

AUSTRALIA'S
LOST
IMPRESSIONIST

John
Russell

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AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS OF MEDIA

A STUDY GUIDE BY
MARGUERITE O'HARA



*Peonies and head of a woman c1887,
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne*

Introduction

John Peter Russell is sometimes described as 'Australia's Lost Impressionist'. Catherine Hunter's documentary film, along with a retrospective exhibition of his work at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, has reassessed Russell's role in art history. Neither his work nor his life story is now lost. Almost ninety years after his death there is a resurgence of interest in his work and extraordinary life on Belle-Île, an island off the coast of Brittany in France where Russell lived and worked for more than twenty years. This film reveals the close relationships with other better known artists enjoyed by Australia's 'lost impressionist', an early Australian expatriate who developed his painting style in Europe in the 1880s

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Left: John Russell, *The red sail, Port-Goulphar* c1900, Musee d'Orsay, Paris, held by the Musee de Morlaix

Below L-R: John Russell, *The terraces of Monte Cassino* c1889, Private collection, courtesy of Nevill Keating Pictures, London, on loan to the National Gallery, London; John Russell, *Antibes* 1890/92, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

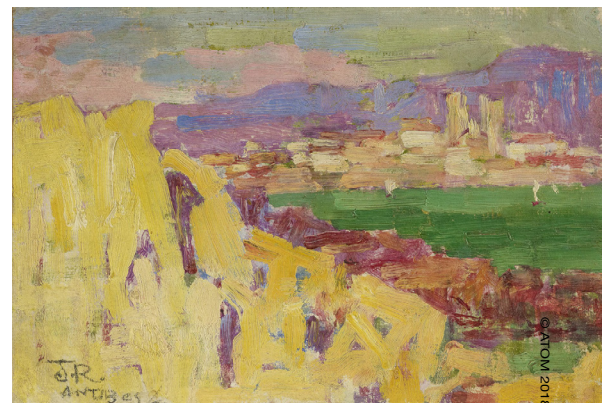
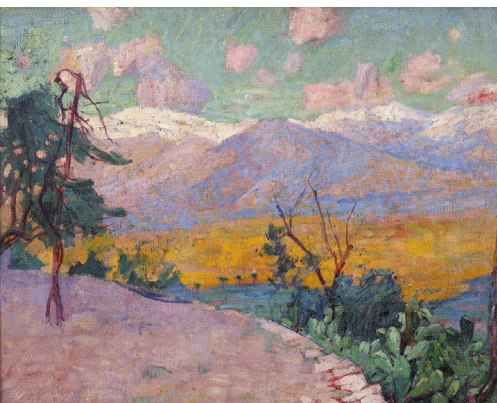
Synopsis

Australia's Lost Impressionist – John Russell tells the fascinating story behind the only Australian artist at the centre of the Impressionist movement in France and how his famous friendships forever changed the way the world sees colour.

A close friend of Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh and Henri Matisse, John Peter Russell was himself a great vanguard painter, as well as a magnetic personality and long-term inhabitant of Belle Île, a gorgeously wild, picturesque island that has had an outsize impact on the development of modern

art, from Monet and Matisse through to Ellsworth Kelly. Russell is one of the most interesting figures in Australian art, and a crucial figure in the story of Impressionism and post-Impressionist art in general.
– Sebastian Smee, Australian-born art writer and critic.

John Russell was handsome, wealthy, debonair and being Australian, quite exotic in nineteenth-century France. Yet despite his own artistic accomplishments and his pivotal role in the development of modern art, his name and his art have been largely unrecognised outside rarefied art circles. This documentary explores his enormous legacy on twentieth-century art through his paintings and his friendships. It also provides a vivid picture of what it was like to be an Australian expatriate living and working in Europe in the 1880s.



Curriculum Guidelines

Australia's Lost Impressionist – John Russell would be an excellent film to show to secondary and tertiary students of visual arts and art history. The documentary is also a fine example of a filmed biography, drawing on a range of sources, both contemporary and from the archives, to create a vivid picture of an Australian who chose to study, work and live in Europe.

While it is always most satisfying to see an artist's work firsthand in a gallery or other exhibition space, this is not always possible. However, documentary films offer a way of seeing not only the range and style of an artist's work but also the context of the artistic development, with a

number of people helping tell the story.

The film raises questions about how an artist's work becomes known and appreciated. How does one artist become famous, their work highly valued and their legacy secure while others languish in the margins of history until someone is prompted to tell the story and gather together the work to exhibit? Is originality and newness of creative work always the only criteria by which we judge an artist's success, whether in painting, writing or music? What part does fashion and newness play in the way an artist's work is regarded over time?

