

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT
RETROSPECTIVE
heroes & icons



■ national gallery of **australia**

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT

RETROSPECTIVE

heroes & icons

Self-portrait (unfinished) c. 1930

oil on canvas 91.5 x 75.0 cm

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, purchased 1930

George Washington Thomas Lambert was born in 1873 in St Petersburg, Russia. His father was an American engineer employed in railway construction and his mother was an English pianist. After his father's death, just before George's birth, the family moved to Germany and then back to England. Lambert spent his school years in England where his talent for drawing was first recognised.

In 1886, the family settled in Sydney, where Lambert demonstrated an early talent for drawing in his illustrations for the Australian magazine, the Bulletin, during the 1890s. He gained a reputation with his painting *Across the black soil plains* 1899 which depicts heroic masculine labour in harmony with the brute strength of the struggling horses. This painting was bought by the Art Gallery of New South Wales and was later awarded the Wynne Prize for landscape. In 1900 Lambert was awarded the first New South Wales Society of Artist's Travelling Scholarship.

That same year, he and his new wife Amy moved to Europe where they remained for twenty-one years. Their two sons, Maurice and Constant, were born during this period. In Britain Lambert was recognised as having considerable ability as a draughtsman and a portrait painter, and he remains the only Australian painter to be elected an Associate of the Royal Academy.

Lambert constantly formed and reformed his art. He studied the work of Titian, Velasquez, Puvis de Chavannes, Manet and Whistler, reworking their approaches in terms of contemporary life. He viewed the work of his contemporaries Charles Furse, John Singer Sargent, Augustus John and William Orpen, adopting and adapting their ideas to make his own statements.

Lambert often adopted a detached viewpoint, looking at individual subjects as arrangements of lines, forms and colours. Despite this formalist approach, he imbued these portraits with his understanding of, and affection for, the people he depicted.

From 1917 to 1920, Lambert served as the official war artist attached to the Australian Imperial Force. He made many sketches and paintings in Palestine and Gallipoli which were important sources for his later large war paintings. Lambert conveyed more than a particular historical event – he summed up 'sacrifice and achievement' and the universal experience of human beings striving to overcome obstacles.

In 1921, Lambert returned to Australia, leaving his family in England. Although he continued to paint portraits, landscapes and still-lives, sculpture gradually dominated his life and he created three monumental bronze sculptures late in life.

In 1930 Lambert died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of fifty-six. He had a weak heart and had suffered from debilitating malaria and general exhaustion. Lambert was a complex man, flamboyant and sensitive, theatrical and serious. He was an artist whose works reveal this dichotomy. From his extravagant portraits to his evocative war images Lambert created works of great power combined with idiosyncratic drama that place him in a category of his own.

For more information, visit nga.gov.au/Lambert

major partner





George W. Lambert
Amy Lambert 1906

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT

RETROSPECTIVE

heroes & icons

Amy Lambert 1906
conté crayon 28.2 x 22.4 cm
Private collection

In this delicate drawing of his wife, George Lambert displays his mastery of the medium. Lambert, who was one of Australia's finest draughtsmen, saw drawing as an important basis for art. In this drawing of Amy he creates a loving image through soft shading and a gentle line.

George and Amy Lambert had married in 1900, two days before they set sail for London on George's art scholarship. Amy was born in England in 1872, and moved to Australia with her family in the 1890s. By 1906, when this drawing was made, she was thirty-four years old and the mother of two boys, Maurice and Constant.

In this work, Lambert drew her very close up, showing only her head and neck. The resulting feeling of intimacy is combined with a lack of formality, emphasised by the wayward strands of hair around her face. The viewpoint is about level with her chin, and as her head is half turned and tilted to one side, she looks at the viewer slightly downwards and out of the corners of her eyes. Lambert has captured an intimate moment of contemplation with this sketch – her gaze is attentive but detached, and her full lips, parted slightly, are sensuously drawn.

From Julian Ashton, his teacher in Sydney from 1896, Lambert learnt the importance of drawing. He said: 'My one idea ... was to be a good painter. To become a good painter, I had to become a good draughtsman, so I became a good draughtsman ...'; and again, 'Painting cannot exist without drawing.'¹

Lambert's approach was to draw a firm outline first and rely on lines rather than shading to define form.

Discussion

Compare this drawing of Amy with the image of her in the paintings Portrait group (the mother) 1907 and Holiday in Essex 1910.

