

1973/15

# Robert Campbell

# Robert Campbell 1902-1972

## FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The presentation of this exhibition is an expression of appreciation of both the art of Robert Campbell and his long career in art administration in Australia. He was probably, in his lifetime, generally under-rated as an artist and it is hoped that these works will do something to better inform the art interested public of his real status as an artist. As an administrator he has left his mark, and in each of his areas of activity he will long be remembered for both his sensitivity and energy.

This exhibition was selected and catalogued by Ian North, our Curator of Paintings, who also wrote the introduction. Mrs. Jean Campbell, widow of the artist, provided invaluable assistance in locating and dating works, and providing biographical information.

Acknowledgement is also due to the private donors and public galleries who have kindly lent works for this exhibition, which is to embark on a year's tour of Australia.

John Baily  
Director  
The Art Gallery of South Australia  
May 1973

## INTRODUCTION



Robert Campbell, carte d'identité photograph, Paris, 1930.

Robert Campbell felt an early affinity for a Turner-esque treatment of the landscape which he was never to lose, though his interest was converted to its late 19th century descendant, Impressionism, early in his career. This concern was in turn modified as an increasing involvement with the watercolour medium induced to him to turn rather to Wilson Steer and other English watercolourists; their approach encouraged Campbell's talent and spontaneity to reach its most impressive expression, and to reaffirm Turner as a source of inspiration.

The early sketchbooks show that the youth was very much the father to the man in terms of subject and even technique. By the time Campbell set out to become an artist at the age of twenty (see biography) he was already deeply interested in rendering natural light effects.

The Melbourne Impressionists apparently impressed Campbell considerably at this time, as did Roland Wakelin's work of the mid-1910's, and he continued to work in a manner derived from these sources until his trip overseas in 1928. The work Campbell produced — usually on a small scale, through a lack of materials — ranged from such vigorous sketches as "The Beach, Austinmer" (Cat. No. 15) to the more subdued "Croydon Victoria" (Cat. No. 17), the latter executed, it may be noted, after he became friendly with the family of Walter Withers. The more experimental and abstract works which some artists (notably Wakelin and Roy de Maistre) in John Young's circle had produced left Campbell unmoved.

Campbell took especial notice of Constable and Turner, Monet and Pissarro, when he was abroad in the U.K. and on the Continent 1928-1932. Rupert Bunny's simplified, rhythmic compositions and subjective use of colour failed to significantly influence Campbell in spite of their close working association in France, and the latter's personality could not admit his companion's *intimiste* poeticism. Campbell received direct support from the more prosaic work of John D. Fergusson, the Scottish Impressionist. Both Campbell's methodical approach at this time and the rare self-portrait (Cat. No. 27) suggest that this was a period of special endeavour.

Not long after his return to Australia, in an attempt to reduce his Melbournian stylistic origins and registering in particular the influence of Elioth Gruner and the more Cezannesque work of Wakelin, Campbell's work repeatedly showed a greater concern for tonal qualities, more sharply defined shapes, and the illusion of three dimensions.

By the mid-1930's Campbell perceived this to be an unhappy development, even if in its less

stringent manifestations it allowed work of the quality and charm of "Morpeth, N.S.W." (Cat. No. 34). By the late 1930's Campbell's style had relaxed and broadened considerably and paintings such as "Construction, Collaroy, N.S.W." (Cat. No. 38) directly anticipate his increasingly free watercolour technique of later years. It is noteworthy, however, that Campbell characteristically returned to a more disciplined Impressionist style in his oils.

From 1941 art administration made ever more onerous demands on Campbell's time and energies, and watercolours became the main vehicle for his art. It is in this medium that he earned the most frequent accolades; his friend and mentor Sir Daryl Lindsay noted recently that Campbell's passing "leaves a gap in Australian watercolour painting that will be hard to fill".<sup>1</sup>

Of the influences which there is space here to briefly note, both Lindsay and Jack Carington Smith left their mark as did the pen and wash architectural studies of the English artist, John Piper. The major single source of Campbell's style, however, was Wilson Steer, whom he had sought out in England in 1929. Campbell's work often paralleled Steer's use of broad washes punctuated by notational focal points, with considerable use made of the paper's luminosity.

But Campbell developed his work to the point where it became a personal and highly responsive reaction to the landscape he assiduously sought out. One might also say passionately; throughout his career as an art administrator he continued his former practice of exhibiting once or more a year. A prolific artist, Campbell frequently produced several watercolours in a day.