Curriculum areas relevant to this documentary include:

- **ART HISTORY**
Where does the work of this artist fit into Australian and European art movements? What makes his work important in art history?
- **VISUAL ARTS: PAINTING, COLOUR AND DESIGN**
What does Russell's work bring to our understanding of representing colour and light in nature through his brushwork?
All Visual Arts studies include responding to the work of other artists. This includes exploring, responding to, analysing and interpreting artworks. *In both making and responding to artworks, students consider a range of viewpoints or perspectives through which artworks can be explored and interpreted. These include the contexts in which the artworks are made by artists and experienced by audiences. The world can be interpreted through different contexts, including social, cultural and historical contexts.*¹
- **AUSTRALIAN BIOGRAPHY**
Identifying and understanding the many resources available to a biographer.
- **AUSTRALIAN HISTORY**
What access did artists in the nineteenth century have to international developments in the visual arts?
- **ARTISTIC MOVEMENTS**
Context, place and time as key elements in composition and developing style of an artist.
- **FILM STUDIES**
Utilising a range of written sources such as letters, the expertise of enthusiasts and scholars and the artworks themselves to create a comprehensive picture of an artist and the worlds in which he lived and worked.



Left: Luke Sciberras, Belle-Ile
 Below L-R: Euan Macleod,
 Belle-Ile; Tom Roberts,
Charcoal burners (previously
 known as 'Wood splitters')
 1886, Art Gallery of Ballarat



Background

What might attract a filmmaker and a state gallery to exhibit the work of an artist such as John Russell and explore his life some ninety years after his death? Might this mini renaissance result in more people valuing his work and even adding it to an art collection, whether in a public gallery or in a private collection? Does the interest in the work of a long neglected Australian artist suggest national pride or simply curiosity and a desire to restore an artist to his place in history?

Director Catherine Hunter has made many documentaries about Australian artists, architects and photographers. In a recent interview she explained why she chooses these subjects for her documentaries. They include the following:

- There is much less coverage of the arts today in the mainstream media.
- Documentaries about artists and their work translate

into increased audiences at galleries and interest in the arts.

- Artists always make for colourful stories.
- These films become important historical archives.
- Being broadcast on free-to-air television can still command big audiences for art programs.

She believes that it is important for our sense of self that we record, reference, appreciate and understand the contribution of artists whose work often sheds light on history, artistic influences and the period and places where they lived, whether they are photographers, painters, sculptors, printmakers, architects or potters.

In 2017 Catherine Hunter and cameraman Bruce Inglis travelled to Belle-Île off the coast of France. Highly respected contemporary artists Euan MacLeod and Luke Sciberras travelled with them to Belle-Île where they



Painted the country and seascapes that were such an important part of Russell's artistic output.

It always struck me from a very young age that this colourful and powerful artist wasn't ever really celebrated in the broad sense. His life and work are illuminated with all the biographical ingredients for a wild ride of a story, exotic, sophisticated, rich and at once charged with 'the rude energy' of a robust and well-heeled Australia. Russell is a great portal through which we as Australians can view the lives and works of his European contemporaries which may otherwise appear distant or historically remote.

To think of Gauguin, van Gogh, Monet, Matisse, Rodin, all having more than a passing acquaintance with an Australian born in Darlinghurst in the 19th century who spent his last years on Sydney Harbour in the 20th century gives great heart and touch and something of a real humanity to the works and stories contained around them all. – Luke Sciberras

- In what ways are films about the work of artists a powerful way to present artworks to audiences, who may have little opportunity to visit galleries or travel overseas?
- How can documentary film open up an artist's life and work in ways that may be more difficult to convey through the background notes and catalogues that often accompany exhibitions?
- What are some of the archival materials that a filmmaker may be able to access about an artist's life and work? How important is it that family and friends retain as much as possible in the way of letters, drawings, photographs and other materials that are important in telling the story of an artist's work?
- What role do state and national art galleries play as conservators of art and promoters of an artist's work?



Above: L-R: John Russell, *Rough sea, Belle-Ile* 1900, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; John Russell, *The Needles, winter sun, Belle-Ile* 1903, The Westfarmers Collection of Australian Art, Perth

* JOHN RUSSELL'S LIFE

John Peter Russell was born in Darlinghurst, Sydney in 1858. He left Australia in 1881 and went to London to study art after the death of his father in 1879. He travelled to London where he studied drawing and painting at the Slade School. His father's inheritance left him wealthy enough to pursue his passion for becoming an artist. Three years later he moved to Paris, the centre of the art world at the time, where he undertook further studies at Atelier Cormon in the artistic milieu of Montmartre.

In 1883 an exhibition of his work was held in Sydney. A report in The Sydney Morning Herald noted that:

J. P. Russell exhibits more pictures than any other member of the Society [Art Society of New South Wales], and some of his pictures are really admirable. His portraits are especially good, for although they are not thoroughly finished, his handling is vigorous and telling, and he has the gift, which only belongs to a man who has a true eye, and an intuitive knowledge of character, of reproducing nearly always the characteristic expression of his subjects.

