



TOM ROBERTS

Shearing the rams
painted at Brocklesby station,
Corowa, New South Wales, and
Melbourne, 1888–90
oil on canvas mounted on board
121.9 x 182.6 cm
National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne, Felton Bequest Fund, 1932

SECONDARY
Education resource

NGA
National Gallery of Australia

For teachers

How to use this secondary student learning resource

This extraordinary exhibition brings together Tom Roberts' most famous paintings loved by all Australians. Paintings such as *Shearing the rams 1888–90* and *A break away! 1891* are among the nation's best-known works of art.

Tom Roberts is a major exhibition of works from the national collection as well as private and public collections from around Australia.

The secondary student learning resource for the *Tom Roberts* exhibition highlights the relevance of Roberts' oeuvre to today's contemporary world. Themes explored include Australian life, landscape, portraiture, Federation and making a nation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, immigration and the influences of other artists. These themes draw parallels to other works in the National Gallery of Australia's collection.

In this resource Tom Roberts' paintings are accompanied by activities and questions that refer to Australian Curriculum learning areas including **Visual Art, Music, History, and Civics and Citizenship. General capabilities and Cross-curriculum** priorities have also been linked to various themes. The work in this exhibition has strong connection to a number of the content descriptions in the **Year 7–8** and **Year 9–10** band of the Australian Curriculum.

When visiting the *Tom Roberts* exhibition it is recommended that you also visit the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander galleries as well as works in the permanent collection. Compare the way other artists have addressed similar themes to Roberts throughout history. Suggestions have been made in this learning resource to guide you to key works in the NGA collection.

CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT

All the themes in the *Tom Roberts* exhibition can be used with visual arts students from Year 7–10 and beyond. Some may be more relevant to specific years given connections to other learning areas such as History and Civics and Citizenship at the same level as outlined under each theme that follows.

The Arts – Visual Arts: Year 7 and 8

- Experiment with visual arts conventions and techniques ([ACAVAM118](#))
- Develop ways to enhance their intentions as artists through exploration of how artists use materials, techniques, technologies and processes ([ACAVAM119](#))
- Develop planning skills for art-making by exploring techniques and processes used by different artists ([ACAVAM120](#))
- Practise techniques and processes to enhance representation of ideas in their art-making ([ACAVAM121](#))
- Present artwork demonstrating consideration of how the artwork is displayed to enhance the artist's intention to an audience ([ACAVAM122](#))
- Analyse how artists use visual conventions in artworks ([ACAVAR123](#))

The Arts – Visual Arts: Year 9 and 10

- Explore and apply ideas inspired by the style of other artists in their own artworks ([ACAVAM125](#))
- Manipulate materials, techniques, technologies and processes to develop and represent their own artistic intentions ([ACAVAM126](#))
- Develop and refine techniques and processes to represent ideas and subject matter ([ACAVAM127](#))
- Plan and design artworks that represent artistic intention ([ACAVAM128](#))
- Present ideas for displaying artworks and evaluate displays of artworks ([ACAVAM129](#))
- Evaluate how representations communicate artistic intentions in artworks they make and view to inform their future art making ([ACAVAR130](#))

- Analyse a range of visual artworks from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their visual art-making, starting with Australian artworks, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and consider international artworks ([ACAVAR131](#))

LANDSCAPE: ARTISTS' CAMPS AND COLLABORATION

Investigating the rise of *en plein air* painting in Australia, the artists' camps of the Australian Impressionists and the influence the artists had on each other and artists that followed. This theme is relevant to **Year 7–10 Visual Arts**.

General capabilities

- Critical and creative thinking
- Information and communication technology
- Personal and social capabilities
- Literacy

PORTRAITURE

Covering portraiture and self portraiture this theme examines Roberts' portrayal of various people, from politicians who are now historical figures to Aboriginal people he met, and offers opportunities to explore portraiture more broadly by looking at the work of other artists, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. Because of its relevance to **Year 9 History** it is also recommended for Visual Arts students at this level, but could also be used with **Year 7 and 8 Visual Arts**.

History – Making of the Modern World: Year 9

Historical knowledge and understanding

- The nature and extent of the movement of peoples in the period (slaves, convicts and settlers) ([ACOKFH015](#))

Historical skills

- Identify and select different kinds of questions about the past to inform historical inquiry ([ACHHS166](#))
- Evaluate and enhance these questions ([ACHHS167](#))
- Identify and locate relevant sources, using ICT and other methods ([ACHHS168](#))

Cross-curriculum priorities

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and stories

General capabilities

- Critical and creative thinking
- Information and communication technology
- Personal and social capabilities
- Literacy
- Ethical understanding
- Intercultural understanding

9 BY 5 IMPRESSION EXHIBITION

This theme is particularly relevant to looking at how artists can work together as a group and how works of art are displayed. It also is useful in understanding key moments, ideas and techniques of Australian Impressionism. It is relevant to **Year 7–10 Visual Arts** and beyond.

