



Conservation report

Walter Withers *Moonrise on the Yarra* 1908

Supported by Geelong Conservation



Walter Withers
Moonrise on the Yarra 1908
oil on canvas
24.0h x 34.2w cm (sight)
39.5h x 49.8w x 6.5d cm (frame)
Geelong Gallery
Purchased 1910
Accession number: 1910.1
Photographed pre-treatment by George Stawicki

The conservation treatment of this painting and frame was the first project completed through the support of the fundraising group, Geelong Conservation.

This work was identified as a high priority for conservation ahead of its inclusion in the 2019 Geelong Gallery exhibition *The Moon*.

The companion work, *The steam ferry* (1907), had been conserved earlier so it was important to address the condition of this work as they are often exhibited as a pair.

Upon arriving in Australia in 1882, Withers worked as a farmhand on several country properties before moving to Melbourne to attend classes at the National Gallery. His work is associated with the Heidelberg School: a group of Australian painters who adopted the European approach of painting en plein air—directly within the scenery they depicted.

In his later years, Withers began to paint nautical scenes, capturing the shifting effects of light, water and atmosphere. This work's subject is unique in the context of Withers' largely pastoral oeuvre, its depiction of a busy trade and shipping port indicative of Melbourne's increasingly industrialised landscape.



Conservation report

Painting—pre-treatment assessment

Completed by conservator Sabine Cotte, April-May 2019

Support

The support is in good condition.

Paint layer

The surface is covered with a layer of grime, which has accumulated in the impastos and on the crests of paint. The composition is painted on top of a previous one, visible in the top corners through losses in the surface layer. Many micro losses scattered on the composition reveal this under-layer.



Detail: stains and under-layer visible, upper right corner
Photographer: Sabine Cotte



Detail: stains and under-layer visible, upper left corner
Photographer: Sabine Cotte



Detail: stains on impastos
Photographer: Sabine Cotte



Conservation report

Painting—treatment summary

Completed by conservator Sabine Cotte, April-May 2019

Cleaning

The surface was cleaned with cotton swabs and cleaning solution, then cleared with distilled water. The stains could be removed with the cotton swabs and with mechanical action (scalpel blade).

The surface is very textured with brushstrokes and impastos, contrasting with areas of thinner paint or visible support. An artist's fingerprint is visible along the upper edge.



Detail: during cleaning (left section cleaned)
Photographer: Sabine Cotte

Inpainting

After evaporation of solvents, the surface was varnished.

The small losses were filled with vinyl stucco Modostuc. In-painting was carried out with varnish based colours Maimeri for conservation.



Details: before inpainting
Photographer: Sabine Cotte



Detail: after treatment (upper right section)
Photographer: Sabine Cotte



Conservation report

Frame—pre-treatment assessment

Completed by conservator Louise Bradley, May 2019

Frame details

Exterior: 39.5 (h) x 49.8 (w) x 6.5 (d) cm

Sight: 24.0 (h) x 34.2 (w) cm

Rebate: 25.8 (h) x 36 x 1.1 (w) cm

Style: French Barbizon style frame cut from a running moulding

Frame maker: unknown,

Dates: c. 1908-10

Glazing: none

Frame description

Type of timber: possibly cedar

Hanging system: vertical D-rings on sides

Construction details: mitre joints secured with nails

Carved pressed or cast decoration: pressed compo ornament of scrolling foliate, with textured fillet at sight edge decorated with alternating leaf forms: three petal forms with concave oval holes on convex C, and fleur de lys type form on a concave C

Ground layer: gesso

Frame condition

Primary structure: sound

Alteration in size: it is possible, judging from the numerous holes in the frame verso, that this frame has been resized.

Carved or moulded decoration: sound

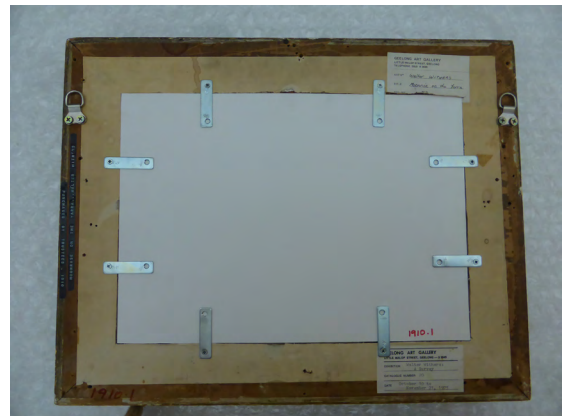
Ground layers: sound

Surface layers and coatings: most likely schlagmetal rather than gold leaf

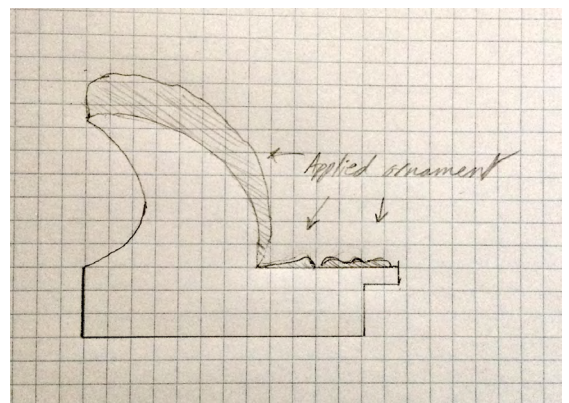
Previous conservation treatment or restoration: unknown



Frame: recto pre-treatment
Photographer: Louise Bradley



Frame: verso pre-treatment
Photographer: Louise Bradley



Frame profile drawing (5mm grid)
Louise Bradley



Conservation report

Frame—treatment summary

Completed by conservator Louise Bradley, May 2019

Summary

- Clean frame, remove residue with distilled water swabs
- Varnish
- Fill gaps at corners
- Tone fills and spots of discolouration with mica pigment
- Line contact area of frame with gummed paper, and poly felt tape
- Fit the painting with 3 mm acrylic backing board using original fitting plates



Frame: recto post-treatment
Photographer: Louise Bradley



Frame: verso post-treatment
Photographer: Louise Bradley



Conservation report

Frame and painting—post-treatment



Walter Withers

Moonrise on the Yarra 1908

oil on canvas

Geelong Gallery

Purchased 1910

This painting and frame were conserved with the support of Geelong Conservation

Photographed post-treatment

Photographer: Andrew Curtis

Please note: the pre- and post-treatment photographs were taken under different studio conditions.

Painting conservation

Sabine Cotte, April–May 2019

Frame conservation

Louise Bradley, May 2019