In the summer of 1883 Russell visited Spain with his brother Percy, Australian doctor and later Labor politician, William Maloney, and Australian painter and friend, Tom Roberts. In Spain they met Spanish art students Laureano Barrau and Ramon Casas, who inspired them to paint directly in front of the subject. In Paris, Russell studied with Fernand Cormon and became friends with fellow students



Top: John Russell's House, Belle-Île
Above L-R: John Russell, *Calm sea at Morestil Point* 1901, Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; John Russell, *Rough sea, Morestil* c1900, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Emile Bernard and Vincent van Gogh, as well as with Auguste Rodin.

Russell joined van Gogh on a painting trip to Belgium and painted a portrait of him in 1886. Van Gogh liked this portrait very much and the pair corresponded for some years until van Gogh's death in 1890. In Paris, in 1887, he met up with Australian painter, E Philips Fox. In 1886, Russell visited Belle-Île, a wild and beautiful island off the coast of Brittany where he encountered Claude Monet. The two artists painted together during the summer of 1886 and, in 1888, Russell moved to Belle-Île, living there for over twenty years with his wife Marianna Mattiocco and their six surviving children².

Russell also met Henri Matisse on Belle-Île and was visited by Auguste Rodin, the French sculptor whose famous bronze first casting of *The Thinker* is in the National Gallery of Victoria. Marianna Mattiocco later became one of Rodin's favourite models and he produced several busts of her in silver and bronze.

RUSSELL first met Rodin in 1888 when he commissioned a bust of his wife Marianna. They then became friends and Rodin visited Russell on Belle-Île in 1902.

When Russell's wife died in 1908 he left Belle-Île and is said to have destroyed many of his paintings following her death. Eventually he returned to Sydney with his second wife where he died in 1930 at Watson's Bay moving some rocks in his garden.



Above: Goulphar Bay, Belle-Ile Photo: Bruce Inglis Bottom: Claude Monet, Storm off the coast of Belle-Ile 1886, Musee d'Orsay, Paris, PeterBarritt/Alamy Stock Photo

* BELLE-ÎLE-EN-MER

Belle-Île is an island off the coast of Brittany in northwest France. In the main town La Palais, Citadelle Vauban is a star-shaped fortress. The fort at Pointe des Poulains, the island's northern tip, houses a museum dedicated to nineteenth-century actress Sarah Bernhardt. Sandy Donnant Beach lies on the rugged west coast. Nearby, the Grand Phare lighthouse looks out over the needles rock formations of Port-Coton. The island is 17 kilometres by 9 kilometres, rising 71 metres out of the sea. This is about the same size as Victoria's Phillip Island in Westernport Bay, though Belle-Île is much wilder being subject to Atlantic storms.

Find an image of Belle-Île-en-Mer on an online site or in an atlas.

Its wild beauty is shown both in this film and in Russell's paintings. The place was a strong factor in his artistic development as he painted the seascapes and country in all weathers. He also painted intimate family studies – figures in the landscape. He was clearly greatly influenced by the then new style of painting en plein air favoured by Monet, Pissarro and other members of the French Impressionists. His interest in colour theory was greatly influenced by the work of Matisse who worked on Belle-Île between 1895 and 1897.



* IMPRESSIONISM

Impressionism, as the word implies, refers to a style of painting that conveys a strong impression of a landscape without necessarily recording a particular moment at a particular time as a photograph can.

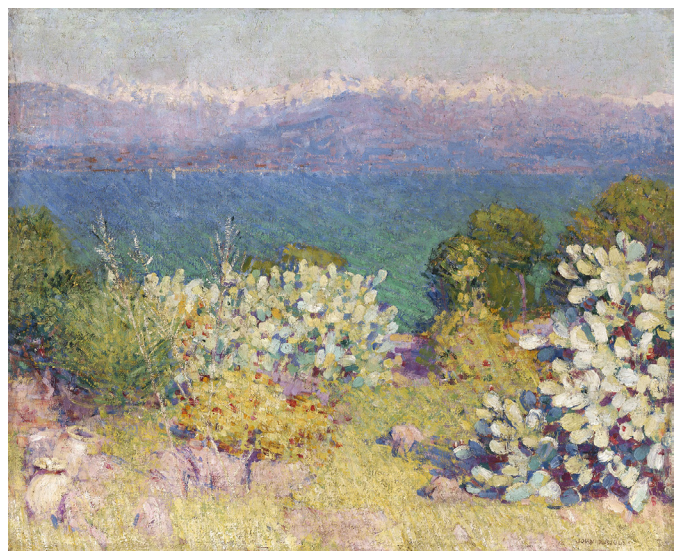
Photography was in its early stages of development in the period when these artists were working. The first simple Kodak box camera was produced in the late 1880s which allowed individuals to record images of people and places. Photography certainly changed the way visual artists recorded and painted their impressions of their subjects, whether this was in landscape, seascapes, cityscapes or groups of people. Realistic detail was no longer an absolute imperative to create a likeness in painting.

