

Cowen Gallery Labels

November 2023



Laurence William WILSON

(c. 1851-1912)

Melbourne 1905

Oil on canvas

Purchased with funds from the Samuel E. Wills bequest, 1975

Conservation Treatment undertaken in 2022-3 with the generous support of the Marquill Foundation and the Vera Moore Foundation

H36538

Depictions of Melbourne from the southern bank of the Yarra River have been popular with artists since the city's founding. The views by Reinhold Hofmann and Ludwig Becker, to the left, are examples of this. Wilson's view illustrates the scale of urban development that took place in less than 100 years. Wilson studied art in England before migrating to New Zealand in the 1870s. He travelled to Melbourne in 1904 to undertake this commissioned painting.

Henry BURN

(1807-1884)

Melbourne from Wellington Parade, East Melbourne, Looking North-West 1872

Oil on canvas

H8380

This view of East Melbourne, looking west towards the city, is suffused with evening light. A shepherd herds sheep to graze in parklands adjacent to the Melbourne Cricket Ground and a horse-drawn omnibus makes its way past the then-fenced Fitzroy Gardens. Henry Burn was skilled at producing topographical views. The most prominent city building is the tower of the Independent Church (now St Michael's) in Collins Street, designed by architect Joseph Reed and completed in 1867.

Agnes Grant McDONALD

(1867–1941)

Robert Hoddle, First Surveyor General of Victoria c. 1885–90

Oil on canvas

Gift of Miss Frances Hoddle-Wrigley, 1967

H30830

Robert Hoddle (1794–1881) surveyed areas of New South Wales and Queensland before travelling to Port Phillip with Governor Sir Richard Bourke in March 1837. He took over from surveyor Robert Russell, and it is thought Hoddle drew his outline of the township over a detailed topographic map prepared by his predecessor. Hoddle's grid was large in scale, with wide streets, but ignored the physical terrain, so streets such as Elizabeth Street, which lay on a natural waterway, were prone to flooding.

Alice Julie PANTON

(1863–1960)

***Mr Robert Russell* 1889**

Oil on canvas

H141893

Robert Russell (1808–1900) was appointed surveyor of the newly established Port Phillip District in 1836. His initial surveys in Werribee and Geelong were not considered accurate and so Robert Hoddle superseded him when he was appointed surveyor-in-charge in 1837. From this time, Russell's government career was fraught; his position as clerk of works, with responsibility for architecture, ended in 1839. Russell had trained and worked as an architect in Edinburgh and London before arriving in Sydney in 1833.

Ludwig BECKER

(1808–1861)

Old Prince's Bridge and St Paul's by Moonlight 1857

Oil on canvas

Bequest of Mrs Sarah Leage, 1894

Conservation treatment undertaken in 2020, made possible with the generous support of the Marquill Foundation

H287

In the 1850s, money generated by the discovery of gold saw the rapid transformation of the city. Ludwig Becker's depiction of Swanston Street from Princes Bridge gives prominence to the city's newly installed gas lamps. Becker is best remembered for the superb watercolours he produced in 1860–61, during Robert O'Hara Burke and William John Wills' attempt to cross the continent. The expedition was a failure and Becker, the party's scientific observer, died eight months into the journey from exhaustion and dysentery.

William STRUTT

(1825-1915)

***Mrs J.P. Fawkner* 1856**

Oil on canvas

H32037

Eliza Cobb (1801–79) was transported to Van Diemen's Land in 1818 for 'feloniously and maliciously' kidnapping a baby. When ships arrived carrying women, men rushed the docks in order to choose a wife. Eliza was John Pascoe Fawkner's second choice, but she proved invaluable in business and civic ventures. Together they established a bakery, a timber business, a bookshop, newspapers, a nursery, an orchard and a hotel. John described Eliza as his 'guardian angel and true friend'.