If Bunny's subjectivity was not Campbell's, neither was the cosmic vision—nor the theatricality—of Turner. Campbell was not an experimenter; his major Impressionist works were executed nearly sixty years after the First Impressionist exhibition in Paris. His art shared the post-industrial alienation of that movement, and his subjects usually comprised distant views of luminous landscapes which, if peopled at all, were accorded only a species of contemporary *staffage*. There is little suggestion of introspection or social comment. Perhaps the most apt summary of Campbell's untroubled art may be found in Robin Ironside's description of Wilson Steer's: "It does not normally do more than perceive the unalloyed beauties of nature, but these are translated for us so wholeheartedly, at the beginning with an affectionate solicitude and later with such a simple and grandiloquent verve, that our pulses are quickened by the painter's response."<sup>2</sup>

1 Daryl Lindsay. "Robert Campbell — in remembrance"  
*Art & Australia*. Vol. 10, No. 3. Sydney, January 1973. p. 234

2 Robin Ironside. *Wilson Steer*. London, 1943. p. 14

## SKETCHBOOKS

1. THE SAWMILL c. 1915  
Pen and wash, 16 x 19.5 cm  
Unsigned, undated, inscribed l.r. Sawmill  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
2. "THE GREAT HARRY" AFTER  
BERNARD FINEGAN GRIBBLE  
(English, 19th Century) c. 1916  
Pen and wash, 13.3 x 18.87 cm  
Unsigned, undated, inscribed l.r. "The Great  
Harry" after Bernard Gribble.  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
3. THE BRISBANE RIVER 1917  
Watercolour, 9.7 x 14.2 cm  
Unsigned, undated, inscribed u.l. Dec. 11  
Tuesday 7.30 a.m. slight S.E. wind. The sun  
coming out  
Mrs. D. B. Leigh
4. BRISBANE CUSTOMS HOUSE  
c. 1918  
Pen and black ink, 9.2 x 13.5 cm  
Unsigned, undated, inscribed l.r. Brisbane  
Customs House  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
5. LONDON STREET SCENE c. 1929  
Crayon, 13.5 x 18 cm  
Unsigned, undated, inscribed l.r. London  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
6. RUE BOSSUET, MEAUX c. 1930  
Pencil, 21 x 16 cm  
Unsigned, undated, inscribed l.r.  
Rue Bossuet, Meaux  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
7. TOULON HARBOUR c. 1930  
Pencil, 18.1 x 27 cm  
Unsigned, undated, inscribed l.r. Toulon  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
8. NEAR COLLAROY, N.S.W. c. 1938  
Crayon, 19 x 25.2 cm  
Unsigned, undated  
Mrs. Jean Campbell

## DRAWINGS

9. SYDNEY HARBOUR FROM GEORGE  
STREET NORTH 1925  
Pencil and wash, 16.5 x 25.4 cm  
Signed l.r. R. R. Campbell, undated,  
inscribed l.l. Sydney Harbour from  
George St. Nth.  
Estate of Mr. John Young
10. LONSDALE STREET,  
MELBOURNE 1925  
Pencil and wash, 18.5 x 14.5 cm  
Signed and dated l.l. R.R.C. 1925,  
inscribed l.r. Lonsdale St., Melbourne  
Estate of Mr. John Young
11. VINCENNES 1930  
Pastel, 21 x 18 cm  
Signed and dated l.l. R.R.C. Vincennes '30  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
12. OVERLOOKING LAUNCESTON  
1942  
Pastel and wash, 21.5 x 28.2 cm  
Unsigned and undated  
Mrs. Jean Campbell

13. EDINBURGH CASTLE 1956  
Pencil, 21.1 x 31.7 cm  
Signed l.r. Robert Campbell, inscribed and  
dated l.l. Edinburgh Castle 1956  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
14. ROMAN FORUM 1956  
Pen and watercolour, 22.5 x 31 cm (sight)  
Signed l.l. Robert Campbell, dated l.r.  
Rome 31.8.56  
Western Australian Art Gallery