Research

Research the life of Amy Lambert.

Activity

Focus on the eyes of this portrait. Draw your own eyes by looking in a mirror.

Notes

¹ George Lambert, cited in Anne Gray, *George Lambert: drawings 1873–1930*, exhibition catalogue, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1993, pp. 15, 20.





George W. Lambert
Portrait group (The mother) 1907

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT

RETROSPECTIVE

heroes & icons

Portrait group (The mother) 1907
oil on canvas 204.6 x 162.5 cm
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
Purchased with the assistance of S.H. Ervin in 1965

This portrait group by Lambert is about the ideal of motherhood. The painting displays Lambert's phenomenal ability to manipulate paint to create luscious textures and subtleties of light and shade. Between about 1905 and 1910 Lambert painted a number of family group portraits; for this series of works Lambert used his friends and family as models.

Lambert's wife Amy was the model for the mother in this painting. Her central position makes her the focus of the composition. She is depicted in a loose dress popular in feminist and artistic circles. The child on the left is modelled on Lambert and Amy's son Maurice, who has his father's coat slung around his shoulders. Maurice's pose and expression is reminiscent of figures in paintings by earlier Western European artists, such as Velázquez.

The toddler at the mother's feet is the Lamberts' younger son, Constant. The woman on the right of the group represents 'the independent woman'. For this figure Lambert used as his model the Australian artist Thea Proctor. She is depicted in a fashionable high-necked dress, black coat and plumed hat.

A London critic wrote that Lambert's 'chief aim seems to have been the realisation of a decorative effect by rhythmic arrangement of line and balance of masses.'¹ The fresh growth shooting from the tree stump may symbolise the fertility of the mother, but it also frames the boy within its arch. The languid curves of the mother's body contrast with the angular, upright pose of Thea Proctor, whose independence and character is conveyed by her dark, tailored clothing, the defiant tilt of her head and the placement of her hand on her hip.

Note the way Lambert, using only limited colours, plays with the textures of feathers, silk and other materials. In this painting Lambert displays the brilliant painting skills for which he was renowned. He has created sumptuous, voluminous textiles, which link the focus of the work – the mother and child.

Discussion

How does Lambert direct your eyes to the toddler in the foreground? Why do you think this child is emphasised?

Research

Find out some more biographical information about the people in this painting: Thea Proctor, Maurice Lambert and Constant Lambert.

