

# Themes in focus

## A THE BEACH

Charles Conder **Bronte Beach** 1888  
oil on paper on cardboard 22.6 x 33 cm  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.  
Purchased from Gallery admission charges 1982

Charles Conder **A holiday at Mentone** 1888  
oil on canvas 46.2 x 60.8 cm  
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. South Australian Government Grant with the assistance of Bond Corporation Holdings Ltd through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation to mark the Gallery's Centenary 1981

Supplementary Images:

Charles Conder **The beach at Ambletouse** 1901  
(formerly *French beach scene, Dieppe*)  
oil on panel 33.6 x 46.3 cm  
Sheffield Galleries and Museums Trust. Graves Gift 1942

Charles Conder **Windy day at Brighton** 1905  
oil on canvas 63 x 91.4 cm  
Tate, London. Purchased 1922

## B ARTISTS' IDENTITIES

Charles Conder **Self portrait as Eugène de Rastignac** 1905  
blue chalk on pale blue paper 38.7 x 27 cm  
National Portrait Gallery, London. Purchased 1967

Supplementary Image:

Charles Conder **Invitation-card for Mr and Mrs Edmund Davis** 1904  
transfer lithograph, printed in black ink on white card  
18.3 x 25.2 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the Government of Victoria 1979

## C BOHEMIAN ARTISTS

Charles Conder **The Moulin Rouge** 1890  
oil on wood panel 25.6 x 34.1 cm  
Manchester Art Gallery. Presented by Charles L. Rutherston 1925

Supplementary Image:

Charles Conder **Mardi Gras week in Paris** 1891  
pen and ink on paper 10.7 cm x 10.9 cm  
Manchester Art Gallery. Presented by Charles L. Rutherston 1925

## D ARTISTS AND COLLEAGUES

Charles Conder **Coogee Bay** 1888  
oil on cardboard 26.8 x 40.7 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the Government of Victoria, 1979

Tom Roberts **Holiday Sketch at Coogee** 1888  
oil on canvas 40.3 x 55.9 cm  
Art Gallery of New South Wales. Purchased 1954

Supplementary Images:

Charles Conder **The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition** 1889  
catalogue – with cover and advertisement designed by Charles Conder  
wood engraving on handmade paper 17.7 x 10.6 cm  
printed by Fergusson and Mitchell, Art Printers,  
Fancy Stationers of Melbourne  
State Library of Queensland's James Hardie Library of Australian Fine Arts, Brisbane.  
Purchased 1990

Charles Conder **Impressionists' camp** 1889  
oil on paper on cardboard 13.9 x 24 cm  
National Gallery of Australia.  
Gift of Mr and Mrs Fred Williams and family 1979



### Bronte Beach 1888

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# A

## THE BEACH

The whole front of the sea is simply magnificent, and reminds me of one's comprehension of some past time in our century... I might tell all about the place here but the sea air leaves one idle; one likes to believe oneself hand in glove with all sorts of poignant emotions but this sea is like some drug that makes one satisfied with the desire.

Conder to William Rothenstein, Dieppe, 14 August 1895

Conder's paintings give us an insight into the leisure activities of Australian society at the beginning of the 20th century.

Trips to the beach were an integral part of the pursuit of leisure and it was a theme to which Conder returned throughout his career. The beaches depicted in Conder's paintings act like a tourist's itinerary, documenting Conder's travels through the three countries he lived in as an artist, from Australia to France and England. In Sydney, Conder painted at Bronte and Coogee; in Melbourne at Mentone, Rickett's Point and Sandringham; in France at Dieppe and Ambleteuse; in England he painted at Swanage, Brighton and Newquay.

**Conder loved the beach above all for its elemental qualities of sea, sky and sand, painting it from Coogee and Mentone to Dieppe and Newquay.**

Ann Galbally, 'The Enigma of Charles Conder: Life and art of a fin-de-siècle personality', *Charles Conder Retrospective*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2003

### K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING

#### Leisure and Pleasure

**Compare** Conder's beach paintings with a visit to the beach by your family today. **Consider** what has stayed the same and what has changed about beach activities. What would you take to the beach? What would you wear? What would you see and hear? What would you eat? What would you do?

**Find** other Australian artworks featuring the beach, such as Charles Meere's *Australian beach pattern* 1939, Max Dupain's *Sunbaker* 1937 and Anne Zahlka's *The bathers* 1989. **Discuss** the changes you see in how people at the beach are represented in these artworks.

**Conduct** a class fashion parade to represent how beach fashions have changed. **Make** cardboard cutouts or paper mock-ups for the clothes.

