**Frederick McCubbin**

Frederick McCubbin, arguably one of Australia's most important painters, was born in Melbourne on 25th of February 1855 and died on 20th of December 1917. As a founding member of the Heidelberg School, McCubbin was at the forefront of one of the most influential movements in Australian art history.

The third of eight children born to his Scottish father, Alexander McCubbin and English mother Anne, McCubbin was educated at William Willmett's West Melbourne Common School and St Paul's School, Swanston Street. He enrolled at the Artisans' School of Design, Carlton in 1869 and later studied drawing under Thomas Clark at the School of Design, National Gallery of Victoria. The young artist worked as a solicitor's clerk, a coach painter and in his family's bakery business whilst studying art at the National Gallery of Victoria's School of Design. He met fellow student Tom Roberts and studied under Eugene von Guerard. McCubbin also studied at the Victorian Academy of the Arts where he exhibited in 1876 and again from 1879 to 1882, selling his first painting, *'View Near Fisherman's Bend'* in 1880. Following his father's death, McCubbin ran the family business. By the early 1880s, his work began to attract considerable attention, winning several prizes from the National Gallery, including a silver medal for figure drawing in 1882 and first prize in 1883 in their annual student exhibition.

By the mid-1880s McCubbin turned his focus to the Australian bush; crafting the evocative works for which he is most well known. When Tom Roberts returned from overseas in 1885, he and McCubbin went on painting trips, camping at Housten's farm at Box Hill, at Mentone on Port Phillip Bay and later in the Heidelberg area. Here they were joined by Arthur Streeton, Charles Conder and others. These first camps heralded the beginning of what came to be called the Heidelberg school. Known for his penchant for philosophising, McCubbin earned the nicknamed 'The Prof'. Passionate about the representation of the national element in the work of the school, McCubbin drew his inspiration both from the earlier traditions of colonial art and the growing sense of nationalism of the time.

As one of the founders of the Heidelberg school, McCubbin was a major figure in the development of the Australian school of landscape and subject painting that emerged at the close of the nineteenth century. His early interest in the portrayal of national life is evident in his large subject pictures of recent history which celebrated the virtues and quiet heroism of the pioneers. McCubbin was strongly influenced by the earlier traditions of Australian colonial art, late-Victorian subject pictures of a high moral tone, Folingsby's interests in heroic history pieces, and the young colony's emerging sense of national identity. Other influences included Louis Buvelot, Roberts and *plein air* realism, combined with the example of Bastien-Lepage and his humble peasants.

In 1886 McCubbin was appointed drawing Master of the School of Design at the National Gallery, a position he held for the rest of his life. Together with Roberts, John Ford Paterson and others, he broke away from the Victorian Academy of Art in 1887 to form the Australian Artists' Association. He participated in the association's exhibitions until an amalgamation with the Academy in 1888 saw it become the Victorian Artists' Society.

In March 1889 McCubbin married Annie Moriarty. They had seven children, with their son Louis following his father into the art world. The family initially lived in the Melbourne suburbs

of Auburn, Blackburn, Brighton and Carlton. In 1901 they moved to Mount Macedon, transporting a prefabricated English style home up onto the northern slopes of the mountain which they named *Fontainebleau*. The bush surrounding the artist's Macedon home became his inspiration to experiment with the light and its effects on colour in nature. It was here that he painted "The Pioneer" along with many other works. It is also the only place where McCubbin painted fairies. *Fontainebleau* was spared the devastation of the Ash Wednesday fires and today stands as a testament to the artist.

McCubbin exhibited alongside Roberts, Streeton, Conder, D. Douglas Richardson, R. E. Falls and Herbert Daly at Buxton's Galleries. In 1891 he was acting director of the National Gallery until the appointment of Bernard Hall in 1892. McCubbin took on the role again in 1903 and 1905.

He also exhibited at the Society of Artists' exhibitions of the late 1890s in Sydney and was represented in the 1898 Exhibition of Australian Art, Grafton Galleries, London. He began holding one-man shows in Melbourne from about 1904. McCubbin was president of the Victorian Artists' Society in 1903-04 and 1909. In 1912 he resigned and became the newly-formed Australian Art Association's first president.

McCubbin continued to paint through the first two decades of the 20th century although he was plagued by ill health from the start of World War 1. Aside from brief visits to England and Tasmania, he lived most of his life in Melbourne. In later years, McCubbin turned increasingly to landscape painting, portraying the lyrical and intimate beauty of the Macedon bush that surrounded him. He moved away from Corot's gentle poetry of the shaded bushland to capturing the brilliant impressionistic effects of light and colour, intimacy and lyricism as pioneered by J. M. W. Turner. Although his primary passion remained with landscape painting, McCubbin was also a portrait painter, with self-portraits in both The Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Art Gallery of South Australia.

Admired as a warm and generous personality, given to easy conversation and an encouraging, intuitive teacher, McCubbin is acknowledged as having made a considerable contribution to Melbourne's art world through his involvement in several societies including The Savage Club. The McCubbin house was a convivial meeting place for artists and students, a nurturing and an inspiring atmosphere for the young Melbourne art scene.

McCubbin's first work to be acquired for a public gallery was 'Feeding Time', purchased by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1894 and exchanged for 'A Winter Evening' in 1900; 'The Pioneers' was also acquired in 1906. The Western Australian and New South Wales galleries made purchases in 1896 and 1897; 'A Bush Burial' was bought by public subscription for the Geelong Art Gallery in 1900; and the Art Gallery of South Australia purchased paintings in 1900 and 1912. In 1912 he became the founding member of the Australian Arts Society.

Frederick McCubbin finally succumbed to heart disease on 20th December 1917 at his home, Carlsburg, South Yarra, and was buried in Brighton cemetery.

In 1955, a retrospective exhibition to mark the centenary of McCubbin's birth was held at the National Gallery of Victoria.