Impressionism was a nineteenth-century art movement developed largely in France where painters sought to

record daily life through the effects of light and colour, often painting outdoors. The movement gained its name when a French critic, Louis Leroy, reviewing the first major Impressionist exhibition of 1874, seized on the title of Claude Monet's painting *Impression, Sunrise* (1873), and accused the group of painting nothing but impressions.

As with many art movements, the artists were reacting against the earlier art movement known as Beaux Arts where there were rules and expectations about what artists painted and how. Colour and spontaneous brushwork became central features of the work.

Impressionism can be considered the first distinctly modern movement in painting. Developing in Paris in the 1860s, its influence spread throughout Europe and eventually to the United States.



L-R: John Russell, *The Garden, Longpre-les-Corps* 1887, Private Collection, Melbourne; John Russell, *In the morning, Alpes Maritimes from Antibes* 1890-91, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Its originators were artists who rejected the official, government-sanctioned exhibitions, or salons, and were consequently shunned by powerful academic art institutions. In turning away from the fine finish and detail to which most artists of their day aspired, the Impressionists aimed to capture the momentary, sensory effect of a scene – the impression objects made on the eye in a fleeting instant. To achieve this effect, many Impressionist artists moved from the studio to the streets and countryside, painting outdoors in different conditions, recording the changes of light, colour and movement.

Impressionist artworks are quite difficult to photograph as the brushwork and method of applying paint can only really be appreciated from a reasonable distance.

Scientific thought at the time was beginning to recognise

that what the eye perceived and what the brain understood were two different things. The Impressionists sought to capture the former – the optical effects of light – to convey the passage of time, changes in weather and other shifts in the atmosphere in their canvases. Their art did not necessarily rely on realistic depictions.

See <<https://www.theartstory.org/movement-impressionism.htm>> for further information about Impressionism.

Some of the best known exponents of this approach and style were Manet, Monet, Cezanne, Degas, Courbet, Renoir, Pissarro and Sisley. However, the style of each painter and choice of subject matter was highly individual and distinctive – from Monet's waterlilies to Degas' dancers. However, they were all informed by a desire to paint their own realities, freed from the constraints of traditional expectations.

Student Activities

* RUSSELL'S WORK

Several of Russell's paintings are shown in this documentary from different periods of his life. We see a range of landscapes, mainly of Belle-Île in different seasons, but also scenes painted in Antibes in southern France, portraits of friends and groups of family members on Belle-Île. Many of the land and seascapes show a real stylistic affinity with the work of Monet at this time, who was also attracted to the wild beauty of Belle-Île and worked there beside Russell.

Russell's daughter Jeanne kept most of his paintings after his death in 1930 and left twenty-one artworks to the Louvre in Paris. That bequest – 19 Russell works, a bust of Russell by his friend Harry Bates and a bust of Marianna

by Rodin – reside in the Morlaix Museum in Brittany. There are also a number of Russell paintings in state galleries in Australia as well as important private collections.

Russell's paintings have recently sold quite well in art auctions with his late watercolours being highly regarded.

Evidence of the increasing interest in his work can be tracked on art auction sites. For instance, in 2007, Russell's painting of his sons bathing on Belle-Île beach fetched A\$1.8 million – a record price for a Russell. In 2017 at an auction in Melbourne, Russell's painting – *Fisherman, Belle Île* sold for A\$756,400. In 2007, Russell's painting of his sons bathing on Belle-Île beach fetched A\$1.8 million.

The 2018 exhibition of Russell's work

The current retrospective of Russell's work at the Art Gallery of NSW includes paintings and other works from public and private collections.

Exhibition curator, Wayne Tunnicliffe, says Russell's capacity for friendship during a time when camaraderie was greatly valued meant his experience as an artist was fundamentally shaped by an exchange of ideas about art within a remarkable international peer group.

'Russell's move to Europe was an enterprise fraught with risk but the reward was the freedom to paint at the edge of the French avant-garde – all the more remarkable for someone born so far away,' Tunnicliffe said.

The exhibition also presents a small number of works by Russell's nineteenth-century contemporaries – two paintings by Claude Monet, two paintings by Henri Matisse, two paintings and a sketch by Vincent van Gogh, five sculptures by Auguste Rodin and two paintings by Tom Roberts. Exploring Russell's role as a collector and patron, the exhibition includes works he is known to have owned by his artist friends.

This exhibition which runs until 11 November 2018 is the first major survey of Russell's work in forty years and brings together 120 paintings, drawings and watercolours, drawn from the Art Gallery of NSW collection and from private and public collections around the world including the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, the Musée d'Orsay in Paris and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Hilary Spurling, Matisse's biographer says that Matisse always credited Russell with explaining colour theory to him.