William STRUTT

(1825–1915)

J.P. Fawkner, Esq., MLC 1863

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mr Norman Newcombe, 1952

H15375

The son of a convict, John Pascoe Fawkner (1792–1869) arrived at the ill-fated settlement at Sorrento in 1803, before being transported to Van Diemen’s Land (now Tasmania). In 1835, he sailed to Port Phillip, arriving shortly after the party of George Evans. Fawkner became a leading figure in the social and political life of the colony, establishing a hotel, publishing Melbourne’s first newspaper, the *Melbourne Advertiser*, and serving as a member of the Victorian Legislative Council for 18 years.

Reinhold HOFMANN

(Dates unknown)

Melbourne 1836 c. 1886

Oil on cotton canvas

Gift of the Public Library Society, Melbourne, 1957

H17707

In 1836, the settlement at Port Phillip was little more than a cluster of crude buildings and tents. Ships travelled up the Yarra River as far as 'The Falls', a natural rock formation, and were moored directly to the bank. The river broadened here, enabling vessels to turn. A key identifies some of the buildings and dwellings of the day, including the residences of John Batman and Captain William Lonsdale, and the tent of surveyor William Wedge Darke.

Jan SENBERGS

(Born 1939)

***Melbourne* 1998–1999**

Acrylic on canvas

Gift of the Gualtiero Vaccari Foundation in recognition of services provided by State Library Victoria to the Italian community, 1999

H99.151

Jan Senbergs was born in Latvia and moved to Melbourne in 1950, following World War II. Melbourne was invigorated by the arrival of highly talented and creative émigrés, who contributed to the profound social and cultural change. The city in Senbergs' painting is presented as a labyrinthine metropolis. Amid the density, familiar landmarks emerge: the train line hugging the Yarra, the Arts Centre spire and the Rialto Towers – Australia's tallest building at the time of its opening in 1986.

Fred WILLIAMS

(1927-1982)

***West Gate Bridge Under Construction I* 6 March 1974**

Oil on canvas

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by
Lyn Williams, 2010

H2010.186/1

Fred WILLIAMS

(1927-1982)

West Gate Bridge Under Construction II 6 March 1974

Oil on canvas

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by
Lyn Williams, 2010

H2010.186/2

Fred Williams is one of Australia's most significant landscape painters. These works are unusual in his oeuvre, as he rarely painted urban views or the built environment. Williams first started sketching the West Gate Bridge in 1970, but stopped after the collapse of a span in October that year, killing 35 workers. In 1974, two years after construction resumed, Williams returned and painted these works en plein air from the deck of a moored ferry.

Inside the Chinese shopfronts

These photographs, shared by Dr Wes Jame OAM, give us a rare glimpse inside the Lilly Buk shops and the lives lived within them.

For Dr Jame and his family, Thake's two works titled Chinese shop, Lt. Bourke Street (Lilly Buk) are more than paintings; they are genealogical bridges between the doctor and his grandfather.

My maternal grandfather, William Hoey Gin, emigrated from Guangdong, China, in the 1890s and leased the two shops in Little Bourke Street, stocking fancy goods such as ivory, silks, and Chinese goods and furniture. From family recollection, via one of my uncle's letters, William would always find an excuse to visit the herbalist across the road. The herbalist soon realised, William wasn't after remedies but was actually interested in his Sydney-born daughter, Choy Yuk Lum. After a few years' courtship, they married in 1905.

Dr Jame's grandparents eventually moved from the Lilly Buk shops to a house they built at the periphery of metropolitan Melbourne, now called Toorak. They had 12 children, creating a flourishing family line despite colonial measures, such as the White Australia policy (1901–73), intended to suppress non-Anglo-Saxon peoples.

My mother, a legal secretary and keen photographer, was glamorous; in the photograph you can see her lovely dress. My father, a professional photographer, graduated from the first RMIT photography course, one of a handful, then progressed to pictorial editor, then editor, of the Radio Times.

Eric Prentice Anchor THAKE

(1904-1982)

***Chinese Shop, Lt. Bourke Street* 1942**

Oil on enamel board

Purchased with the assistance of the State Library Victoria Foundation, 2006
H2006.146/2

Following the gold rush, many Chinese prospectors returned to Melbourne and opened stores on Little Bourke Street, importing Chinese goods. Eric Thake was fascinated by the way in which the past could survive into the present. These two shopfronts illustrate his eye for colour, design and typography, honed in his work as a commercial artist. Thake is best known for his prints, drawings and bookplates; his paintings are comparatively few. Influenced by the surrealist movement, Thake's works are often injected with wry humour.