Cross-curriculum priorities

- Sustainability

General capabilities

- Critical and creative thinking
- Personal and social capabilities
- Literacy

COMING SOUTH: IMMIGRATION AND TRAVEL

Using Tom Roberts' painting *Coming south* as a starting point this theme investigates patterns of migration to Australia and travel by Australians to Europe and back at the time, and has relevance to **Year 9 and 10 History** and **Year 9 Civics and Citizenship**. Investigating Roberts' compositional devices and choice of subject matter this theme is appropriate for **Year 9 and 10 Visual Arts**, but is also relevant to **Year 7 and 8**.

History: Year 9

Historical knowledge and understanding

- The nature and extent of the movement of peoples in the period (slaves, convicts and settlers) ([ACOKFH015](#))

Historical skills

- Identify and select different kinds of questions about the past to inform historical inquiry ([ACHHS166](#))
- Evaluate and enhance these questions ([ACHHS167](#))
- Identify and locate relevant sources, using ICT and other methods ([ACHHS168](#))

History: Year 10

Globalising the world

- The waves of post-Second World War migration to Australia, including the influence of significant world events ([ACDSEH144](#))
- The impact of changing government policies on Australia's migration patterns, including abolition of the White Australia Policy, 'Populate or Perish' ([ACDSEH145](#))
- The impact of at least ONE world event or development and its significance for Australia, such as the Vietnam War and Indochinese refugees ([ACDSEH146](#))
- The contribution of migration to Australia's changing identity as a nation and to its international relationships ([ACDSEH147](#))

Historical questions and research

- Identify and select different kinds of questions about the past to inform historical inquiry ([ACHHS184](#))
- Evaluate and enhance these questions ([ACHHS185](#))
- Identify and locate relevant sources, using ICT and other methods ([ACHHS186](#))

Analysis and use of sources

- Identify the origin, purpose and context of primary and secondary sources ([ACHHS187](#))
- Process and synthesise information from a range of sources for use as evidence in an historical argument ([ACHHS188](#))
- Evaluate the reliability and usefulness of primary and secondary sources ([ACHHS189](#))

Civic and Citizenship: Year 9

Questioning and research

- Develop, select and evaluate a range of questions to investigate Australia's political and legal systems ([ACHCS082](#))
- Identify, gather and sort information and ideas from a range of sources and reference as appropriate ([ACHCS083](#))

Analysis, synthesis and interpretation

- Critically evaluate information and ideas from a range of sources in relation to civics and citizenship topics and issues ([ACHCS084](#))

Problem solving and decision making

- Recognise and consider multiple perspectives and ambiguities, and use strategies to negotiate and resolve contentious issues ([ACHCS086](#))

Questioning and citizenship skills

- Use democratic processes to reach consensus on a course of action relating to a civics or citizenship issue and plan for that action ([ACHCS087](#))

Cross-curriculum priorities

- Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia
- Sustainability

General capabilities

- Critical and creative thinking
- Numeracy
- Information and communication technology
- Personal and social capabilities
- Literacy
- Intercultural understanding

THE BUSTLING CITY

The theme of the bustling city examines *Allegro con brio Bourke Street west* by Tom Roberts, looking at how music influenced his work and his compositional techniques and application of paint. The subject matter is also interesting in terms of appreciating Roberts' interest in the city as well as the bush. It is relevant to **Year 7 and 8 Music**, **Year 9 History** as well as **Visual Arts**.

The Arts – Music: Year 7 and 8

- Structure compositions by combining and manipulating the elements of music using notation ([ACAMUM095](#))
- Analyse composers' use of the elements of music and stylistic features when listening to and interpreting music ([ACAMUR097](#))
- Identify and connect specific features and purposes of music from different eras to explore viewpoints and enrich their music making, starting with Australian music including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ([ACAMUR098](#))

History: Year 9

- The nature and extent of the movement of peoples in the period (slaves, convicts and settlers) ([ACOKFH015](#))
- The nature and significance of the Industrial Revolution and how it affected living and working conditions, including within Australia ([ACOKFH016](#))

Cross-curriculum priorities

- Sustainability

General capabilities

- Critical and creative thinking
- Numeracy
- Information and communication technology
- Personal and social capabilities
- Literacy

MAKING A NATION

Through the examination of iconic paintings *Shearing the rams* and *A break away!* this theme explores how Roberts develops national narratives, through his choice of subject matter, complex compositions and other visual elements. This theme is relevant to **Year 9 History** as well as **Visual Arts**.

History: Year 9

- The nature and extent of the movement of peoples in the period (slaves, convicts and settlers) ([ACOKFH015](#))
- The nature and significance of the Industrial Revolution and how it affected living and working conditions, including within Australia ([ACOKFH016](#))
- The emergence and nature of significant economic, social and political ideas in the period, including nationalism ([ACOKFH019](#))

Cross-curriculum priorities

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and stories
- Sustainability

General capabilities

- Critical and creative thinking
- Information and communication technology
- Literacy

FURTHER READINGS

The catalogue for this exhibition is recommended as an additional resource as it includes an introduction to the exhibition by curator Anne Gray, as well as themed chapters with essays by other curators and art historians.