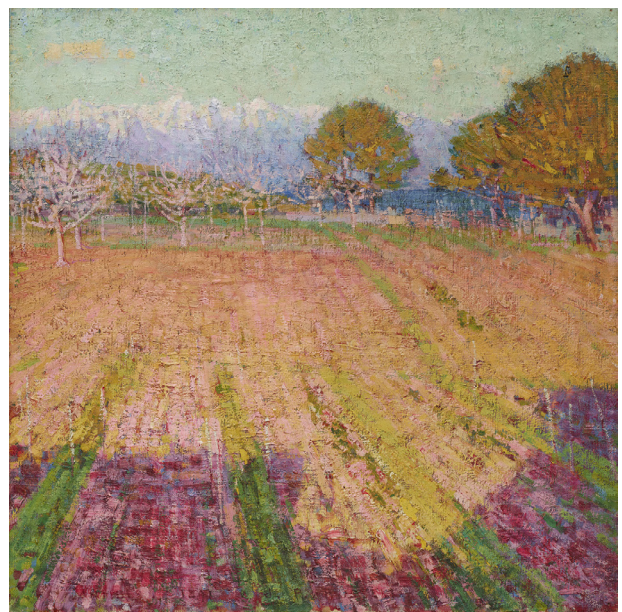
As Hilary Spurling tells it:

Russell of course is doing something totally different ... What absolutely bowled Matisse over was the luminosity of his paintings, the amount of light that Russell was able to convey, and it was perfectly clear. You couldn't do that with the traditional old masters' palette. It was the beginning of the end, in contemporary terms for Matisse, that discovery on Belle Île.

We can see this luminosity of colour in several of Russell's paintings including *The Terraces of Monte Cassino* from 1889, a hill town in Italy, south-east of Rome. The colour and light he is able to include in *In the Afternoon* from 1891 is equally luminous, pure and unclouded. Black is absent from his palette with pinks, blues, greens, yellows and whites predominating, colours we find in nature, modulated by light.

John Russell, In the afternoon 1891, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

The rawness of the natural world is captured in many of his paintings – the crashing waves, the rocky cliffs, the sea spray and the foam, the sky and the clouds – nature in its wildness and beauty.



* PLACES AND PEOPLE

Belle-Île is like a central character in John Russell's work and life; so powerfully do his paintings capture the changes in the place where he lived. His muse may well have been his wife Marianna, but so too was Belle-Île.

Russell also painted in Antibes in the south of France where he sometimes spent the Belle-Île winters. Antibes is a resort town on the Cote d'Azur. He also travelled to Spain and Italy where he encountered a variety of artists and styles.

Friendships with other artists and admiration of their work were equally important factors in Russell's developing style. He had ongoing friendships with a number of artists, the work of many of them now much better known than his own. It is important to consider that Russell chose to work in France rather than Australia from the 1880s. This choice, a result of many factors, certainly influenced his place in art history. Travel between Europe and Australia took months.

- What influence did the following artists have on Russell's art and life? (When you are making your assessments, keep in mind that artistic influences can take many forms. Artists often adapt and unconsciously incorporate stylistic elements of other artists' work into their own compositions)

TOM ROBERTS – a friend and fellow artist from Russell's years in Australia. Roberts was a key member of the Heidelberg School, also known as Australian Impressionism. After attending art schools in Melbourne, he left for Europe in 1881 to further his training, and returned home in 1885, 'primed with whatever was the latest in art'. After returning to Australia he became a highly regarded artist creating works such as *Shearing the Rams*, *Bailed Up*, *A Break Away* and *The Golden Fleece*, quintessentially Australian images of a country emerging from colonial rule and shaping an identity.

CLAUDE MONET – now revered as one of the fathers of French Impressionism.

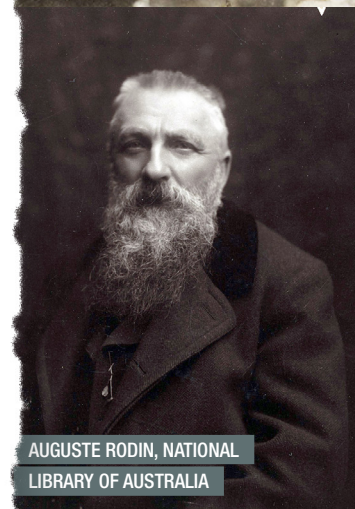
VINCENT VAN GOGH – a now famous post-impressionist and highly individual colour stylist who also corresponded with Russell.

AUGUSTE RODIN – a French sculptor who used Marianna as a model for his busts.

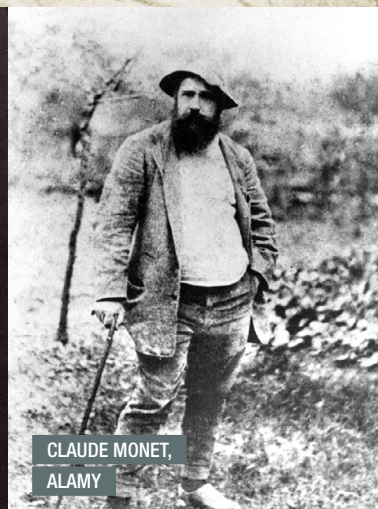
HENRI MATISSE - now regarded as a major figure in the history of colour and design and printmaking. He came to paint on Belle-Île in 1895 when he was twenty-five and unknown in the art world. It is said that Russell helped develop Matisse's theory and use of colour.



