

Clarice Beckett

—Atmosphere

Clarice Beckett (1887–1935) is one of the most important Australian modernist painters of the 1920s and early 1930s, and her work is acclaimed and loved for its distinctive evocation of atmosphere and mood.

Beckett's work was lost to time and neglect from her death in 1935 to its rediscovery around 1970 and reintroduction to audiences, and its rightful repositioning in Australian art history.

Clarice Beckett—Atmosphere is the first major public gallery exhibition in Victoria of Beckett's painting since 1999 and it assembles 67 of Beckett's most thought-provoking and beautiful works dating from 1919 to the early 1930s. Numerous paintings borrowed from private collections have not been seen in public for decades. Serendipitously, this exhibition is occurring 100 years after Beckett's first solo exhibition at the Athenaeum Gallery, Melbourne, in 1923.

Our focus is on Beckett's extraordinary visual perception and her depiction of atmospheric effects and phenomena. Her works give painterly, material form to the ethereal and fleeting conditions of light and climate, and to moments in time as she saw and felt them on her local suburban streets, at the water's edge, and in the landscape. Beckett's special capacity to unite seeing with feeling resulted in mesmerising landscape images that reward considered, slow looking, and that trigger memory and recognition in ways that can be profoundly affecting.

That Beckett was a Melbourne-based Victorian artist who also worked for periods in the Geelong region—on the Surf Coast and in the Western District—has been a compelling local context for Geelong Gallery's survey.

Beckett articulated her artistic aims in the catalogue accompanying the *6th Annual Exhibition of the Twenty Melbourne Painters* in 1924:

To give a sincere and truthful representation of a portion of the beauty of Nature, and to show the charm of light and shade, which I try to give forth in correct tones so as to give as nearly as possible an exact illusion of reality.

Repeated subjects like cars, telegraph poles, empty winding roads, and shimmering reflections bordering on pure abstraction were radical subjects for her time. Nature and her immediate environment were Beckett's inspirations, and she returned again and again to familiar locations to capture them at different times and conditions.

Beckett sometimes included up to 80 paintings in each of the solo exhibitions she presented from 1923 to 1933, and it was her tendency to install her paintings grouped by subject or theme. In this exhibition we balance a chronological journey through Beckett's career with arrangements that reveal her unending fascination with atmospheric effects and place.