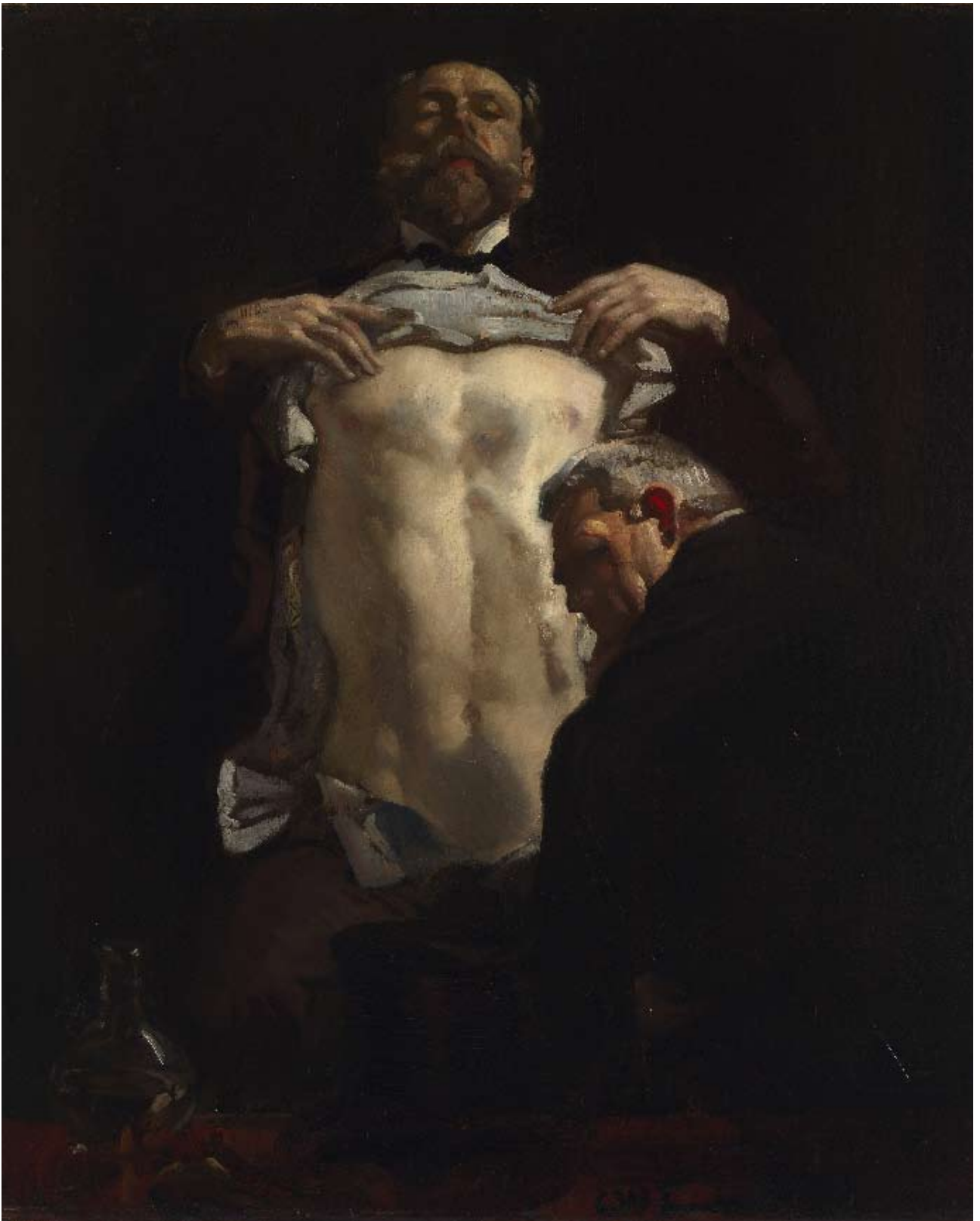
Activity

Use a dark colour of paint – for example, brown or blue – and by only adding white to it, paint a picture of cloth tied into a loose knot.

Notes

¹ P.G. Konody, Supplement to the Observer, 5 May 1907.





George W. Lambert
Chesham Street 1910

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT

RETROSPECTIVE

heroes & icons

Chesham Street 1910
oil on canvas 62.0 x 51.5 cm
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased in 1993

A bearded man, the head of which is probably the artist himself, unbuttons his pants and lifts his shirt to bare his top half to a doctor in Chesham Street, London. From a central crucifixion-like pose he looks down at the viewer through half-closed eyes, the pale skin of his naked body looming dramatically out of the dark background. Almost all we can see of the doctor is his turned head as he listens intently through a stethoscope; his top hat is in the foreground, along with a water flask and other objects.

This painting is an outstanding example of chiaroscuro, an Italian word meaning a strong contrast of light and shade. Lambert had an exceptional ability to capture all sorts of surfaces and materials in paint. In this painting, with very limited colours, he not only depicted the subtle textures and dramatic folds of the clothing, but created a silky skin surface that, through careful modelling, becomes a solid, breathing form. There is one dash of colour where light passes through the doctor's ear and turns it a vivid pink. With the light source at the upper right the artist cleverly shows the doctor's face silhouetted against the lit torso.

Lambert was a painter of great talent, who had the ability to introduce, on occasion, a sense of the theatrical into his work through a mannered gesture or a haughty expression or pose. There is something dramatic in the way the patient in this painting bares his whole upper half, sticks his chest out and looks down at us as if to say, 'If I have to do this, I might as well do it with style.'

Discussion

Study the skilful painting of the torso. How has the artist used light and shade to create this body? Do you think the body is copied from another, perhaps younger, model or do you think it belongs to the face of the man in the painting?

Research

Can you find other examples from art history where artists have depicted the human body during medical procedures?

Activity

Draw a series of geometric shapes and make them appear three-dimensional by the use of shading.





George W. Lambert
The convex mirror c. 1916

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT

RETROSPECTIVE

heroes & icons

The convex mirror c. 1916
oil with pencil on wood panel 50.0 x 50.0 cm
Private collection

It takes great skill to paint the distorted image seen in a convex, rounded mirror. A number of famous artists of the past have displayed their prowess by painting pictures of convex mirrors. These include artists such as Jan van Eyck, Quentin Massys, Parmigianino, Pieter Claesz and William Orpen. In choosing to paint this scene reflected in a convex mirror George Lambert makes deliberate reference to these great European artists. However, in this work Lambert not only displays his ability to accurately depict the distorted reflection, but plays with the optics to create a more complex personal narrative.