TOM ROBERTS, STATE
LIBRARY OF NSW



AUGUSTE RODIN, NATIONAL
LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA



CLAUDE MONET,
ALAMY

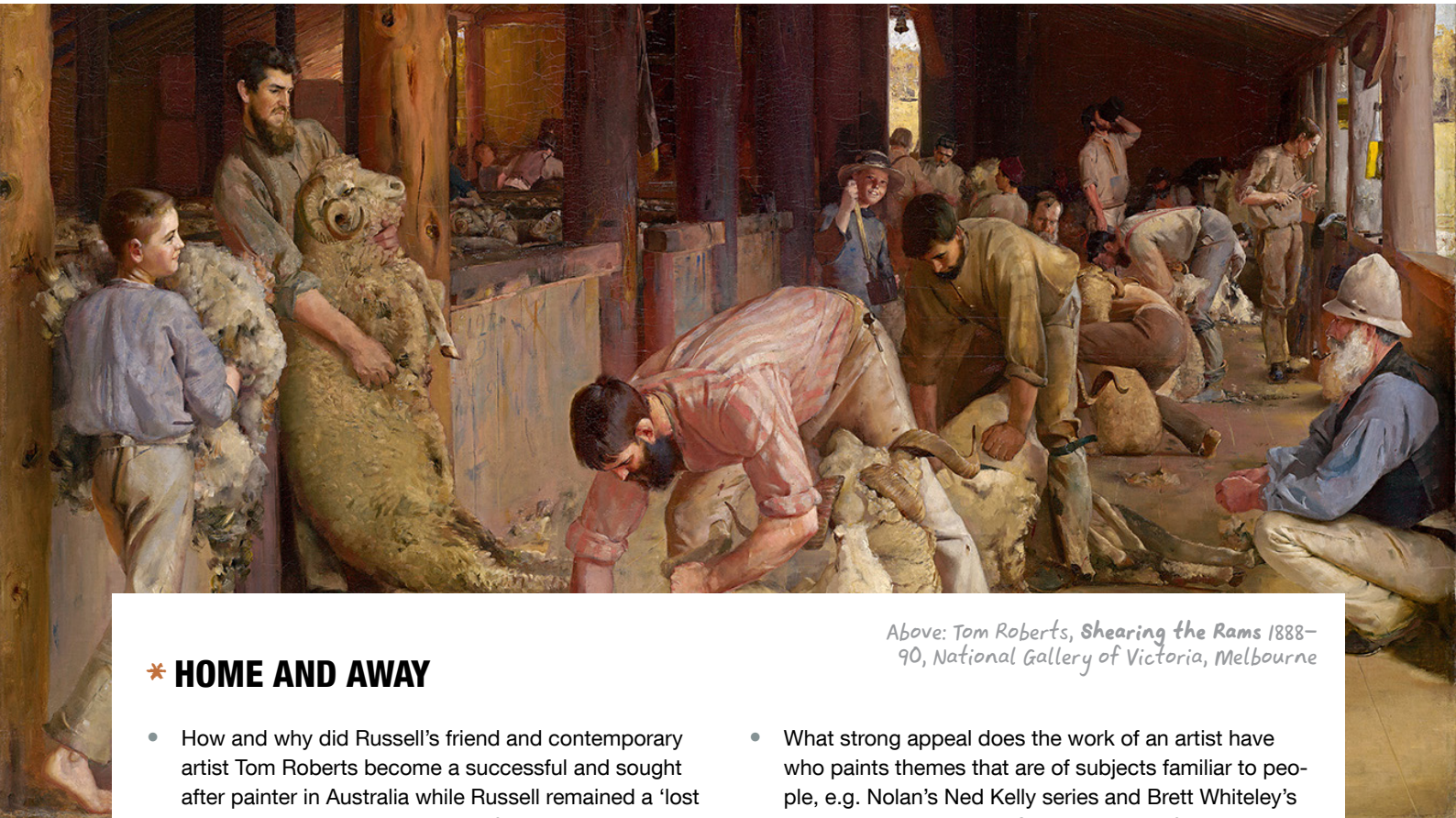


HENRI MATISSE, ARCHIVES
CLAUDE MATISSE

People appearing in the film – artists, experts, writers and admirers

Australia's Lost Impressionist – John Russell seamlessly explores Russell's remarkable life and work, especially during his twenty years on Belle-Île with contributions from authors, art curators, artists, biographers and those who admired both his work and the man through family and friendships. From descendants and family members to curators, conservators, artists, critics, writers and historians, there are many people who contribute to the story of John Russell. Each has something to contribute to the story.