OTHER RESOURCES

- R Radford, *Tom Roberts*, Art Gallery of South Australia, 1996
- [Art Gallery of New South Wales website, Tom Roberts](#)
- [Australian National Maritime Museum, immigration history](#)
- [Australian Curriculum](#)



A Sunday afternoon picnic at Box Hill
 painted in Melbourne, c 1887
 oil on canvas 38.6 x 28.7 cm
 National Gallery of Australia,
 Canberra, purchased 1984



In a corner on the Macintyre
(The bushranger)
 painted at Newstead, North Elsmore,
 New South Wales, 1895
 oil on canvas 71.1 x 86.4 cm
 National Gallery of Australia,
 Canberra, purchased 1971



Holiday sketch at Coogee
 painted in Sydney, 1888
 oil on canvas 40.3 x 55.9 cm
 Art Gallery of New South Wales,
 Sydney, purchased 1954

Landscape: Artists' camps and collaboration

While staying in the Spanish city of Granada, Roberts met two young Spanish art students, Ramón Casas and Laureá Barreau, who encouraged him to paint a 'direct sketch' in front of a subject.

Roberts made a number of paintings outdoors (*en plein air*) during his stay and continued the practice in a number of locations after he returned to Australia in 1885.

'We went to the bush ... and, as was always our ambition, tried to get it down as truly as we could.'
Roberts to Frederick McCubbin, 1914

In 1886 Roberts established an artists' camp in a patch of wild bush at Box Hill, on the outskirts of Melbourne, with Frederick McCubbin and Louis Abrahams who he had met at the National Gallery School. They pitched their tents beside the creek, among tall blue-gum saplings, tea-tree and wild grasses and worked quickly to capture an impression of the scene before the light changed.

Zooming in on a small segment of the bush, they depicted 'treescapes' in which the sky was absent and the eucalypts were viewed in close focus, creating works that were radically different from the wide panoramic views of earlier Australian landscape painters. Another great Australian artist, Fred Williams, would go on to develop their approach in a different way.

Roberts continued to work regularly outdoors and shared a cottage on the coast at Rickett's Point, near Mentone, with McCubbin and Abrahams in January 1887 where the younger artists, Arthur Streeton and Charles Conder joined them. Roberts and Conder painted together at Coogee Bay, Sydney in 1888. Roberts, Streeton and Conder also spent two idyllic summers working in an old weatherboard farmhouse on Mount Eagle estate, Heidelberg from 1888 to 1890. When Roberts moved to Sydney in 1891, he lived at the artists' camp at Little Sirius Cove while also working in a city studio.

The artists' camps provided Roberts and his friends with an opportunity for experimentation and discussion and took place during a highly creative period for the artists, who would later become known as the Australian Impressionists.

RESPONDING

- Tom Roberts and Fredrick McCubbin worked closely together at Box Hill. Using the NGA's website locate other works in the collection by McCubbin such as *At the falling of the year 1886*. What are the similarities between this painting and Roberts' *A Sunday afternoon picnic at Box Hill c 1897*?
- Write a visual analysis of *A Sunday afternoon picnic at Box Hill* using the elements of art and principles of design. Identify the two most dominant elements and principles and discuss your choices as a class group.
- Compare and contrast the landscapes mentioned above to later works by Tom Roberts such as *In a corner on the Macintyre (The bushranger)* 1895. Consider subject matter, the rendering of light, colour, composition and atmosphere.
- You might also like to discuss Tom Roberts' legacy by observing some of Fred Williams' work in the NGA's collection such as *Forest 1960–61* or Arthur Boyd's *Interior with open door, Shoalhaven 1976–77*.

MAKING

- Painting outside *en plein air* was an important aspect to Roberts' practice. Roberts and Conder painted similar views of Sydney's Coogee Bay in 1888. As a class, choose a location near your school and sit as a group to paint this location in your preferred medium.
 - Draw a selection of native trees and plants from observation—use your pencil in innovative ways to create textural effects.
 - Take photographs of a landscape to capture the light and experiment with your zoom lens to fine-tune your view.
 - Sit as a group and paint this location using watercolour as your medium.
 - Install your paintings in the classroom and discuss the variety of interpretations of the same scene.