The convex surface of the round mirror reflects a room which is made to seem extremely long by the tiny size of the people and the immense length of the spiralling, exposed ceiling beams and their supports. Even the artist, who is closest to the mirror, seems far away.

Lambert and his wife Amy – she is standing by the table in a blue dress – were staying at Belwethers in Surrey, the country cottage of Sir Edmund Davis. He stands by the window, and his wife Mary sits at the table. The Lamberts were staying there to be near their younger son Constant, who was seriously ill with osteomyelitis at his school in Horsham, West Sussex. Two of the women in the painting wear the dark clothes of mourning, as their mother had recently died. Lambert captures a disturbed and distorted world at a time when grim news was coming in daily from the battlefields of the First World War.

Discussion

How does Lambert create a strange sense of space in this composition?

Research

Find out more about the artists mentioned in the text and find their paintings of convex mirrors.

Activity

Make a drawing of your face from the reflections in the convex and concave sides of a shiny spoon.

major partner





George W. Lambert

Balcony of the troopers' ward, 14th Australian General Hospital, Abbassia 1919

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT

RETROSPECTIVE

heroes & icons

Balcony of the troopers' ward, 14th Australian General Hospital, Abbassia 1919
oil with pencil on wood panel 32.0 x 45.6 cm
Australian War Memorial, Canberra
Acquired under the official war art scheme in 1921

Lambert described this work as a 'study of afternoon sunlight effect.'¹ It is also a gentle portrayal of a romance. However it is seen, it is Lambert's skilful rendering of sunlight – the interplay of stripes of light and shadow – that dominates this image.

The slanting sunlight coming in from the left casts shadows on the balcony's pillars, forms sloping lines of shadows on the floor and continues as dappled light across the rug. Solid forms become fractured and ethereal.

During 1919, while an official war artist in the Middle East, Lambert experienced a recurrence of malaria and suffered from a heart attack. While convalescing in a hospital near Cairo, he passed the time drawing and painting. In this painting an injured soldier wears the blue trousers, white shirt and red tie issued to convalescents at the hospital. The slouch hat that he proudly holds identifies him as an Australian, and his bowlegs are typical of a member of the Light Horse. The nurse is more demure, with only a glimpse of her profile to be seen as she attends conscientiously to her duties. Lambert renders them with a hint of romance tingling between them, warmed by the golden rays of the sun.

Discussion

What time of day do you think Lambert is capturing? Discuss the use of red in this painting.

Research

Research the role of nurses in the First World War.

Activity

Paint an interior with one-point perspective.

Notes

¹ George Lambert, cited in Anne Gray, *George W. Lambert: heroes and icons*, Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2007, p. 148.





George W. Lambert
A sergeant of the Light Horse 1920

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT

RETROSPECTIVE

heroes & icons

A sergeant of the Light Horse 1920
oil on canvas 77.0 x 62.0 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased through the Felton Bequest in 1921

This work encapsulates, through the portrayal of a single Light Horseman, the characteristics of an entire fighting force. Lambert's sergeant represents a certain type of rugged individual who has become an iconic image of the Australian soldier.

The model for this work was Sergeant T.H. Ivers, shown wearing a flannel shirt with the sleeves rolled up. He holds his plumed hat over his heart as though in respect for his dead mates, about whom his lowered eyes suggest he may be thinking. Behind him are rounded, scrubby hills and a scattering of fluffy, white clouds in a blue sky.

This is a composition of diagonals. The tilt of the distant hills complements the angles of shoulders, elbow and sergeant's stripes. However, the direction of the soldier's gaze encourages the viewer's gaze to travel in a circular motion down the shoulder, across the intricately painted arms and hands to the hat and back to the face.

George Lambert was a fine horseman and accepted an offer to be official artist to the Australian Light Horse. His wife Amy recalled, 'He approached his new experiences with a youthful ardour.'¹ Lambert was a gregarious character who used his good sense of humour to get along with all sorts of people throughout his military duties. His supreme confidence in painting and drawing, his understanding of landscape and his ability to paint horses and people with flair made him well suited to the role of war artist. But, most importantly, it was Lambert's ability to capture the emotional essence of a subject which made him arguably Australia's finest war artist.

Discussion

How can you tell the sergeant is sitting down? Discuss the relationship between the figure and the background.