## OIL SKETCHES

15. THE BEACH, AUSTINMER, N.S.W.  
1925  
Oil on wood, 9.5 x 20.8 cm  
Unsigned, undated  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
16. IRONMONGER'S SHOP, OXFORD  
STREET, SYDNEY 1926  
Oil on wood, 20 x 14.2 cm  
Signed l.l. R. R. Campbell, undated,  
inscribed l.r. Ironmonger's Shop Oxford St.  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
17. CROYDON, VICTORIA 1927  
Oil on wood, 9.6 x 27.6 cm  
Inscribed l.r. Croydon '27 R.R.C.  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
18. LA CORNICHE, MARSEILLES 1930  
Oil on card, 13.8 x 18 cm  
Signed l.l. R.R.C., undated  
Private Collection
19. NEAR SUEZ 1932  
Oil on card, 11.5 x 21.1 cm  
Signed l.r. R.R.C., undated  
Mrs. R. Whitty
20. THEATRE ROYAL, SYDNEY 1932  
Oil on card, 20.5 x 26 cm  
Unsigned and undated  
Mrs. B. Mendel
21. GREAT BARRIER REEF 1933  
Oil on wood, 10.8 x 14.3 cm  
Signed l.r. R.R.C., undated  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
22. TOWNSVILLE, QUEENSLAND  
c. 1934  
Oil on card, 11.6 x 12.5 cm  
Signed l.r. R.R.C., undated  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
23. MIDDLE HARBOUR, SYDNEY  
c. 1934  
Oil on wood, 12.1 x 13.4 cm  
Signed l.r. Robert Campbell, undated  
Mrs. R. Whitty
24. SYDNEY HARBOUR FROM  
MILSON'S POINT 1936  
Canvas on board, 15.4 x 10.7 cm  
Signed l.r. R.R.C., undated  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
25. BEACHFRONT, COLLAROY, N.S.W.  
1939  
Oil on card, 15.2 x 20.6 cm  
Unsigned, undated  
Miss K. Campbell
26. MERRY-GO-ROUND,  
VICTOR HARBOUR, S.A. 1960  
Oil on masonite, 22.3 x 28.5 cm  
Signed l.r. Robert Campbell, undated  
Mrs. Jean Campbell

## OILS

27. SELF-PORTRAIT, PARIS 1930  
Oil on canvas, 46 x 37.8 cm  
Signed and dated l.r. R.R.C. Paris 1930  
Inscribed l.r. a mon vieux John  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
28. THE BRIDGE AT BESALU, SPAIN 1929  
Oil on canvas, 51 x 61 cm  
Signed l.l. Robert Campbell, undated  
Estate of the late A. H. Norman
29. GLASGOW c. 1929-1930  
Oil on canvas, 35.6 x 56 cm  
Signed l.l. Robert Campbell, undated  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
30. AVENUE DU MAINE, PARIS 1930  
Oil on canvas, 46 x 55 cm  
Signed and dated l.r. Robert Campbell '30  
Art Gallery of New South Wales
31. TRAFALGAR SQUARE 1930  
Oil on canvas, 72.6 x 91.5 cm  
Signed l.l. Robert Campbell, undated  
Estate of the late A. H. Norman
32. JEAN, TOWNSVILLE 1933  
Oil on canvas, 46 x 41 cm  
Signed and dated l.r. Robert Campbell  
Townsville 1933  
Mrs. E. C. Young
33. DOLCE FA NIENTE, MAGNETIC ISLE, QUEENSLAND 1934  
Oil on board, 40.8 x 50.8 cm  
Signed and dated l.r. Robert Campbell  
Magnetic Island 1934  
Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Campbell
34. MORPETH, N.S.W. 1935  
Oil on canvas, 30.5 x 40 cm  
Signed and dated l.l. Robert Campbell 35  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
35. SYDNEY FROM BALMORAL 1936  
Oil on board, 51.3 x 20.6 cm  
Unsigned and undated  
Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Campbell
36. KITCHEN TABLE, GALSTON, N.S.W. 1937  
Oil on canvas board, 25.5 x 35 cm  
Signed l.r. Robert Campbell, undated  
Mrs. E. C. Young



Trafalgar Square (no. 31)

37. WHALE BEACH, N.S.W. 1938  
Oil on cardboard, 45 x 61.5 cm  
Signed l.r. Robert Campbell, undated  
Mrs. D. B. Leigh
38. CONSTRUCTION, COLLAROY, N.S.W. 1939  
Oil on cardboard, 40 x 50.2 cm  
Signed and dated l.l. Robert Campbell 39  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
39. THE ORCHARD, LAUNCESTON c. 1942  
Oil on card, 62.8 x 76 cm  
Signed l.l. Robert Campbell, undated  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
40. ROAD TO THE SEA, PORT ELLIOT, S.A. c. 1957  
Oil on masonite, 25.5 x 35.3 cm  
Signed l.r. Robert Campbell, undated  
Mrs. G. Farmer
41. FLOWERS IN A WHITE VASE 1959  
Oil on masonite, 51.2 x 40.3 cm  
Signed l.l. Robert Campbell, undated  
Mrs. A. Davy
42. THE MEADOW, ARBURY PARK, S.A. c. 1960  
Oil on masonite, 55.9 x 50.8 cm  
Unsigned and undated  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
49. MT. COOROY FROM NOOSA, QUEENSLAND 1951  
Watercolour, 38 x 50.7 cm  
Signed and dated l.r. Robert Campbell 1951  
The Art Gallery of South Australia
50. THE BEACH, NOOSA, QUEENSLAND 1951  
Watercolour, pen and brown ink  
21 x 44.2 cm (sight)  
Signed and dated l.l. Robert Campbell 1951  
Inscribed l.c. Noosa Q  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
51. WINTER AFTERNOON, WEST STIRLING, S.A. 1952  
Watercolour, 26.3 x 38.2 cm  
Signed l.l. Robert Campbell, undated  
Private Collection
52. ROUGH SEA, PORT ELLIOT, S.A. c. 1954  
Watercolour and pen, 23.5 x 37 cm  
Signed l.l. Robert Campbell  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
53. THE MILLION DOLLAR FIRE DETROIT 1956  
Watercolour, 23 x 30 cm  
Signed l.l. Robert Campbell  
Dated l.r. Detroit 56  
Mrs. Jean Campbell

