



## Frederick McCubbin— Whisperings in wattle boughs

2 October to 28 November  
Entry fees apply



Frederick McCubbin  
*A bush burial* 1890  
oil on canvas  
Geelong Gallery  
Purchased by public subscription, 1900  
Photographer: Andrew Curtis



Frederick McCubbin  
*Down on his luck* (detail) 1889  
oil on canvas  
Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth  
State Art Collection  
Purchased 1896

Geelong Gallery continues to celebrate its 125th anniversary with a program of exhibitions and events highlighting the institution's significant contribution to the life and culture of the region.

The centrepiece exhibition of the Gallery's anniversary is *Frederick McCubbin—Whisperings in wattle boughs*, opening on 4 September. **Due to lockdown disruptions, the exhibition will now open on 2 October and run until 28 November.** This exceptional exhibition celebrates the first major work to enter the Gallery collection in 1900: Frederick McCubbin's *A bush burial* (1890). That acquisition was made possible through public subscription, and this moment in the Gallery's and community's history will be marked by bringing *A bush burial* into close dialogue with a tightly focussed selection of other iconic McCubbin paintings, in which he redefines the Australian bush and the human subjects within it.

*Frederick McCubbin—Whisperings in wattle boughs* brings together three of McCubbin's key 'pioneer' subjects, *Down on his luck* (1889, Art Gallery of Western Australia), *A bush burial* and *The pioneer* (1904, National Gallery of Victoria); the first time these iconic works have been exhibited together in Geelong. The exhibition also includes significant works from public and private collections that reveal McCubbin's enduring fascination with the colour and nature of the bush.

The exhibition title acknowledges the inspiration McCubbin took from the poetry of Adam Lindsay Gordon (1833–1870), the unique beauty of the Australian bush and the rich stories that emerge from it (in the suggestive form of whisperings). The intimately-scaled painting, *Whisperings in wattle boughs* (1896, Private collection), is named after a work by the widely admired Australian poet, dating to around 1867. The poem's opening stanza reads:

Oh, gaily sings the bird! and the  
wattle-boughs are stirr'd  
And rustled by the scented breath  
of spring;  
Oh, the dreary wistful longing!  
Oh, the faces that are thronging!  
Oh, the voices that are vaguely  
whispering!

McCubbin was also inspired by real life events such as the disappearance of twelve-year-old Clara Crosby in 1885 who was lost in bushland in the Yarra Valley for three weeks and is thought to be the subject of McCubbin's painting of the following year, *Lost* (1886, National Gallery of Victoria). In exploring the narrative of the child in the bush, McCubbin posits the setting as one of potential danger, but also one of unencumbered exploration, mystery, wonder and magic, through works such as *Child in the bush* (1913, National Gallery of Australia), *What the little girl saw in the bush* (1904, Private collection), and *Bush idyll* (1893, Private collection).

Another aspect to this in-focus exhibition is the inclusion of portraits of one of the key subjects in McCubbin's enduring great narrative pictures, his wife Annie, the model for *A bush burial* and *The pioneer*. The captivating *Portrait* (1893, National Gallery of Victoria) is an essential representation of his muse. Similarly, the rarely publicly displayed *A fine day and a good breeze* (1907, Private collection) shows Annie in an outdoor setting depicted candidly undertaking household chores. A number of other family members and friends appear in exhibited works: for example, the artist's son Louis in *The wood sawyer* (c. 1905, Shepparton Art Museum), and friend Patrick Watson in *Bush sawyers* (1910, Private collection) who was also a model for *The pioneer*. These two sawyer-themed paintings expand on the grand pioneering narrative to focus in on the labouring activities that were essential to settling the land.



# Media Release

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Frederick McCubbin  
*Lost* 1886  
oil on canvas  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Felton Bequest, 1940  
Photo: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

The inclusion of Tom Roberts' *The artist camp* (1886, National Gallery of Victoria) presents McCubbin himself as subject: he and fellow artist Louis Abrahams were the models for this key work that reinforces the importance of the bush to this group of artists as a site of creativity and immersion (Abrahams is also the younger male subject in *A bush burial*, and the model for *Down on his luck*). These friendship and familial threads also extend to locations of personal significance for McCubbin that feature in his paintings including the Box Hill region (the setting for works such as *Lost* and *Down on his luck*) and the family property Fontainebleau near Mount Macedon (purchased in 1901) where *The pioneer* was set, along with later works such as *Afterglow (Summer evening)* (1912, National Gallery of Australia). The latter work is an example of another of the exhibition's sub-themes: that of the bush idyll, or the bush as a setting for creativity, inspiration and relaxation.

### Jason Smith Director and CEO

'The exhibition follows on from two of our recent Geelong-curated scholarly and highly successful ticketed exhibitions *Land of the Golden Fleece—Arthur Streeton in the Western Districts* and *Fred Williams in the You Yangs*. The exhibition celebrates a picture in the collection that has become a nationally beloved icon by one of Australia's most important and popular historical artists'.

### Lisa Sullivan Senior Curator

'From iconic nationalistic statements and intimate compositions that draw the viewer into the dense bush setting, to later works in which the subject becomes as much the dappled light effects within the bush as the landscape itself, *Frederick McCubbin—Whisperings in wattle boughs* presents a tightly focused thematic exploration of the Australian bush as a key subject in the artist's oeuvre, through paintings spanning almost three decades.'

### Exhibition entry fees

Adult \$16 | Concession \$12 | Member \$10  
Child \$7 | Groups over 10 \$14  
Companion card holder &  
Children under 5 free | Family \$40  
Senior's discount applies on  
Tuesdays only \$12

Dual entry to McCubbin & Archie 100—  
see website for details

### Exhume the grave— McCubbin and contemporary art

14 August to 28 November

Drawing largely from the Gallery's collection, the complementary exhibition *Exhume the grave—McCubbin and contemporary art* brings together works by artists who have—since the early 1980s—responded to McCubbin's key paintings. Juan Davila and Jill Orr to *A bush burial*, Polixeni Papapetrou to *Lost*, Robert Hague to *Down on his luck*, and Anne Zahalka to *The pioneer*.

Free entry

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### Exhibition partners



Indemnification for the exhibition is provided by the Victorian Government.



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