Research

Who were the Australian Light Horsemen?

Activity

Write a story describing what happened to a man such as this when he returned from the war.

Notes

¹ Amy Lambert, *Thirty years of an artist's life: the career of G.W. Lambert, A.R.A.*, Sydney: Society of Artists, 1938, p.77.





George W. Lambert

Weighing the fleece 1921

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT

RETROSPECTIVE

heroes & icons

Weighing the fleece 1921
oil on canvas 71.7 x 91.8 cm
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased in 1966

With a remarkable ability to capture detail and realism, Lambert has, through this depiction of working life in a woolshed, encapsulated the soul of an Australian ideal. The woolshed had become part of the national mythology and wool was important to the Australian economy at this time. Earlier artists, such as Tom Roberts, had painted images of woolsheds during less successful times – when shearers were striking. These images became iconic. With full knowledge of the great Australian artists who tackled the subject before him Lambert set out, with *Weighing the fleece*, to paint an iconic image.

Mr and Mrs Leigh Sadleir Falkiner are shown in their woolshed at Wanganella Estate in the Riverina district of New South Wales. They are watching John Carse, Mr Falkiner's nephew, weighing a record-priced fleece from one of their two champion rams. The pose of the wealthy grazier, head held high, hand in pocket, conveys his superiority over the other workers in the shed, who are shown in shirt sleeves, hard at work with bowed backs.

Lambert emphasises the importance of the fleece, which is held up like a religious icon in the darkened woolshed. The sides of the fleece sloping down from the hook establish a bright, inverted V-shape at the centre of the work. Note how the groupings of figures connect and overlap, leading the eye to this focal point.

On the completion of the painting Mr Falkiner, who commissioned the work, would not buy it, because he did not like the way the artist had portrayed him and his wife. Lambert, however, had no trouble selling the work for 600 pounds – a huge sum of money for a painting in those days.

Discussion

From what material is the woolshed made? Do you think this a common building method for woolsheds? What does it tell us about this rural property? Why do you think Lambert was able to sell the painting for so much?

Research

Research the importance of the wool industry to the Australian economy during the early twentieth century. Find out how much 600 Australian pounds in the 1920s would equate to today.

Activity

Create a present-day work environment using cut-out figures from magazines.





George W. Lambert
The white glove 1921

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT

RETROSPECTIVE

heroes & icons

The white glove 1921
oil on canvas 106.0 x 78.0 cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased in 1922

A beautiful and vivacious young Melbourne woman, Miss Gladys Neville Collins, has dressed in her best finery and is hamming it up for the artist. Lambert's title suggests that once again it is not the individual, but rather a type of person that is his focus in this work. The white-gloved hand is an important element at the centre of the canvas. Lambert had a brilliant capacity to capture expression not just in the face of the person he portrayed, but also through their posture and, perhaps best of all, through their hands. He often depicted the hands of his sitters with gestures that added to the understanding of their character and animated his compositions.

A viewer's eyes may first look at the woman's face, then drop vertically to the gloved hand, where they are switched horizontally to the ungloved hand, and then travel down parallel to the picture's left edge. These dramatically angular movements supply an internal dynamism to the composition.

Miss Collins holds her head back at a haughty angle, but tilts it to one side for humorous effect, her laughing eyes and smiling mouth let the viewer in on the joke. The formal black dress sets off an amazing range of textures that extend through the see-through sleeves of black lace, the velvet hat's waving fringe of feathers, the collar of fluffy white fur, the gloves' white leather, the stole's shiny rustling silk and golden tassel, and the ring's hard jewel. The painting displays Lambert's brilliance at expressing the richness of different textures through paint.

Discussion

Compare this portrait with that of Mrs Annie Murdoch. Look for similarities and differences.

Research

Research the fashions of the early 1920s. Who were the famous Australian designers of this period?

Activity

Write a short dialogue between Miss Gladys Neville Collins and yourself.





George W. Lambert
Self-portrait with gladioli 1922

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT

RETROSPECTIVE

heroes & icons

Self-portrait with gladioli 1922
oil on canvas 128.2 x 102.8 cm
National Portrait Gallery, Canberra
Gift of John Schaeffer AO in 2003

When he painted this self-portrait Lambert was at the peak of his career and the height of his abilities. He became the first Australian painter elected an Associate of the Royal Academy in London and was in command of a formidable array of painting techniques. In this celebrated work he also displayed a well-developed sense of humour. The strange gesture of his outstretched hand, his almost dislocated right wrist and the unusual position of the dramatic gladioli create a uniquely revealing self-portrait.

