

Did you know that Box Hill is the birthplace of Australian Impressionism?

Kelly Lai and Olivia Dufty

With the invention of the humble paint tube in the 1840's, artists were able to leave their studios and venture into the Australian bush. A new era of artistry was born, Impressionism. Emanating from the French impressionist movement of the 1880s, en plein air — a French term meaning 'in the open air' — quickly became a widespread painting style among Australian artists.

The first artist to introduce impressionism to Australia was Tom Roberts. Every Saturday, for four years (1885-1889), Tom Roberts, joined by his friends Frederick McCubbin, Louis Abrahams, Arthur Streeton, Charles Conder and Jane Sutherland escaped the monotony of the city for a serene weekend of painting and camping in Box Hill, the last stop on the train line.

They continued set up camp every weekend and painted the bush around Gardiner's Creek. Their friend Louis Abrahams was forced to abandon art and take over his family's cigar business. The story goes, he donated dozens of recycled 9x5 inch cigar box lids to his friends. Together the group of artists painted in the cigar box lids and this became Australia's first ever Impressionist exhibition held at the Buxton Rooms in 1889.

Over a century later, the Heidelberg School's influence on Australia's art culture continues, especially for the students at Box Hill High School. The Year 10 art classes, following the style of the Australia's early impressionists, investigated the historical and cultural significance of this era of art originating from within their own area, and are preparing an exhibition of their own. During an excursion to Gardiner's Creek along the Whitehorse Heritage Artist's Trail, students began exploring possibilities for their own artworks: photographing scenes and completing sketches, ready to paint the suburban sprawl that has since replaced the rugged bush lands of the times gone by.

Drawing inspiration from the immensely successful '9 by 5' artworks, the students will be painting and presenting impressionist-style artworks on wooden panels measuring 9 by 5 inches, an acknowledgment of the original 1889 Exhibition.

Students will be sharing their artworks in a private event held at Box Hill High School on Tuesday 5th September. However, they would also like to share their impressionist style paintings with the Whitehorse community. The general public are encouraged to show their support by visiting the school's Art Domain Instagram page. Please visit <https://instagram.com/framing.higher> and leave a message to encourage our new generation of artists.

Kelly Lai and Olivia Dufty are Year 10 students from Box Hill High School.