Arthur Thomas CHALLEN

(1911-1964)

Moira Madden 1937

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs S.M. Challen, 1966

H28383

Moira Frances Madden (1915–73) epitomises the glamour of the 1930s, with her red lipstick, painted nails, bob haircut and fur stole. Her personal style is informed as much by trends in modern art as fashion. Madden is seated in front of a fabric panel by the progressive textile designer Frances Burke. In 1938, Madden married Albert Hallenstein, a brother of modernist painter Lina Bryans. This portrait was exhibited in Arthur Challen's first solo exhibition.

Jessie Constance Alicia TRAILL

(1881–1967)

Market Street 1911–14

Oil on canvas

Bequest of the artist, 1968

H30880

This evocative painting takes in the view from Jessie Traill's studio, at the original Temple Court building in Collins Street. Looking down Market Street towards Flinders Street, where a steam train crosses the railway viaduct, it shows Traill's interest in modernity and industrial subjects that would later define her work. In December 1914, Traill left Australia to join the war effort, serving at a military hospital in France. Following the war, Traill became one of Australia's most influential and progressive printmakers.

Sybil CRAIG

(1901–1989)

Connie with a Red Rose c. 1928

Oil on canvas on composition board

H94.101

This portrait of Constance Stokes (1906–91) is one of a number of sketches that Sybil Craig made of fellow students at the National Gallery School of Art during the late 1920s. Many women were taught painting at the school (which was housed on this site), under the longstanding directorship of Bernard Hall. Stokes won the school's prestigious travelling scholarship in 1929, which allowed her to complete her training in London and Paris.

Clarice BECKETT

(1887-1935)

Evening c. 1923

Oil on board

Purchased with the assistance of the Vera Moore Foundation, 2022

H2022.184

Clarice Beckett's paintings draw on her immediate environment; the bayside suburb of Beaumaris where she lived with her parents, and the city streets of Melbourne. Working with a restricted pallet, her paintings are small in scale and understated. This painting depicts Beach Road in Beaumaris, which was close to the Beckett's family home. Beckett was a student of the Tonalist painter Max Meldrum, and exhibited throughout the 1920s and 30s, until her death from pneumonia at the age of 48.

Unknown artist

Wharves near Spencer Street c. 1910

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs Alma Mitchell, 1993

H97.20

Melbourne's first wharves, located on the northern bank of the Yarra River, were in operation from 1842. As Melbourne's population grew, so too did demand for expansion of its port facilities. This painting shows passengers disembarking one of the Union Steamship Company's vessels, the SS Loongana or the SS Maheno. Both were in service from 1905. In the foreground, the railway viaduct connects Flinders Street and Spencer Street stations, and the suburb of South Melbourne spreads out beyond.

Jacques François CARABAIN

(1834-c. 1927)

Melbourne Town Hall and Swanston Street 1889

Oil on canvas

H15967

This painting conveys the confidence and grandeur of post-gold rush Melbourne. In 1867, Reed & Barnes won the competition to design a larger and more splendid town hall. Situated on the corner of Collins and Swanston Streets, the building was opened in 1870. Jacques Carabain, a landscape and topographical painter from Amsterdam, was visiting Australia on a year-long stay when he executed this work, which shows the town hall's newly added portico.

Ugo CATANI

(1861–1895)

Collins Street, Rainy Weather c. 1885–86

Oil on canvas

Purchased with funds from the Tristan Buesst bequest, 1972

Conservation treatment undertaken in 2021, made possible with the generous support of the Marquill Foundation

H35210

The centre point of this painting is the colossal Burke and Wills monument by Charles Summers (1825–78). The sculpture was designed and skilfully cast in bronze at Summers' studio. It was positioned in the middle of the intersection of Collins and Russell Streets in 1865, but had to be relocated following installation of the cable tramway along Collins Street in 1886. Ugo Catani studied painting in Florence, arriving in Melbourne in 1885. He quickly established himself in local artistic circles.