Aboriginal head, Charlie Turner
pointed at Corowa, New South Wales,
1890, or in Sydney, c 1892, or
Cooktown, Queensland, 1892
oil on canvas on paperboard
39.4 x 29.8 cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales,
Sydney, purchased 1892



Sir Henry Parkes
pointed in Sydney, 1892
oil on canvas 66 x 56 cm
Art Gallery of South Australia,
Adelaide, Elder Bequest Fund, 1901

Portraiture

Tom Roberts was Australia's leading portrait painter of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

For many years, portraiture was a principal source of income, and represented 40 per cent of his oeuvre. He admired portraits by the Spanish artist, Diego Velázquez; French artist, Édouard Manet; and also American-English painter, James McNeil Whistler—especially their minimal paint application and the manner in which subjects were often placed against a plain background.

'... the subtlety of it & the way the pigments have been floated & flickered on I grasp all that the painter meant, no brush work no cleverness.' Roberts on Velázquez's approach to painting portraits, 14 November 1909

Roberts painted a wide range of subjects including pastoralists, businessmen, politicians, fellow artists, musicians, actors, fashionable ladies, children, and Aboriginal people. As is the case with many portrait painters, the commissioned works were often more formal and those of friends show greater empathy and flair.

Roberts made a particular effort to pay homage to Indigenous Australians in works such as *Aboriginal head, Charlie Turner* c 1892 and *Aboriginal woman (Mariah, Yugalbar)* 1895. He was the only one among his colleagues to have such an interest. The artist's portraits are in sharp contrast to photographic studies of Indigenous Australians at the time. In those images subjects were typically depicted in traditional garments and carrying weapons and tools.

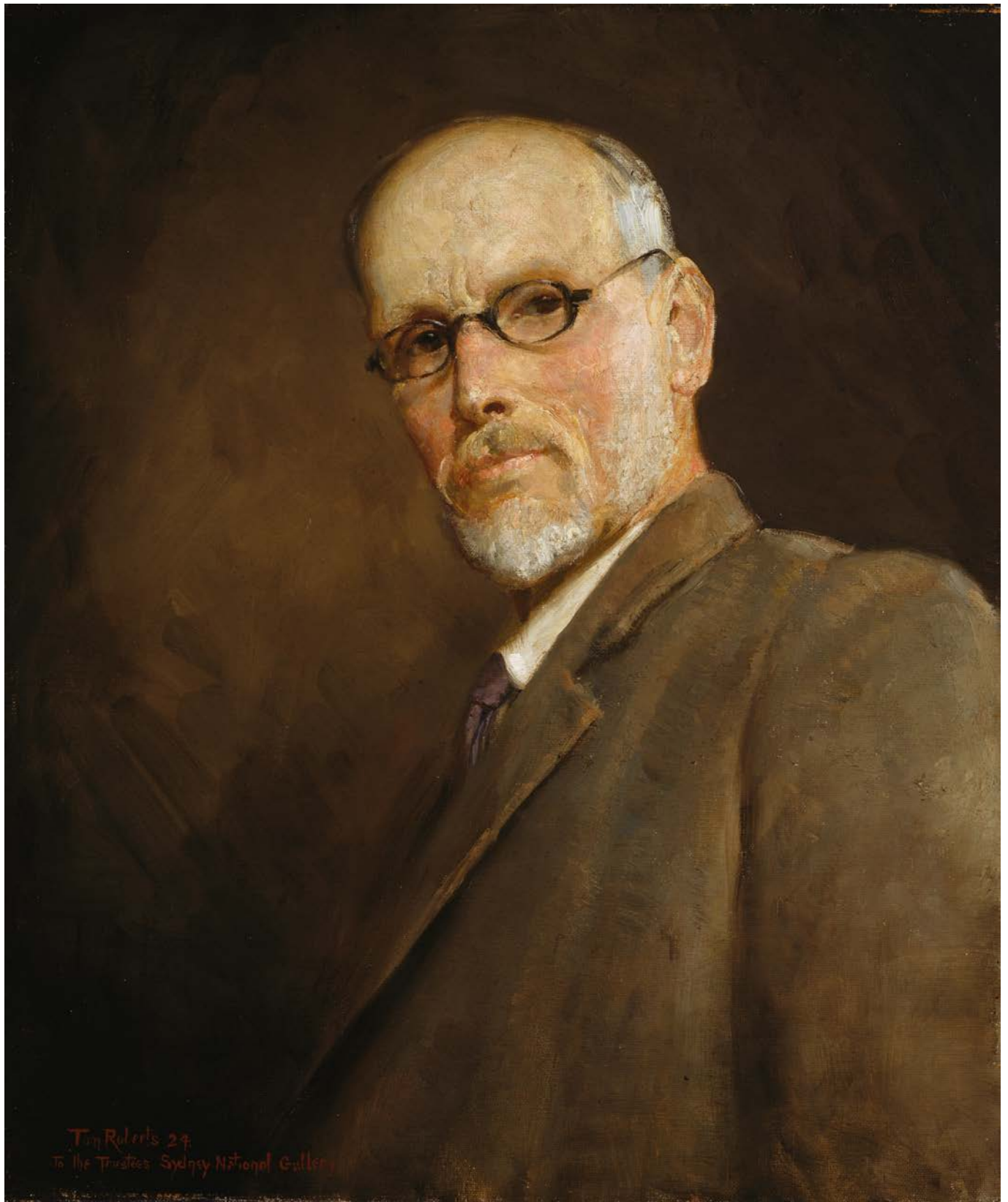
Roberts' reputation as a portraitist and his expertise in creating large national narrative paintings meant he was the right man for the task when commissioned in 1901 to record the opening of the first parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia in the Melbourne Exhibition Building.

