

AUSTRALIAN IMPRESSIONISM PLACED CENTRE-STAGE AT SOTHEBY'S
AUSTRALIA'S FORTHCOMING AUCTION

Tom Roberts's *She-Oak and Sunlight* Emerges for Public Sale for the First Time
Since *The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition* in 1889

Study for Arthur Streeton's Renowned *Australia Felix* – Hanging in Art Gallery of
South Australia, Adelaide – Offered for Sale

Masterpiece by John Russell Presented to the Public for the First Time in Almost
50 Years



TOM ROBERTS 1856-1931
She-Oak and Sunlight (1889)
oil on wood, 30.5 x 30 cm
Estimate \$220,000–280,000

MELBOURNE, 13 November 2019 – On 20 November 2019, Sotheby's Australia will offer several exceptional works of Australian Impressionism, led by a trio of works from Australia's most cherished painters of the period – Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton and John Russell. Tom Roberts's celebrated masterpiece, *She-Oak and Sunlight* (1889) (lot 16, estimate \$220,000–280,000) leads the group and

was first seen by the public during the iconic *The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition* in Melbourne in 1889, before being acquired by one of Australia's first great art patrons Sir Walter Baldwin Spencer (1860-1929). Immediately following Roberts's *She-Oak and Sunlight* is Arthur Streeton's atmospheric *View from Mt. Toorong* 1907 – an exquisite study for his renowned landscape, *Australia Felix* (1907), which hangs in the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Closing the trio is *Maisons sur la Falaise (Le Chateau Anglais)* (1889) by John Russell. A shining example by Australia's most internationally revered Impressionist, the work represents the only known depiction by Russell of his home on the coast of France, where he painted alongside his friend and contemporary Claude Monet.

*Geoffrey Smith, Chairman of Sotheby's Australia commented: 'Sotheby's Australia is honoured to present this exceptional trio of works from Australia's most beloved generation of nineteenth century artists. Their collective vision and effort established a national artistic identity that not only inspired Australian painting for generations to come but also put Australia on the map in the eyes of the world's artistic community. Furthermore, we are especially delighted to present Tom Roberts's *She-Oak and Sunlight*, which has re-emerged for public sale for the first time in its one-hundred-and-twenty-year history.'*

TOM ROBERTS'S *SHE-OAK AND SUNLIGHT* (ILLUSTRATED ABOVE) – A CELEBRATED WORK FROM AUSTRALIA'S FIRST IMPRESSIONIST EXHIBITION

Tom Roberts's shimmering *She-Oak and Sunlight* (1889) was first seen by the public during the renowned *The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition* in Melbourne in 1889. Over the past century, beginning with Frank Gibson, R.H. Croll, William Moore and Arthur Streeton himself, local art historiography has elevated *The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition* to the status of 'a turning-point in the history of art in Australia.' (1)

Roberts presented a diverse range of subjects within *The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition*, that included landscapes, portraiture, and genre themes, and were priced from 1 guinea. *She-Oak and Sunlight*, larger than the standard '9 by 5' inch format and priced at 2 guineas, was one of the few works singled out for comment, 'No. 19, "Sheoak and Sunlight," by the same artist, is considered by those competent to judge to be a very strong bit of work, but the ignorant will find the sheoak rather too "germy." Its brown tinge shows up well against the golden tinge of the burnt-up grass.' (2)

Following *The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition*, *She-Oak and Sunlight* was acquired by one of Australia's most celebrated patrons, Sir Walter Baldwin Spencer (1860-1929). Since then, the panel has been cherished by Spencer's descendants and will make its auction debut at Sotheby's Australia.

The impact of *She-Oak and Sunlight* remains as remarkable today as it did to nineteenth-century observers one hundred and twenty years ago. This radical, inventive and intense composition celebrates the almost piercing light and heat found in the inland regions of the Australian countryside and remains an enduring symbol of Roberts's vision to create a distinct and national visual vocabulary for Australian landscape painting.