- **Hugh Russell** – John Russell's great-grandson
- **Wayne Tunnicliffe** – head curator of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of NSW
- **Luke Sciberras** – contemporary artist
- **Euan Macleod** – contemporary artist
Sciberras and Macleod travelled with director Catherine Hunter and cinematographer Bruce Inglis to Belle Île to paint in the place where Russell lived and worked.
- **Sarah Turnbull** – author of a book about John Russell
- **Anne Galbally** – art historian
- **Christopher Riopelle** – curator from London's National Gallery and curator of the 2016 exhibition *Australia's Impressionists*
- **Julia Sharp** – Conservator, Stein & Co
- **Paula Dredge**, Head of Paintings Conservation, Art Gallery of NSW
- **Patrick Jourdan** – former director of the Morlaix Museum in Brittany
- **Nienke Bakker** – curator of van Gogh's art at the Van Gogh museum
- **Giselle Borgnis Desbordes** – 72-year-old resident of Belle-Île who has lived on the island all her life and knows family stories about the Russell family.



Above: Tom Roberts, *Shearing the Rams* 1888–90, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

* HOME AND AWAY

- How and why did Russell's friend and contemporary artist Tom Roberts become a successful and sought after painter in Australia while Russell remained a 'lost impressionist' for so many years?
- What are the most obvious characteristics of Roberts' work and that of other members of Australia's Heidelberg School of artists? Does their work generally have the same impressionistic sweep and energetic brushwork of the French Impressionists and Russell?
- What was the developing mood in Australia in the years leading up to Federation?
- How might Roberts' success be a product of the national mood in the latter part of the nineteenth century?
- What strong appeal does the work of an artist have who paints themes that are of subjects familiar to people, e.g. Nolan's Ned Kelly series and Brett Whiteley's works of places around Sydney Harbour?
- How true is it that a painter can only be moved by what he knows?
- How might the much greater ease of travel to other countries (tourism) and mass communications have tended towards art becoming more accessible to a global audience?
- Are you aware of any distinctively French, Italian, American or Australian art styles in the twenty-first century, apart from the highly distinctive and recognisable Australian Indigenous art?



* ART AND ARTISTS, FAME AND FORTUNE

- What does it mean to be a successful artist?
- How important is public and critical recognition?
- Does bringing great sums of money at public auctions indicate much about the individual quality of an artwork?

Discuss the questions below drawing on your own prior knowledge and what you learn from this film.

- How does an artist become well-known, popular and their work admired and sought after?
- What are some of the qualities that attract us to paintings?
- What makes the work of one artist sought after and valued and another artist's work lesser-known and rarely exhibited?
- Is it possible for most visual artists to make a reasonable living through their work?
- What factors can help an artist's work become sought after and highly valued?
- What part do you think originality plays in an artist's success?
- What part do you think luck, promotion and having a patron or powerful supporter or just being in the right place at the right time might play in an artist's work entering into the public consciousness?
- Does entering works in art prizes such as The Archibald, the Wynne, the Sulman, the Blake prizes or other competitions where works are exhibited and later available for sale provide an opportunity to have your work 'out there'?
- Several artists including Andy Warhol and Banksy sell a licence to use some of their images to clothing companies such as Uniqlo. Is this a legitimate outlet for an

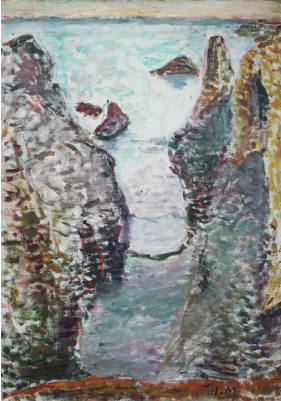
artist to use? How 'famous' would you need to be to secure such a deal?

- What criteria are applied to artworks that become popular and are much sought after by art lovers and investors, e.g. how were Vincent van Gogh's artworks regarded and valued in his lifetime?
- Many greatly admired artists, including van Gogh, struggled to make a living from their artworks during their lifetime. Now their works sell for enormous sums of money and are coveted as investments. Investigate how and why several of these artists – Manet, El Greco, Gauguin, Cezanne, Vermeer, Sisley, Seurat, Toulouse Lautrec and even Monet in his early years – struggled to have their work accepted in their lifetime. Consider whether having a smaller output as in the case of Vermeer and van Gogh affects valuations. Choose three artists to investigate and share your research results.
- Without online platforms, the opportunity to see photographs and the limits on world travel, how did artists in the past develop a public profile, an audience and buyers for their work? In what sense might originality and bold experimentation be initial detriments to artists achieving recognition and even a living?
- How do artists today sell and exhibit their work? Who buys contemporary artworks today, such as video installations and collections of photographs?
- What occupations that provide a living wage may be chosen by artists today, whether they are visual artists, writers and/or musicians?
- Is being financially secure a prerequisite to achieving success and recognition as an artist?
- What ongoing costs are part of being an artist?
- How important is it for an artist to have a wife/partner/muse/confidante who can keep the domestic world of house and family running as the artist pursues his or her goals?
- How many other John Russells, artists on the margins of the mainstream, might be waiting to be discovered and admired? How might their work, if it still exists, be discovered and assessed?