Maybe Lambert is celebrating, in this painting, his 1922 election to the Royal Academy, unprecedented for an Australian artist. That might explain the scarf around his neck, the bouquet of gladioli for his success, and his posture – as though he is on stage and acknowledging the applause.

But he may also be using this self-portrait, as he does with many of his other works, to create a commentary on a character 'type'. In the previous year he had written to his wife Amy, 'I am a luxury, a hot house rarity ... Scoffed at for preciousness.'¹ And so he painted himself as a dandy type – precious and affected, mocking those who perceived him that way. He was, after all, a gifted artist and a man with a strong sense of humour.

Discussion

What do you think Lambert is saying about himself in this portrait?

Research

Research the establishment and importance of the Royal Academy in London.

Activity

Dress up, strike a pose, look in a mirror and make a self-portrait.

Notes

¹ George Lambert, cited in Anne Gray, *George W. Lambert: heroes and icons*, Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2007, p. 164.





George W. Lambert

The squatter's daughter 1923-24

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT

RETROSPECTIVE

heroes & icons

The squatter's daughter 1923–24

oil on canvas 61.4 x 90.2 cm

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased with the generous assistance of James Fairfax AO,
Philip Bacon AM and the people of Australia in 1991

On many days the hills, trees, grass, sky and light around Michelago, south of Canberra, look exactly like this. Lambert constructed this landscape from many discreet dabs of coloured paint that stand out quite clearly on the surface of the canvas, their precision and control reinforcing the sense of windless calm that pervades the scene.

The strong contrasts of tone and colour create a scintillating clarity of light in this painting. It is also a very sophisticated composition of carefully arranged diagonal lines and deftly balanced forms.

Gwendoline 'Dee' Ryrie, in white shirt and jodhpurs, leads her horse across the family property, Micalago, during Christmas and New Year of 1923–24. Lambert's intention was that the woman look 'like a figure on a Greek vase'¹ – classic, in profile, timeless.

The painting caused a stir, with some admiring the bold modernity of the work, while other critics maintained that it lacked emotion. The painting provided a new vision of the Australian landscape.

Discussion

In common with many of Lambert's paintings, the use of diagonals creates dynamic patterns and an illusion of depth. How does Lambert balance the strong diagonal movement from bottom right to mid-left?

Research

Find out about the pioneering Ryrie family.

Activity

Write a short story or poem which captures the rural peace and tranquillity of this painting.

Notes

¹ George Lambert, cited in Anne Gray, *George W. Lambert: heroes and icons*, Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2007, p. 170.

major partner





George W. Lambert

The charge of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade at the Nek, 7 August 1915 1924

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT

RETROSPECTIVE

heroes & icons

The charge of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade at the Nek, 7 August 1915 1924
oil on canvas 152.5 x 305.7 cm
Australian War Memorial, Canberra Commissioned in 1919, acquired in 1925

The Anzac landing on Turkey's Gallipoli peninsula took place on 25 April 1915. The event depicted here took place about four months later. The Australians made a dawn assault to divert the Turks, but the Turks had been warned, allowing them to meet the advancing Australians with a torrent of gunfire. Four out of five Australians taking part in the assault were killed or wounded.

Lambert painted the battle scene with a heroic accuracy. Young Australians dramatically die as the bullets of the Turkish soldiers thump into them. Soldiers are thrust 'into the air like marionettes jerked into eternity,' as the Sydney Guardian put it.¹ Lambert intertwines this detail of war with an almost serene depiction of the landscape.

To create this painting, Lambert worked from sketches and notes he made when he went over the ground at Gallipoli in 1919. He added figures that fitted in with his ideas of what the battle scene must have been like, and of what would help to make a good painting. Lambert was later to tell his wife, Amy, 'From the point of view of the Artist Historian the Nek is a wonderful setting for the tragedy.'²

Lambert believed that war was a ghastly debacle that 'wrecked one's faith in human reasonableness and laughed hideously at love and culture.'³ He makes us conscious of the irony of war taking place in the beautiful setting that he has recorded in this painting, with its fading sky and the purple-misted distant hills. It is this insight that ensures this painting's place as one of Australia's most enduring military scenes.

Discussion

Discuss the difference between a painting and a photograph of a war event.