Samuel Salkeld KNIGHTS

(1818-1880)

Toryboy, Winner of the Melbourne Cup 1865

Oil on canvas on board

H6705

Horseracing was introduced to the Australian colonies soon after European settlement. In 1861, the Melbourne Cup, a two-mile handicap race conceived by the Victoria Turf Club, was held at Flemington Racecourse. Samuel Knights, a skilled painter of horses and livestock, depicts the parading prior to the start of the fifth Melbourne Cup, with Toryboy, the 'dangerous grey', following race favourite Panic. The race was an upset when Toryboy snatched the win, equalling the previous record of 3.44 minutes.

Thomas CLARK

(1814-1883)

Kenney's Baths, St Kilda c. 1854

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Blake family, 2009

H2009.165

Since the 1850s, St Kilda has been a popular destination for day-trippers, who flock to the beaches and amusements along the foreshore. In 1854, Captain William Kenney purchased a condemned Swedish whaling brig, the *Nancy*, and scuttled her off St Kilda Pier. She was converted into a bathing ship, the hull ballasted with sand and flooded to make an enclosure for swimming. Kenney's 'Bathing Ship for Gentlemen' afforded swimmers privacy and refuge from marine life.

Eugène VON GUÉRARD

(1811-1901)

Head of the Mitta Mitta, Eagle's View of the Mountains 1879

Oil on millboard

Gift of Tristan Buesst, 1967

H30578

Considered one of the most important landscape painters of the 19th century, Eugène von Guérard sought to express the awe-inspiring beauty of the Australian landscape in the German romantic tradition. He was praised by his contemporaries for his faithful renditions of botany and geology. This work depicting the head of the Mitta Mitta River, near Omeo in eastern Victoria, looks towards Mount Wills, named after the explorer William John Wills of the ill-fated Victorian Exploring Expedition.

Eugène VON GUÉRARD

(1811-1901)

Plenty Ranges from East Melbourne c. 1862

Oil on paper on composition board

H1602

This view is painted from the artist's own residence. Little Parndon in Gipps Street, East Melbourne, was built for Eugène von Guérard in 1862. While there were other buildings in East Melbourne at this time, the vantage point suggests von Guérard enjoyed uninterrupted views to the north. Little Parndon was constructed as a two-storey residence, but in 1866 a third storey was added, with a tower room serving as his studio. Von Guérard occupied the house until his return to Europe in 1882.

Eugène VON GUÉRARD

(1811-1901)

Dr Howitt's Corner, Dandenong Ranges 21 May 1862

Oil on paper on composition board

H1601

Behind this high brick fence is the garden of Dr Godfrey Howitt (1800–73), a physician and natural scientist. In 1839, Howitt arrived with his family in Melbourne, and, like Lieutenant Governor La Trobe, brought a prefabricated house with him. In 1845, he acquired land at the corner of Collins and Spring Streets, where he erected his home and cultivated a large garden. This view takes in the Treasury Reserve, a smattering of buildings in East Melbourne and, in the background, the Dandenong Ranges.

Henry SHORT

(1807-1865)

Our Adopted Country. To the Memory of the Lamented Heroes of the Victorian Exploration, 1861 1861

Oil on canvas

Purchased with the assistance of the Helen H. Schutt trust and the Friends of State Library Victoria, 1986

H86.106

The discovery of the bodies of Burke and Wills provoked an outpouring of grief, and artists were quick to capitalise on public sentiment. Henry Short's skill for painting still-life arrangements of flowers and fruit is used in this memorial to the explorers. A silver vase features miniature portraits of Burke, Wills and Charles Gray. The symbolism of the flowers, while obscure today, would have appealed to a contemporary Victorian audience.