RESPONDING

- Compare and contrast Roberts' portraits of Sir Henry Parkes and Charlie Turner. Research the sitters on the NGA's Tom Roberts website. What is similar and how are they different? Write an analysis of each considering the sitter's gaze, facial expression and body language, the role of portraiture, the subject and the painting's colouration and texture.
- When viewing these works think about cultural, historical and/or social and political influences that were relevant at the time the portraits were created compared to our interpretations today. Discuss your thoughts as a class group.
- Research Diego Velázquez and Édouard Manet's portraits. Develop a 250 word written response discussing how you think these portraits may have influenced Roberts.

MAKING

- Create portraits using your classmates as sitters. Ask them to assume a similar gaze and expression as either subject in the above paintings. You may like to use photography and digital manipulation to appropriate the style and mood of each.
- When completed, hang your portraits in the classroom, sit as a group and describe the mood or tone of each in no more than three words.



Self portrait
painted at Kallista, Victoria, 1924
oil on canvas
61.2 x 51 cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift
of the artist at the request of the
Trustees, 1924

Self portraiture

Tom Roberts painted this self portrait when he was 68 years old.

He has carefully analysed his facial features and created a portrait that is restrained and formal. The artist's brown suit blends into the dark background and only the white collar lightens the outfit. Roberts depicted himself with a slight turn of the head so that his face is almost fully observed. He has a steady and determined gaze and a rather self-confident, but personable smile. The artist chose not to embellish his presence and instead conveys a simplicity and understated approach.

The self portrait is often the artist's most personal form of expression, a means of self-evaluation and self-promotion. Successive self portraits over a long career can chart an artist's creative development, showing how their concerns have changed over time. Although Roberts was Australia's leading portrait painter at the turn of the century, unlike other major Australian portrait painters of this time such as George W Lambert and Hugh Ramsay, his self portraits are rare. This suggests that Roberts was less keen to learn how to paint portraits by using himself as a model, or to explore his likeness and character in his art.

RESPONDING and RESEARCH

- What is the purpose of a self portrait? Should it be a realistic likeness of the artist? Why or why not? Throughout history, artists have always created self portraits, why do you think this is so?
 - Look at the self portrait of Tom Roberts. Discuss the main colours you can see in the painting. Do you like these colours? If you were painting yourself what colours would you choose and why?
 - Research the entries about this self portrait on the NGA's Tom Roberts website. How do you think the circumstances leading to the painting of this portrait may have influenced the artist's approach?
 - The artist is looking down at the viewer. Does he look as if he is taller than us? How does this affect our interpretation of the painting?
- Look at a range of self portraits that are in the NGA's collection. Here are a few that vary in approach and medium:
 - Ambrose Patterson, c 1902
 - Grace Cossington Smith, 1916
 - Nora Heysen, 1932
 - Arthur Boyd, 1937
 - Rita Angus, 1939
 - Albert Tucker, 1941
 - Carol Jerrems, 1974
 - Julie Dowling, 2002
 - Rea, *Poles apart*, 2009

From the collection of self portraits, which ones do you like and why? What do they tell us about the artist? How has the genre of self portraiture changed with the advent of technology?

MAKING and DOING

- Working in pairs using a camera or a phone, take a series of self portraits (or 'selfies'). Experiment with a full face, three-quarter and profile view and study yourself from each angle to establish if they reveal anything different about your features and character.
- Include one object that tells us about you. It might be a musical instrument, sporting equipment, bunch of paintbrushes, book, phone etc. Create a series of self portraits and use Photoshop to change and enhance certain aspects such as the colour and size of each version. Print out your series of self portraits and display them in the classroom. Have some fun discussing each series as a class.



Going home
 painted in Melbourne, c 1889
 oil on cedar cigar-box lid 23.4 x 13.6 cm
 National Gallery of Australia,
 Canberra, purchased 1976



Saplings
 painted in Melbourne, c 1889
 oil on cedar cigar-box lid 14.5 x 34.5 cm
 Art Gallery of South Australia,
 Adelaide, Morgan Thomas Bequest
 Fund, 1927



Gray day in spring, Venice
 painted in Venice, 1884
 oil on wood panel 11.3 x 20.2 cm
 National Gallery of Australia,
 Canberra, purchased 1973



Mentone
 painted in Melbourne, 1888
 oil on cedar panel 11.4 x 19 cm
 National Gallery of Victoria,
 Melbourne, purchased 1955

9 by 5 Impression exhibition

The 9 by 5 Impression exhibition of 1889 established Roberts' and his friends' reputations as innovators and created their identity as a group that came to be known as the Australian Impressionists.