Research

Find information about recent war artists such as George Gittoes and Peter Churcher.

Activity

How does Lambert create a sense of chaos in this painting? Draw your own battle scene.

Notes

- 1 Sydney Guardian, 26 November 1930, cited in Anne Gray, George W. Lambert: heroes and icons, Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2007, p. 172.
- 2 George Lambert, cited in Gray 2007, p. 172.
- 3 George Lambert, cited in Gray 2007, p. 173.





George W. Lambert
Mrs Annie Murdoch 1927

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT

RETROSPECTIVE

heroes & icons

Mrs Annie Murdoch 1927
oil on canvas 59.6 x 49.5 cm
The Murdoch Collection

Annie Brown was the daughter of a minister of the Free Church of Scotland, and in 1882 she married another such minister, Reverend Patrick John Murdoch. In 1884 they left Aberdeenshire so that he could be the minister at the West Melbourne Presbyterian church in Victoria, Australia. After three years Patrick Murdoch moved to Trinity Church in the eastern Melbourne suburb of Camberwell, staying there until his retirement in 1928. He died in 1940, and Annie in 1945.

Annie Murdoch's importance to later Australian history is that one of her sons was Keith Murdoch (1885–1952), a Melbourne newspaper owner and father of the international media tycoon Rupert Murdoch. Keith Murdoch commissioned this portrait of his mother.

The portrait shows her with kindly and knowing brown eyes, and a smile that suggests genial amusement. The directness of her gaze, the set of her mouth, and perhaps even the aquiline nose, hint at a person who knows and speaks her own mind and is accustomed to getting her own way.

The triangular composition is made more dynamic by the slightly off-centre placement of the line of her nose and beads. Note how Lambert uses different brushstrokes to describe hair, fur, skin and glass beads. He skilfully reveals both the luxurious materials of fur and fabric and the personality of the sitter. This painting won the Archibald Prize for portraiture in 1927.

Discussion

How has Lambert used the types and style of clothing to interpret the sitter? Look at the clothes and expression of Mrs Annie Murdoch. What sort of person do you think she was?

Research

Find information about the Archibald Prize. Where is it held? How often? Which other artists have won the prize?

Activity

Write a short poem from the point of view of the fox-fur collar.

major partner





George W. Lambert
Henry Lawson memorial 1927–30

GEORGE · W · LAMBERT

RETROSPECTIVE

heroes & icons

Henry Lawson memorial 1927–30
bronze 250.0 x 130.0 x 135.0 cm
Botanic Gardens Trust, Sydney
Gift of the Henry Lawson Memorial Fund committee in 1931

Henry Lawson (1867–1922), Australian poet and short story writer, and totally deaf from the age of fourteen, was nationally celebrated for his popular accounts of Australian life, written in a down-to-earth style. His sympathy for the poverty-stricken men and women in the bush and the slums was inspired by the republicanism and political radicalism of his mother.

In selecting Lambert's entry as the winner of the competition for this memorial, the judges wrote: 'The sketch model ... showed the writer reciting his poems to the world, a typical bushman being seated at his feet, a dog on the left helping to give balance to the base where part of an old post and a tucker bag filled a vacant space. The modelling of the loose shirt and trousers of the poet was carried out with great skill, the clothes suggesting not only the form but the character of the man.'¹ The man at Lawson's feet has also been described as a swagman.

There was a close connection between the drawings Lambert made and the finished sculpture. As Lambert said, 'sculpture is essentially drawing or a craft in which drawing is the basic part and continual accomplishment.'² There was a sculptural aspect to Lambert's drawings even before he became a sculptor, Lambert's graphic technique of outlining and modelling created a three-dimensional effect on the page.

People at the time recognised a remarkable likeness to the poet. It was not just the bushy eyebrows and drooping moustache, but that Lambert had captured the gesture Lawson usually made when he was searching for a word, or reciting his verses to his mates.

Discussion

Why did Lambert place the dog and the swagman near the image of Henry Lawson?

Research

Who was Henry Lawson?

Activity

Imagine you are the poet Henry Lawson. Write a ballad about the artist George Lambert.

Notes

- 1 Art in Australia, March 1927, cited in Anne Gray, *George Lambert 1873–1930: catalogue raisonné*, Perth: Bonamy Press, 1996, p. 139.
- 2 George Lambert, cited in Anne Gray, *George Lambert: drawings 1873–1930, exhibition catalogue*, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1993, p. 16.