ARTHUR STREETON 1867-1943 *VIEW FROM MT. TOORONG (STUDY FOR AUSTRALIA FELIX) (1907)*

In early February 1907 Arthur Streeton stayed at the property of his friend and patron Carl Pinschoff, the Austrian Consul-General in Melbourne, at Mount Macedon in Victoria: 'I write to you from Pinschoff's place 3000 feet above sea level ... I've had a fine time up here, plenty of fresh-air, & lovely Victorian landscape pale symphonies in purple, blue & gold ... I've painted a large one 5 feet by 3 – & several smaller ones up here.' (3)



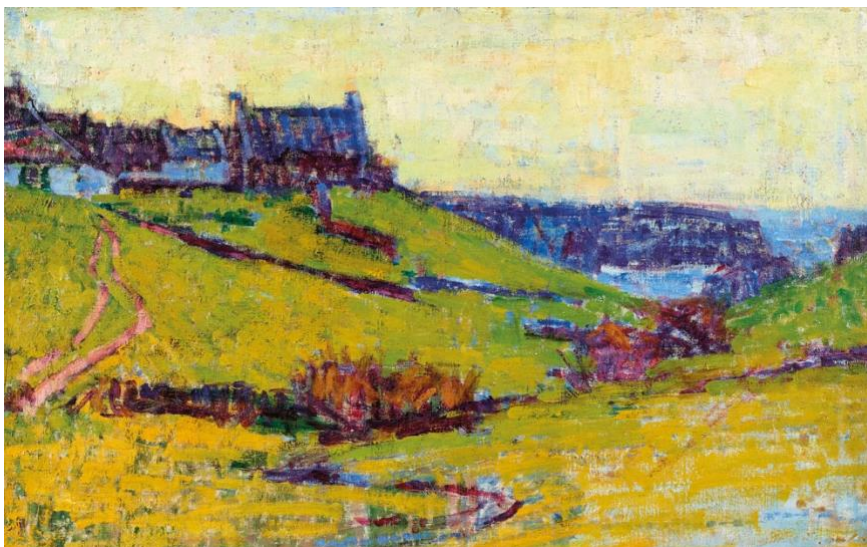
The most splendid of these compositions, *Australia Felix* (1907, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide) – for which the present work was a crucial study – was exhibited to great acclaim in Australia and overseas.

The title evokes Sir Thomas Mitchell's reference to the fertile country he saw from the heights of Mount Macedon as 'Australia Felix' – fortunate/happy Australia – during his explorations of what is now called Victoria in 1836. The present view from Mount Toorong (now usually spelled Towrong) is exquisite in its deft use of pigment and delicate tones to convey an impressionistic bird's-eye view of the distinct Australian panorama.

ARTHUR STREETON 1867-1943
View from Mt. Toorong (Study for Australia Felix) (1907)
oil on wood panel, 18.5 x 24.2 cm
Estimate \$40,000–60,000

'... pause must be made at the great canvas, "Australia Felix" (No. 13), a term first employed by the explorer Mitchell when near this very spot, looking from Mount Toorong towards Melbourne. This characteristic view shows the yellow plains and darkling bush, the pale blue streams and haze-like mantle of grey from distant bush fires, that strike the mind in contemplation of a vast stretch of country. The actuality of the tones, the idea of distance, and the fine treatment of the sky, with its suggestion of high wind on the far horizon, give value to this work.' ('Mr. Streeton's Exhibition', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, 18 July 1907, p. 3)

JOHN RUSSELL 1858-1930 *MAISONS SUR LA FALAISE (LE CHATEAU ANGLAIS)* (1889)



JOHN RUSSELL 1858-1930

Maisons sur la Falaise (Le Chateau Anglais) (1889)

oil on canvas, 38.4 x 61 cm

Estimate \$100,000–150,000

In strict art-historical and technical terms, Australia produced only one 'Impressionist' painter: John Russell.

Admirer and follower of Claude Monet, close friend and colleague of Vincent Van Gogh and Auguste Rodin, and mentor of a young Henri Matisse, Russell was in the thick of progressive painting practice in the 1880s and 1890s.