## WATERCOLOURS

43. SPRINGTIME, LAUNCESTON c. 1942  
Watercolour and pen, 28.3 x 37.6 cm  
Signed l.l. Robert Campbell  
Inscribed l.l. Launceston  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
44. THE QUARRY, LAUNCESTON 1943  
Watercolour, 26 x 37.5 cm  
Signed and dated l.l. Robert Campbell 1943  
National Gallery of Victoria
45. EVENING ON THE TAMAR, LAUNCESTON 1945  
Watercolour, 28 x 36.9 cm  
Signed and dated l.c. 1945 Robert Campbell  
National Gallery of Victoria
46. GOAT ISLAND CLIFFS, TASMANIA c. 1945  
Watercolour and pen, 26.2 x 37.5 cm  
Signed l.r. Robert Campbell  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
47. LATE AFTERNOON, UPPER SWAN, W.A. c. 1947  
Watercolour and pen, 26.3 x 36.6 cm  
Signed l.r. Robert Campbell, undated  
Inscribed l.l. Upper Swan W.A.  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
48. YACHTS IN RAIN SQUALL, OFF CLONTARF, QUEENSLAND 1950  
Watercolour, pen and black ink, 31.5 x 45.8 cm  
Signed and dated l.r. Robert Campbell 1950  
Private Collection
54. SUNSET OVER LAKE c. 1956  
Watercolour and pen, 26.7 x 37.2 cm  
Unsigned and undated  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
55. THE SCORCHED EARTH, PORT ELLIOT, S.A. 1959  
Watercolour, 33.3 x 50.6 cm  
Signed l.r. Robert Campbell, inscribed and dated l.l. The Scorched Earth, Port Elliot, Feb. 1959  
Art Gallery of New South Wales
56. THE COORONG, S.A. 1961  
Watercolour, 24 x 31.5 cm  
Signed l.r. Robert Campbell, dated and inscribed l.r. The Coorong '61  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
57. BROADWAY, GLENELG, S.A. c. 1961  
Watercolour, 29.4 x 38 cm  
Unsigned and undated  
Mrs. Jean Campbell
58. COLOMBO MARKET 1962  
Watercolour and pen, 32.5 x 43 cm  
Signed l.l. Robert Campbell  
Dated l.r. Colombo 12/11/62  
Australian National Gallery, Canberra
59. THE BAY OF NAPLES BY MOONLIGHT 1962  
Watercolour, 31.2 x 48.2 cm  
Signed and dated l.l. Robert Campbell '62  
Inscribed l.r. Naples  
Mrs. Jean Campbell



Springtime, Launceston (no. 43)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>60. DUCAL PALACE, VENICE 1963<br/>Watercolour, 26.5 x 35.2 cm (sight)<br/>Signed I.I. Robert Campbell, dated and inscribed I.r. Ducal Palace, Venice '63<br/>Mrs. Jean Campbell</p>                    | <p>63. SKYSCAPE, ATHELSTONE, S.A.<br/>c. 1966<br/>Watercolour, 26.7 x 43.2 cm<br/>Signed I.I. Robert Campbell, undated<br/>Mrs. Jean Campbell</p>         |
| <p>61. MURRAY RIVER NEAR MANNUM<br/>c. 1963<br/>Watercolour, 27.7 x 48.7 cm<br/>Unsigned and undated<br/>Mrs. Jean Campbell</p>   | <p>64. AFTERNOON CLOUDS,<br/>ATHELSTONE, S.A. 1969<br/>Watercolour, 38.3 x 56 cm<br/>Signed and dated I.I. Robert Campbell '69<br/>Mrs. Jean Campbell</p> |
| <p>62. ENCAMPMENT, FINKE RIVER, N.T.<br/>c. 1964<br/>Watercolour, pen and black ink<br/>38.1 x 56.1 cm<br/>Signed I.I. Robert Campbell, undated<br/>Inscribed I.r. Finke, N.T.<br/>Mr. H. C. McDonald</p> |   |

