

Keys to the collection— Stories

Eugene von Guérard

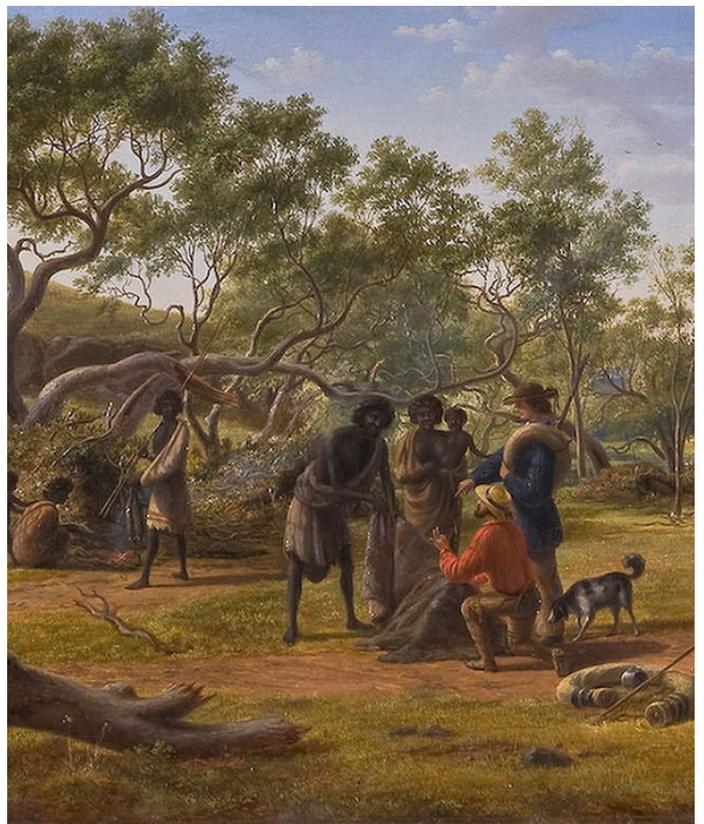
“Eugene von Guérard is arguably Australia’s, and certainly Victoria’s, most important colonial landscape painter.”

—Tony Ellwood, *Eugene von Guérard—Nature revealed*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria, 2011

Eugene von Guérard was born in November 1811 in Vienna and migrated to Australia in 1852 at the time of the Victorian gold rush. He is one of our most important colonial landscape painters.

He studied traditional landscape painting in Rome under Giovanni Battista Batti. In 1838 he studied at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art in Germany, where he was encouraged to paint directly from nature and was influenced by the poetic and expressive tradition of Dutch landscape painting. Von Guérard’s interest in the beauty, mystery and grandeur of nature has direct links to Romanticism. He was also influenced by the Nazarenes, a group that included a number of German artists who sought to return spiritual values to art. At the same time, developments in science informed von Guérard’s painting of the natural world and he was similarly attracted by the work of renowned scientist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859).

Lured to Australia by the gold rush, von Guérard tried his luck on the Ballarat goldfields. He painted in Australia from 1852 until 1882. Curiosity about the Australian countryside and its wilderness regions was nurtured by his extensive travels that in turn



were recorded in his prints and sketchbooks. In 1870 von Guérard was appointed the first master of painting at the art school at the National Gallery of Victoria. He was also made curator of the collections of the National Gallery of Victoria. He returned to Europe in 1882 and died in London in 1901.

Aborigines met on the road to the diggings—

On the road from Geelong to the Ballarat gold diggings, two miners barter with an aboriginal man for a possum-skin cloak. The men are dressed in the typical attire of a miner. In his diary, von Guérard described this scene in the Moorabool Valley, with the You Yangs visible in the background, as he passed through the countryside near Geelong. He frequently made sketches along the way, which were used to compose the finished painting. The painting illustrates an aspect of Aboriginal life at the time and that of early settlers in the region.

**Geelong
Gallery**

Victorian Curriculum level 7 to VCE
geelonggallery.org.au/learn

Eugene von Guérard
*Aborigines met on the road to
the diggings* (detail) 1854
oil on canvas
Collection: Geelong Gallery

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Eugene von Guérard

born Austria 1811;
arrived Australia 1852
departed Australia 1882;
died United Kingdom 1901

Aborigines met on the road to the diggings 1854
oil on canvas
46.0 x 75.5 cm
Collection: Geelong Gallery
Gift of W Max Bell and Norman Belcher, 1923

Question

Eugene von Guérard is considered a leading landscape painter in Australian art by describing the elements and principles/viewpoint. What are the characteristic features of his works?

How did von Guérard's interest in science and geography and his early training influence the style and manner of his paintings?

Research

Access the internet to research Eugene von Guérard's works and choose 2 paintings of the Geelong region. Write a paragraph on each, describing how the artist has used artistic elements and principles to create the compositions.

Activity

Re-draw the painting *Aborigines met on the road to the diggings* as the scene might be depicted today. As you re-contextualise the image, reflect on what features within the work have hardly changed in 125 years and on those that have changed dramatically. Your task is not only to record and think about the topographical features shown but also to record and interpret social history as depicted from a present day point of view. Think about visual hierarchy as you plan your artwork.