Following the lead of Monet (who painted

there in 1886), the island of Guézel or Belle-Île, off the coast of Brittany, became a favoured destination for artists seeking in nature the raw, wild brightness they also sought in the culture of Breton peasants. In actuality, Russell arrived a few months before Monet and, over a few weeks in September 1886, the two artists evidently established a friendly relationship, the notoriously solitary Monet even condescending to their making painting excursions together.

Testament to Russell's love of the 'côte sauvage', in 1888 he and his young family returned to the island and settled at Port-Goulphar, where they would remain until Russell's beloved wife Marianna died 20 years later. The present work, *Maisons sur la Falaise (Le Chateau Anglais)* (1889) – which dates from the same year as Roberts's *She-Oak and Sunlight* (1889) – is unique in Russell's *oeuvre* in its singular depiction of the Russell family home, which would become known as Château de Goulphar, or Château de l'Anglais.

Intimately personal in its subject, harmonious in its composition and thrilling in its colour, this previously un-illustrated (although recorded and exhibited) painting is a particularly fine and characteristic example of the work of Australia's 'lost impressionist.' (4)

- (1) See Frank Gibson, *Charles Conder: His Life and Work*, John Lane, The Bodley Head, London, 1914, pp. 33-35; William Moore, *The Story of Australian Art: From the Earliest Known Art of the Continent to the Art of Today*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1934, Vol. 1, pp. 74-75; R.H. Croll, *Tom Roberts: Father of Australian Landscape Painting*, Robertson & Mullens, Melbourne, 1935, pp. 24-25; Arthur Streeton, 'Eaglemont in the 'Eighties: Beginnings of Art in Australia', *The Argus*, Melbourne, 16 October 1934, 'Souvenir of a Century of Progress' supplement, p. 49
- (2) *The Evening Standard*, Melbourne, 17 August 1889, p. 1
- (3) Letter from Arthur Streeton to Theodore Fink, 16 March 1907, quoted in Ann Galbally and Anne Gray (eds), *Letters from Smike: The Letters of Arthur Streeton 1890-1943*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989, p. 104
- (4) Elizabeth Salter, *The Lost Impressionist: A Biography of John Peter Russell*, Angus and Robertson, London, 1976

AT A GLANCE

Lot 16

TOM ROBERTS 1856-1931

She-Oak and Sunlight (1889)

oil on wood

30.5 x 30 cm

Estimate: \$220,000–280,000

Lot 17

ARTHUR STREETON 1867-1943

View from Mt. Toorong (Study for Australia Felix) (1907)

oil on wood panel

18.5 x 24.2 cm

Estimate \$40,000–60,000

Lot 21

JOHN RUSSELL 1858-1930

Maisons sur la Falaise (Le Chateau Anglais) (1889)

oil on canvas

38.4 x 61 cm

Estimate \$100,000–150,000

Important Australian Art

Estimate: \$10,061,000–13,733,000, 79 lots

Auction in Sydney, 20 November 2019, 6.30 pm

InterContinental Sydney, 117 Macquarie Street, Sydney

Exhibition in Sydney, 14-20 November 2019, 10 am to 5 pm, 30 & 34 Queen Street, Woollahra

FOR MORE NEWS FROM SOTHEBY'S AUSTRALIA

News: www.sothebysaustalia.com.au/articles/press

Twitter: www.twitter.com/sothebysAUST

Facebook: www.facebook.com/sothebysaustalia

Please note all prices include buyer's premium. Sale session totals are net aggregate figures inclusive of premiums. Sotheby's Australia's buyer's premium is 22% of the hammer price. ** Estimates do not include buyer's premium**

Attention: Copyright in the image(s) supplied shall remain vested in Sotheby's Australia. Please note that image(s) may depict subject matter which is itself protected by separate copyright. Sotheby's Australia makes no representations as to whether the underlying subject matter is subject to its own copyright, or as to who might hold such copyright. It is the borrower's responsibility to obtain any relevant permissions from the holder(s) of any applicable copyright and Sotheby's Australia supplies the image(s) expressly subject to this responsibility. Note that the image(s) provided is/are for a one-time use only and no permission is granted to alter the image(s) in any way.

Images are available upon request

All catalogues are available online at sothebysaustalia.com.au