piece "The Artist's Camp" by Tom Roberts showcased how the friendship and collaboration of the artists paved the way to the birth of the legacy of the Australian impressionism movement.

At first glance, the viewer observes some key elements of the work, such as the two men, the tent, and the wilderness. The men appear to be enjoying their time camping and the viewer notices the subtle smoke from a fire and one of the men holding something in their hand. This creates curiosity in the viewer's mind as they continue *slow looking*. It can be interpreted that the two men are cooperating to cook something, giving an amiable aura to the atmosphere surrounding the figures. The thick golden frame enhances the yellow tinge of the setting in the painting, further exuding a warmth by giving an impression of sunlight on the yellow grass. The fascinating rural beauty is shown both by the depiction of the wilderness itself and the simplistic camp lifestyle of the two men in the painting. The bright yellows and greens of the grass and trees contrast the dark clothing of the figures and the bland demure of the tent. The perspective of the work is intriguing as well as the viewer observes as if they are at a distance watching over the scene peacefully without disturbing it. Some questions that

pop to the mind instantly are, “Who are these two men and why exactly are they here? What is their relationship? Where is this place that they are at?” To understand how the viewer might arrive at the answers to these questions after initially discerning the work, a little backtracking has to be done, all the way to the point when the viewer first entered the gallery.

When the viewer steps into the gallery virtually, they are welcomed by the sounds of nature such as cicadas buzzing and the birds chirping amidst flowing streams.

Combined with the golden light from above, this immerses the viewer in the feeling of experiencing a sunny refreshing day in Australia. This helps the viewer be in the proper mindset while going through the long corridor with art depicting nature on both sides of the wall as if they are moving through a forest. Among the many audio blurbs and texts beside the works, a few names stick out, like “Tom Roberts” and “Frederick McCubbin” along with a common phrase, “Australian impressionism”. This thought process is thanks to the delicate planning of the curator, who designed the collection to showcase the legacy and history of Australian painters and their relevance to modern Australia.

Not long after, the viewer learns of the group of artists, Tom Roberts, Frederick McCubbin, Jane Sutherland, and Louis Abrahams, and their contributions to the art of Australia in addition to the history of their relationship with each other. A vivid image is conjured in the viewer’s mind about how the group grew and matured together as friends and rivals, cultivating and encouraging each other’s passion for art before they

start in the next long corridor. This time, the artists' names are recognizable to the viewer and their personalities craft themselves through their individual works. The viewer notices similarities in their works, such as the constant depiction of nature and rural Australia, close and zoomed-in depictions of scenery instead of the usual overall picture of a landscape, however, each work exudes a different color and thought process, distinguishing itself. The viewer halts in front of the work, "A Moorish Doorway" by Tom Roberts just as the audio commentary quotes Frederick McCubbin remarking how Tom's art style has "changed and become brighter" after touring Spain. Astonishment follows, as realization sets into just how close the artists were with each other to be able to notice such subtle differences. It is very easy for the viewer to look around the painting-filled corridor and compare each artist's works before settling on Tom Roberts' "The Artist's Camp".

Upon setting eyes on the artist's name, it is immediately apparent to the viewer that the figures depicted are Roberts' friends. The text informs that the friends are Frederick McCubbin and Louise Abrahams, names now instantly distinguishable to the viewer, who are sharing a meal of meat chops over the campfire, the moment forever captured by Tom Roberts. The viewer looks at the other works depicting nature, and imagines the artist among his friends in the tent, painting away in concentration. The viewer wonders whether the friends reviewed and critiqued each other's works or whether they held competitions among themselves to see who could capture the most perfect

image of the wilderness now burned in the viewer's mind. The accompanying audio reveals that the place depicted was called Box Hill, which was an accessible place from the city although it was pristine and untouched. The viewer imagines the group of friends riding the train to Box Hill with the sole mission of immortalizing the beauty of nature in the wilderness of Australia for generations to come while making precious memories and experiences.

The very fact that the tradition of camping in the wilderness to paint was continued for generations of following artists is evidence of its impact on the advance of Australia's art world. Many more camps were made and many artists found their innermost creativity while participating in them, often resulting in priceless works of art. The whole phenomenon emphasizes the importance of unity and collaboration in any profession. Typically, art is thought of as something that is done solo but this demonstrates how effective peer influence can be for inspiration and motivation. This tradition of the Artist's camp brought together Australia's best talents and undoubtedly moved forward Australian impressionism.

The viewer ponders what Tom Roberts was feeling when he captured this seemingly ordinary moment of his friends taking a break from working on art and enjoying a meal. Was it fondness? Nostalgia? Did he predict that this image would be mirrored by many

artists after? Finally, the viewer moves on to the next work, their heart warm and peaceful, like the figures in the painting.

Appendix

Display



Original