Before the exhibition opened the *Table Talk* art critic Sophie Osmond remarked:

'Now ... the public will have the opportunity of judging for itself what Impressionism really is ... The three principals of the movement are Mr Tom Roberts, Mr Charles Conder and Mr Arthur Streeton ... generally considered to be the leaders of Impressionism here, while Fred McCubbin may possibly be added as a fourth ...'

In the small catalogue produced by the artists they explained their interests and aims:

'An effect is only momentary; so an impressionist tries to find his place. Two half-hours are never alike, and he who tries to paint the sunset on two successive evenings, must be more or less working from memory. So in these works, it has been the object of the artists to render faithfully, and thus obtain the first records of effects widely differing, and often of very fleeting character.'

The *9 by 5 Impression exhibition* opened on 17 August 1889 at Buxton's Art Gallery in Swanston Street, Melbourne. Roberts, Charles Conder and Arthur Streeton contributed the majority of paintings and CD Richardson, sculpture. The opening created a stir in Melbourne. The rooms were decorated in an aesthetic style, with draperies of soft Liberty silk, Japanese umbrellas, blue and green vases filled with japonica and roses, violets and jonquils, and the air was sweet with the perfume of daphne. The artists wanted to convey momentary impressions of colour and light, fleeting atmospheric effects and the transient moods of nature.

Following James McNeill Whistler's example, most of the works were shown in simple wooden standardised frames. The exhibition's title referred to the size of the wooden panels they painted on, which were nine by five inches (23 x 12.5 cm). Many were painted on cigar-box lids provided by Roberts' friend Louis Abrahams, whose family imported cigars.

RESPONDING

- These works were displayed in the *9 by 5 Impression exhibition* of 1889. Identify the similar visual qualities in this series. What characteristics are typical of these impressions?
- Discuss some of the common themes explored in the *9 by 5* series. What themes or subject matter are missing?
- Research James McNeill Whistler. Compare Whistler's *Nocturne* paintings to Roberts' landscapes. What are the similarities and differences?
- Roberts painted many large works throughout his career. Why do you think he painted on such a small surface here? What would have been some of the benefits and disadvantages to painting on a smaller scale?
- All exhibitions are accompanied by some form of writing. Complete one of the following:
 - An extended wall text for your work including a description, analysis and interpretation.
 - A media release visit nga.gov.au > engage > media for examples of media releases.
 - A review of your class *9 by 5* exhibition, including a brief visual analysis of 1–2 works.

MAKING

- As a class, create work for your own *9 by 5* exhibition. In collaboration with your classmates, decide on a universal theme. You may like to consider painting *en plein air* (in the open air) with a focus on light or perhaps use a recycled material as your surface such as cereal packets or scrap wood.
- Consider your exhibition design, including a title, the wall colour and layout of artworks. Will your exhibition be decorated in any other way like the collaborative 1889 exhibition? Explain the decisions you have made and ensure they connect to the theme of your exhibition.



Coming south
 painted in Melbourne, 1885–86
 oil on canvas 63.8 x 50.5 cm
 National Gallery of Victoria,
 Melbourne, gift of Colonel Aubrey HL
 Gibson in memory of John and Anne
 Gibson, settlers (1887), 1967

Coming south: Immigration and travel

Tom Roberts was a passenger on board this ship, the *SS Lusitania*, returning to Australia on its voyage from England in early 1885.

During the journey the artist sketched fellow passengers on the deck of the tilting ship whiling away the relentless hours at sea. Roberts includes information about the vessel's main power source, the large black chimney funnel belching grey smoke into the cloudy sky. Multiple ropes and pulleys and bunches of sail cloth indicate the debt to an earlier time when voyages of discovery plied these waters under sail only.

The individuals depicted here were probably all cabin class passengers and travelled in some degree of comfort; sleeping in large dormitories if travelling alone, or in cabins if in a family group. Less fortunate passengers with limited funds travelled in steerage, a large communal space at the stern of the ship where conditions were cramped, food was poor and ventilation limited.

Coming south provides a snapshot of one aspect of the migrant experience at this time and travel between Australia and 'the mother country'. Roberts has captured a moment in modern life that is full of careful observation and intricate detail. We can imagine ourselves right there swaying with the vessel on a journey to a new and unfamiliar land or returning home to Australia after travels in Europe.

Imagine what became of his fellow passengers: the girl in a pink and blue ensemble looking towards the artist/viewer, or the melancholy women sitting on the left clothed in black mourning attire? Roberts included a man sitting on a ledge above the deck and another young passenger in a bowler hat staring dreamily out to sea. Did good fortune await them? How did their stories unfold?