From top: Vincent van Gogh, *Self-portrait with damaged ear* 1889, Courtauld Gallery, London; Claude Monet, *Port-Domois, Belle-Ile* 1887, Yale University Art Gallery

L-R: Henri Matisse, *Cliff tops, Belle-Ile* 1897 Nock Art Foundation, Hong Kong Succession Matisse/ Copyright Agency, 2018; John Russell, *Morning, Cruach en Mahr, Belle-Ile-en-Mer* c1905, John Richardson collection, courtesy of Nevill Keating Pictures, London



Evaluation and Appreciation

As with any work of art, whether music, visual arts or literature, we all tend to have different tastes and interests and what one person really likes, another may not like at all. However, it is always easier to make choices when you are at least a bit knowledgeable about the work and the artist.

Share your ideas about Impressionism, Russell's body of work and the approach to resurrecting his story and pictures by the filmmakers.

- What did you learn from this documentary about French Impressionism as a style of painting?
- Why do you think it is so popular all over the world when galleries mount exhibitions of Impressionist art?
- If you could loan one of Russell's paintings for a few months, as Canberra politicians are able to do in their offices, which of the works shown in this documentary would you choose to have on your wall – a portrait, a landscape, figures in a landscape, drawings? Explain your choice.
- What do you think John Russell should be honoured and remembered for as part of Australia's story of art? What is the most important part of his legacy or is he, as some critics have said, 'A Master in the Margins of History'?
- Which of his works shown in the documentary did you most like? If an exhibition of John Russell's work were to come to a gallery near where you live, would you go and see the pictures? (The current exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales runs until November 11, 2018.)
- How well do the filmmakers engage you as a viewer in the way they fill in the pieces of the Peter Russell puzzle in art history, e.g. how important is it that they visited the places where he lived and worked?
- Sarah Turnbull, an author who is currently working on a book about the life of John Peter Russell where she is exploring notions of belonging, home and what it means to be Australian, says of Russell: *His story has everything. It's got the fabulous handsome hero, it's a remarkable creative journey. There's the love affair with Marianna ... There are the exotic places, Paris and Belle Île, and then there's tragedy. It's gripping and compelling.*
- If you were able to purchase the creative rights to this story, would you choose to make a feature film or a miniseries for television? How many one-hour episodes would you need to tell the story in all its colour and complexity?
- Think about who you would cast in the central roles and where you would like to film the story.
- Develop a pitch for a production company outlining how you are proposing to present the story. What will be the key episodes in the story? What will create dramatic tension and anticipation for an audience?

The Filmmakers

Catherine Hunter has made many films about artists and architects over the past twelve years since she left her position as an arts journalist on Channel 9's Sunday program where she worked from 1985 to 2006. Bruce Inglis has worked with her on these documentaries as cinematographer and editor. The documentaries include *Glenn Murcutt – Spirit of Place* (2017), *Trent Parke: The Black Rose* (2015), *A Law Unto Himself – Roger Law* (2012), *Margaret Olley: A life in Paint* (2012), *Jenny Sages: Paths to Portraiture* (2012) and *Inland Heart: The Photography of Jeff Carter* (2012).

Crew	
Director	Catherine Hunter
Cinematographer and Editor	Bruce Inglis
Voice of John Russell	Hugo Weaving
Voice of Vincent van Gogh	Dudley Hogarth
Composer	David Bridie
Producers	Catherine Hunter, Erica Drew
ABC Executive Producer	Kalita Corrigan

References and Resources

- An introduction to the Impressionist movement
<https://www.theartstory.org/movement-impressionism.htm>
- An essay by Anne Galbally and Robyn Sloggett that describes Russell's approach to colour in the National Gallery Magazine No.37
<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/john-peter-russells-dr-will-maloney/>
- An essay outlining the NSW State Gallery 2018 retrospective of Russell's work.
<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/media-office/john-russell/>
- Sarah Turnbull's account of her first seeing Russell's work at the Musée de Morlaix in France
<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/john-russell-van-gogh-s-little-known-aussie-impressionist-mate-20180710-p4zqkq.html>
- John McDonald, Sydney Morning Herald's reviewer on the recent retrospective exhibition of Russell's work at The Art Gallery of NSW
<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/visual-art-review-australias-only-genuine-impressionist-john-russell-in-focus-20180806-h13lt9.html>
- John Russell in pictures
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2018/jul/23/john-russell-an-australian-impressionist-in-france-in-pictures/>
- Anne Galbally, *The Art of John Peter Russell*, Melbourne 1977
- Marguerite O'Hara
15/10/2018

Endnotes

- 1 http://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/Australian_Curriculum_The_Arts_2_July_2013.pdf
- 2 Design & Art Australia Online, <https://www.daa.org.au/bio/john-peter-russell/biography/>, accessed



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