## BIOGRAPHY

Robert Richmond Campbell was born at Edinburgh, Scotland, 18 July 1902, the second born and eldest son of four children. He was educated at George Watson's College, Edinburgh. His father, Alfred Richmond Campbell, was a Presbyterian minister, although he was also involved in business enterprises in Australia.

Robert Campbell showed an early facility for drawing. In the sketchbooks of his adolescence (1915-1919) landscapes in the English Romantic tradition alternate with copies after William Callow, Bernard Gribble and George D. Leslie inter alia.

The Campbell family emigrated to Brisbane in 1916, and moved several times in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney over the following six years in which Campbell stayed at home. From 1918-1922 Campbell worked periodically as a commercial artist. Determined to become a painter, he sought to live from his art from the age of twenty — in which aim he largely succeeded for almost twenty years.

He was encouraged from 1924 by John Young, who with Basil Burdett established the Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, in 1925. Young commissioned Campbell to execute a series of drawings of Sydney and Melbourne and introduced him to a number of artists including Roland Wakelin, Roy de Maistre and John Eldershaw. He also made available his cottage at Austinmer.

Campbell was introduced to Rupert Bunny by Walter Wither's widow in Melbourne, 1927. Exhibiting from c. 1921 (with Royal Queensland Art Society) Campbell held his first one-man exhibition of consequence at the Sedon Gallery, Melbourne, in 1928. This was a sell-out financing his trip to Europe with Bunny in the same year.

Overseas, Campbell stayed with Bunny in Paris, and worked with him at Sanary, Toulon and Les Landes; worked with John D. Fergusson, the Scottish Impressionist, in Paris; survived in London on portraiture, and sought out Wilson Steer; he also visited in Scotland and Spain, the latter with Herbert Rose (1890-1937), from Victoria.

The depression forced Campbell's return in 1932.

In 1933 he married Jean Young, daughter of John Young. A year's painting on Dunk and Magnetic Islands and at Townsville, Queensland, followed.

Based in Sydney 1934-1941, Campbell painted at Galston, the Castle Hills area, Morpeth, the Hunter Valley, and especially around Sydney Harbour and Collaroy. He was influenced 1933-1936 by Elioth Gruner and Roland Wakelin.

Campbell undertook part-time teaching jobs in Sydney, taking over Will Ashton's outdoor painting class in 1937, and in 1941 became Head of Art Department, Launceston Technical College, Tasmania, where he acted as Honorary Advisor to Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery. He visited Hobart periodically, painting there with Jack Carington Smith.

Pressure of work led to an increasing concentration on watercolours as opposed to oils, and influence of leading 20th century English watercolourists became apparent. Campbell's first notable one-man exhibition of watercolours was held at the Kozminsky Galleries, Melbourne, 1944.

In 1947 Campbell was appointed Curator, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, where he instituted the watercolour gallery and achieved a separate Art Gallery Board within the wider Museum complex. He favoured Swan River and Rottnest Island subjects for his painting. Campbell was appointed the first Director, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, in 1949. Here he remodelled display facilities, established records, and organized the Queensland Jubilee Art Train (in 1951). While in Queensland he concentrated on painting in the Redcliffe Peninsula, Noosa and Glasshouse Mountains areas.

In 1951 he was appointed Director, The Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, retiring from this position in 1967. He supervised the erection of new air-conditioned wing opened in 1962, using information gained while on a study-tour in the United States, 1956, on a Carnegie Grant.

He was a member of the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board (1952-1972), on behalf of which he organized major exhibitions for Australia and overseas, travelling abroad with shows in 1962 (London and Canada), and in 1968 (India and Pakistan).

Of the many organisations of which he was a member, he particularly valued his association with the Australian Watercolour Institute.

His services to art were officially recognised: in 1958 he was awarded the O.B.E. and in 1967 the C.M.G.

While in South Australia he most frequently painted in the River Murray, Port Elliot and Athelstone districts.

It is estimated that Campbell had held approximately fifty one-man exhibitions during his lifetime.

Robert Campbell died in 1972 at his home at Athelstone, the area of many of his more recent paintings.



Rough Sea, Port Elliot, S.A. (no. 52)