Abram-Louis BUVELOT

(1814-1888)

Terrinallum Homestead 1869

Oil on canvas

Gift of Miss Nesta McKellar, 1941

H82.130

In 1857, squatter John Cumming (1830–1901) acquired the large pastoral property Terrinallum, near Darlington in the Western District, from the Clyde Company. Cumming commissioned a painting of the landscape by Swiss-born Abram-Louis Buvelot. Painted following years of drought, the work was met with scepticism when it was exhibited at the Public Library exhibition of 1869. The *Daily Telegraph* wrote: ‘... emerald green is laid on to an extent calculated to drive any drought-persecuted squatter who pauses to gaze upon it, mad with envy ...’

Wilhelm August Rudolf LEHMANN

(1819-1905)

***Mr George Russell* 1852**

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Estate of Mrs Janet Biddlecombe, 1954

H31205

Scotsman George Russell (1812–88) migrated to Tasmania in 1831 to join his half-brother. He arrived at Port Phillip in 1836 and managed the concerns of the newly formed Clyde Company, which established vast pastoral runs in Victoria's Western District. In 1842, Russell moved his headquarters to Golf Hill, later extending the company's holdings to take in the Terrinallum estate. When the Clyde assets were dissolved in 1857, Russell purchased Golf Hill, while Terrinallum was sold to squatter John Cumming.

Wilhelm August Rudolf LEHMANN

(1819-1905)

Euphemia Leslie Carstairs 1852

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Estate of Mrs Janet Biddlecombe, 1954

H31204

This pendant portrait was painted in London in the year Euphemia Leslie Carstairs (1829–67) married her first cousin George Russell. Euphemia followed her husband from Scotland to Australia, settling at the family estate of Golf Hill. These portraits formed part of the Golf Hill bequest, presented to the trustees of the Public Library in 1954, following the death of Euphemia and George's youngest daughter, Janet Biddlecombe. The bequest included family papers, furniture from the homestead and John Glover's painting *Constitution Hill at Sunset*.

John GLOVER

(1767-1849)

Constitution Hill at Sunset 1840

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Estate of Mrs Janet Biddlecombe, 1954

Conservation treatment undertaken in 2019, with the generous support of the Marquill Foundation

H31203

This painting hung in the dining room of George and Euphemia Russell's homestead, Golf Hill. It came into the possession of George Russell via his brother, the Reverend Robert Russell, who was a friend of Glover's and executor of his estate. The work depicts Constitution Hill, north of Hobart, and demonstrates John Glover's exceptional talent for depicting nature. Glover had a successful career in England before following his sons to Tasmania in 1831, at the age of 64.

Matthew William WEBB

(1851-1924)

Janet Russell 1890

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs Robina Lockyer, 1980

H87.216

The Russell family established one of the earliest pastoral settlements in Victoria. Janet was the youngest of George and Euphemia Russell's eight children. In 1898, she inherited the family estate Golf Hill, in Shelford, Victoria, from her only brother, Philip. With her husband, Commander John Biddlecombe, they managed the property as a Hereford stud. Janet visited the United Kingdom in 1900, the year of her marriage. This portrait was painted by Matthew Webb, a studio assistant to the acclaimed Pre-Raphaelite artist and designer Edward Burne-Jones.

Henry GRITTEN

(1818-1873)

Jackson's Creek, Sunbury 1867

Oil on canvas

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Barbara Tucker, 2004

Conservation treatment undertaken in 2018, made possible with the generous support of the Marquill Foundation

H2004.69

Henry Gritten often repeated his most popular works with minor variations. At least three versions of this painting are known, the earliest, from 1866 (now held by the National Gallery of Victoria), was exhibited at the Intercolonial Exhibition. It was one of the first paintings to come into the collection of the art museum, once housed on this site. Gritten, who suffered from poor health, would have found Sunbury ideal for painting, suited to his picturesque style and accessible by train from 1862.

William STRUTT

(1825-1915)

Black Thursday, February 6th, 1851 1864

Oil on canvas

H28049

This epic narrative painting depicts the devastating fire of 1851, which threatened to consume Victoria. After returning to England, Strutt worked for three years on this painting, referring to his copious notes and several sketches made in the aftermath of the fire. The painting failed to find a buyer and remained in his studio for 20 years before it was shipped to Australia. It eventually sold to an Adelaide buyer, before being purchased by the Public Library of Victoria in 1954.