RESPONDING

- Why do you think people immigrated to Australia in the mid to late 1800s? Why do you think people immigrate today?
- Why did people visit Europe then and why do they today? What do you gain through travel and living in a different place before returning home?

- Travelling to and from Australia by sea would have taken Roberts over a month each way. Look at the clothes the people on the ship are wearing. What 'class' of society do you think they each belong to?
- Think about Australia's current political climate regarding immigration. Investigate Australia's immigration history. For example you may research immigration following the First and Second World Wars, the Vietnam War and the recent wars in Syria and Afghanistan. How has Australia's position changed? You might like to graph your findings.

• Debate topic

Divide your class into teams of six to debate for and against on the topic 'Foreign immigration laws need to be relaxed'. Students may like to research the following to collect supporting evidence:

- Parliament of Australia, Immigration debate from Federation to WWI
- SBS Immigration Nation
- Media coverage of immigration issues including the difference between illegal immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees.
- Artistic responses such as Alex Seton, *Someone died trying to have a life like mine* and Peter Drew, *Real Australians say Welcome*

Take a vote at the end to see how your class responds to the issue and the debaters arguments.

• Essay question

'Discuss the changes to Australia's immigration policy from 1886 to the 1960s to today.'

- Use Roberts' *Coming south 1885–86*, David Moore's *Immigrants arriving in Sydney 1966* and an artwork by a contemporary artist as evidence to support your findings about Australia's immigration policy.

MAKING

- *Coming south* by Tom Roberts encompasses many styles including a pastel palette reminiscent of James McNeil Whistler, while the use of geometric shapes is suggestive of a modern compositional technique. Deconstruct this composition, identifying how Roberts has led you through the painting using geometric shapes and line.
- Create your own painting, using Roberts' compositional techniques. You may like to base this scene in an airport, bus or train station. You might choose to set the work in contemporary times or in the past. What devices will you use to create a sense of time and place as well as the feelings and emotions of those in transit?



Allegro con brio, Bourke Street west
 painted in Melbourne, c 1885–86
 and 1890
 oil on canvas 51.2 x 76.3 cm
 National Library of Australia,
 Canberra & National Gallery of
 Australia, Canberra, purchased 1920
 by the Parliamentary Library
 Committee

The bustling city

You can almost hear the lively commercial buzz of 'marvellous' Melbourne in the late nineteenth century in *Allegro con brio, Bourke Street west*, painted by Tom Roberts in 1885–86 and reworked in 1890.

The artist viewed the scene from a high vantage point where he was able to witness the many activities taking place below. He captured a fleeting moment, a preoccupation of many artists of his time.

The musical term *allegro con brio* indicates a lively composition to be played in a fast tempo with spirit. The artist observed the movement of this busy thoroughfare from the first floor balcony of Buckley and Nunn, the drapery store. The bustling street life features a line of red-coated soldiers crossing the road and groups of figures in the right foreground where the General Post Office was a centre of communication and commercial activity.

Hats, parasols and deep verandas protect city dwellers from the baking heat of a Melbourne summer's day when the air was thick and relentless. The ice cart in the middle of the street seems to supply the only possible relief from the glare of the midday sun.

Roberts embraced modernity and the model of the thriving metropolis in the same way as French artist Claude Monet and American-British artist James McNeil Whistler in their depictions of European cities. The artist has included 150 figures, many of these simply indicated by single dabs or strokes of paint.

RESPONDING

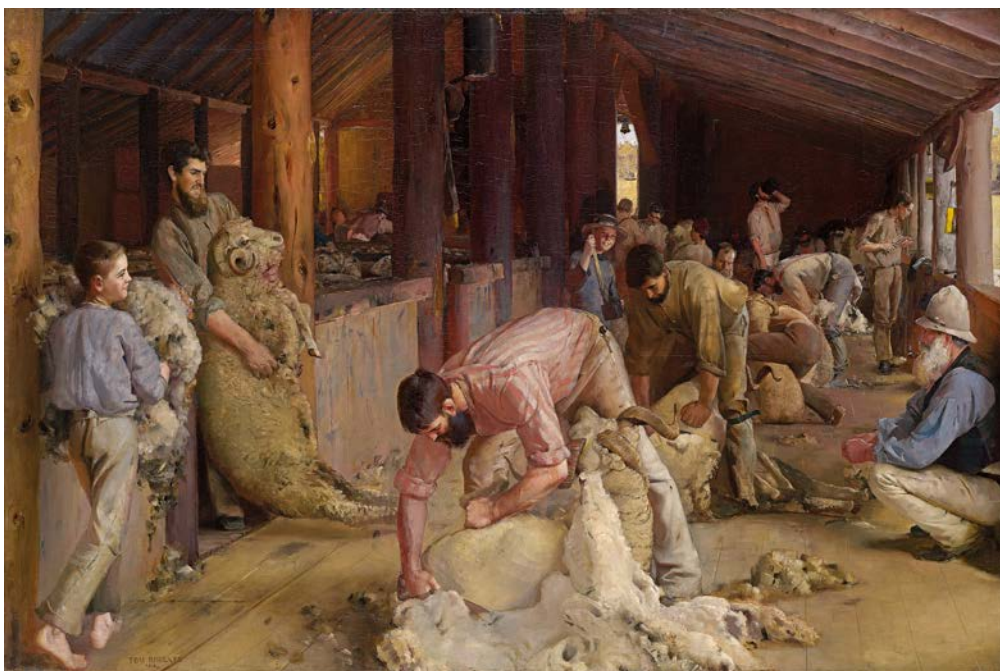
- Locate the horizon line and vanishing point in *Allegro con brio, Bourke Street west*. What other devices has Roberts used to create a sense of depth?
- *Allegro con brio* was also Beethoven's marking for the first movement of his *Eroica* symphony. Locate and listen to this musical piece while looking at the painting and consider:
 - What connections can you make?
 - Does this music 'fit' this image? What makes you say that?
 - Find a different musical track that would suit this scene. Perhaps ask your music teacher for some advice. You may even like to compose some music of your own that could accompany this artwork. Share your selection or composition with the class.
- How does this work by Roberts capture this period in time? While many of his works depict the bush, why is *Allegro con brio, Bourke Street west* significant?