Strutt records the devastating fire of 6 February 1851 in his journal:

I can never forget the morning of that scorching Thursday, ever after memorable in the annals of the Colony as "Black Thursday" ... the sun looked red all day, almost as blood, and the sky the colour of mahogany. We felt in town that something terrible (with the immense volumes of smoke) must be going on up country and sure enough messenger after messenger came flocking in with tales of distress and horror.

Juan DAVILA

(Born 1946)

Churchill National Park 2009

Oil on canvas

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2013
H2014.1048

In 2009, Victoria experienced the worst bushfires in Australia's recorded history. In this painting, Chilean-born artist Juan Davila paints the aftermath of a bushfire in the Churchill National Park, which caused the devastating loss of lives, homes and vegetation. The fire was deliberately lit, and a discarded can and the shadow of a figure in the foreground suggest the hostile relationship that can exist between man and environment.

Molly TJAMI

(Born 1944)

***Waru* 2009**

Acrylic on linen

Gift of Arturo and Annemarie Gandioli-Fumagalli, 2011

H2011.192

Victoria is one of the most fire-prone places on Earth, due in part to a potent combination of highly flammable eucalyptus trees and extreme weather conditions. Molly Tjami says of this painting: *I have painted a bush fire that is burning our land. When I painted this painting I was thinking about the Victoria bush fires in February 2009. I was sad when hearing about all the people who had lost their houses and people that had died or been hurt by these fires.*

Unknown artist

William Buckley c. 1890–1910

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Friends of the La Trobe Library, 1967

H30879

In October 1803, a British party carrying around 470 convicts, soldiers and free settlers landed at Sullivan Cove, near Sorrento, on the lands of the Bunurong people. After enduring a fierce summer and poor water supplies, they abandoned the settlement and relocated to Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania). Convict William Buckley (1780–1856) escaped custody at the settlement and lived with the Wathaurung people on the Bellarine Peninsula for more than 30 years.

Thomas ROBERTSON

(1819-1873)

Marco Polo 1859

Oil on canvas

H306

Heralded as 'the fastest ship in the world', *Marco Polo* astonished mercantile traders when, in 1852, it made the trip from Liverpool to Melbourne in a record 68 days. Despite the acclamations, the journey was gruelling, especially for those in steerage class, with 50 of the 327 children on board dying from a measles epidemic. The Black Ball Line had refitted the Canadian-built clipper ship to capitalise on emigration; from 1852 to 1867 she carried nearly 15,000 passengers eager to escape poverty and try their luck on the Victorian goldfields.

Henry SHORT

(1807-1865)

Robert Hoddle Dec. 1845 Near the Source of the Yarra Yarra River, Starvation Creek 1860

Oil on canvas

Purchased with the assistance of the State Library Victoria Foundation, 2002
Conservation treatment undertaken in 2023, made possible with the generous support of the Marquill Foundation
H2002.119

Fresh water played a critical role in the location of a permanent settlement at Port Phillip. In the summer of 1844–45, Robert Hoddle (1794–1881) conducted a survey expedition through rugged terrain to find the source of the Yarra River. His party reached a tributary in the Upper Yarra region, which Hoddle named Starvation Creek because of a lack of stock feed. The location of the depicted scene is unknown; today there is no waterfall at the junction of the Yarra and Starvation Creek.

Unknown artist

Red Rock, Colac c. 1875

Oil on canvas

Gift of Colonel William St Leonard Robertson, 1940

H11609

This painting illustrates the geological landscape of Western Victoria. Formed approximately 8000 years ago, The Red Rock volcanic complex, near Colac, is one of the area's more recently active centres. Volcanic craters filled with water, producing the region's lakes. In the foreground is Lake Werowrap, which is fed by rainfall and often dries out during periods of drought. The vast saltwater expanse of Lake Corangamite, Australia's largest permanent lake, can be seen in the background.