MAKING

- We get a sense of how busy and noisy this scene would be due to the amount of activity and textures Roberts has created. However, the people are small and the buildings are simple in shape and colour. Recreate this scene as a collage using torn paper from magazines and newspapers.
- Find images of Bourke Street west in Melbourne today using Google Earth. Can you find this exact location? What has changed? Which elements from this period still exist?
- Roberts has painted this scene quickly, evident in his rough line and limited detail in the facial features of the people. Try sketching a busy street quickly to achieve a sense of movement. Make sure your image has at least one vanishing point and your horizon line is defined.



A break away!
 painted at Corowa, New South Wales,
 and Melbourne, 1891
 oil on canvas 137.3 x 167.8 cm
 Art Gallery of South Australia,
 Adelaide, Elder Bequest Fund, 1899



Shearing the rams
 painted at Brocklesby station,
 Corowa, New South Wales, and
 Melbourne, 1888–90
 oil on canvas mounted on board
 121.9 x 182.6 cm
 National Gallery of Victoria,
 Melbourne, Felton Bequest Fund, 1932

Making a nation

The 1880s and 1890s were a time of change in Australian art and a period when artists began to talk about an Australian tradition.

They sought to portray subjects that they believed would distinguish Australian life from that lived elsewhere.

Roberts travelled widely around Australia, and particularly to sheep stations in rural New South Wales, where he worked on his major national narratives *Shearing the rams* 1888–90, *A break away!* 1891 and *The Golden Fleece* 1894. He sought to create evocative images that recorded the hard work of European settlers in 'taming' the land.

Roberts' observation of atmosphere, colour and light is evident in all of his national narratives. No artist before him had captured the fierce glare of the hot Australian sun to such an extent as he did in paintings such as *A break away!*

Movement, or its absence, is also central to these works. The two shearing pictures are careful arrangements of figures in motion, in which he used the ideas of Eadweard Muybridge to convey movement, while *A break away!* is an action picture that dramatically conveys man and animals in motion, counterpointed against the verticals and diagonals of the landscape.

RESPONDING

- Undertake a careful visual analysis of *Shearing the rams* or *A break away!* considering the elements of art and principles of design. Note what and how Roberts defines the focal point, what compositional devices or conventions are used and how they create meaning in the work. Why did Roberts choose to depict these scenes and arrange them as he did? Reflect on how these works capture the spirit of the times. Have they been used to define national identity in the past and do they still today?

- Watch the video of shearing today on the NGA [Tom Roberts exhibition website](#). Compare this video with Roberts' 1888–90 representation in *Shearing the rams*. How accurate was Roberts in capturing regional life? How does his scene differ to a modern day shearing shed? What has remained the same?
- Australian Indigenous media artist Diane Jones appropriated *Shearing the rams* in her work of the same title from 2001, in which she has replaced the three central figures with members of her own family. This work is part of the NGA collection and can be found through our collection search online. Why do you think Jones has appropriated this image? What comment is she making about Australia's colonial past and the involvement of Indigenous Australians in the pastoral industry?

MAKING

- Before looking at *A break away!* in detail, sit in pairs. One student will face the painting and the other will have their back to the work. The student facing the work needs to describe *A break away!* in as much detail as possible. The other needs to draw an image based on the description they are listening to. You may like to repeat this activity with another work in the Gallery.
- Observe your family or members of your community undertaking daily activities. Photograph or complete observational drawings. Create a painting or digital image that depicts daily life in the twenty-first century. Use *Shearing the rams* and/or *A break away!* to inform your decisions for composition, colour, light etc to capture the energy and mood of the activity and the scene.