**Make** a series of artworks (drawings, paintings, prints, collages) of things that could be seen at the beach, such as water, waves, foam, sand, shells, birds, beach bags, etc.

### STAGE 6 SUGGESTED CASE STUDY

#### The Beach as symbol: personal and public

Investigate the significance of the beach in Conder's life. Analyse how this has translated into his body of work. Investigate Conder's life and consider how the representation of these locations might be connected with personal events. Consider why this location became such a consistent element of Conder's subjective experience of the world. Was the symbol of the beach explicitly linked to the societies and cultures he located himself within?

Examine other artists' representations of the beach in different times and cultures. How do these vary? Why does it remain such a powerful symbol for both the artist and society at large? Consider in particular Australian society and culture. Has the beach replaced the rural landscape as the dominant symbol of Australia? Attempt to track this shift in Australian visual art history. How have artists contributed to the symbolism of the beach in defining who we are as Australians?



**Windy day at Brighton 1905**

oil on canvas, 63.5 x 91.4 cm  
Tate, London. Purchased 1922



**The beach at Ambleteuse 1901**

(formerly *French beach scene, Dieppe*)  
oil on panel, 33.6 x 46.3 cm  
Sheffield Galleries and Museums Trust. Graves Gift 1942



Self portrait as Eugène de Rastignac  
1905

blue chalk on pale blue paper, 38.7 x 27 cm  
National Portrait Gallery, London. Purchased 1967

# B

## ARTISTS' IDENTITIES

A legend had developed around him – ‘the Australian painter’ they said. He had actually come from Australia but was a good Englishman with that love of travel and independence, a sportsman interested in intrepid hunts, violent exercises, yet a gentle cigarette-smoker, with the soft body of a dandy with sleepy eyes and a faraway voice like one of the cavaliers of Alfred de Dreux, squeezed into a cornflower blue fitted coat...

Jacques-Emile Blanche, 1906

Amid the disorder of his room, there was one hallowed corner within which were hanging from a nail a stylish frock coat, vest and trousers. A top hat, gloves and a cane kept them in countenance. When he walked abroad clothed in these garments, he looked the Man of Fashion, doing the block and smiling on the fair.

Julian Ashton, 1917

There are a surprising number of portraits of Conder. He was painted and photographed by an impressive number of artists, including most famously Toulouse-Lautrec in 1893. From their images of Conder, he appears to be a man in demand in society, stylish and elegant, well groomed and self-possessed. Whichever city Conder lived in, he was readily accepted into both the bohemian world of the artists as well as the more stylish world of the beau-monde.

**He loved disguise ... He was attracted to subversive social situations and the idea of the Venetian Carnivale, whose emblem was the mask derived from the theatre masks worn on stage by the traditional *commedia dell'arte* characters. Worn in a social context, masks protect subjectivity and privatise individual identity, displacing meaning from who one is to how one behaves...**

Ann Galbally, 'The Enigma of Charles Conder: Life and art of a fin-de-siècle personality', *Charles Conder Retrospective*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2003

### K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING

#### Behind The Portraits

Look at William Rothenstein's *L'homme qui sort* (*The painter Charles Conder*) 1892 on the cover of this education kit.

**Role-play** Conder getting dressed and preparing to go out.

**Play** the artist and the model. One student (the model) is selected to take up the pose of Conder in this painting following the spoken instructions of another student (the artist). The remainder of the class judges how closely they copy the pose depicted in the painting.

**Guess** what comes next. Where is Conder going, what will he see or do?

### STAGE 6 SUGGESTED CASE STUDY

#### Me, myself and I: the artist's persona

Investigate how and why artists can represent themselves in multiple ways to different audiences. Starting with Charles Conder, investigate portraits and self-portraits of artists throughout art history. What might we infer about the person and his or her identity through such representations? What insights does the audience gain into the private and public identity of the artist? Speculate on the function of the portrait in this context.

Compare painted and written portraits of Conder by his contemporaries. Where do they overlap? What can paintings tell us that writing cannot? What can writing tell us that painting cannot?

Consider how projections of identity by artists extend beyond artworks into their personal interactions and relationships. What is a persona? Consider how the manipulation of clothing/costume, action/gesture and conversation/dialogue can construct a persona. Research artists, both historically and in contemporary culture, for whom impersonation is a deliberate and conscious device within their art practice.



#### Invitation-card for Mr and Mrs Edmund Davis

1904

transfer lithograph, printed in black ink on white card, 18.3 x 25.2 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the Government of Victoria 1979



### The Moulin Rouge

1890

oil on wood panel, 25.6 x 34.1 cm  
Manchester Art Gallery. Presented by Charles L. Rutherford  
1925

# C

## BOHEMIAN ARTISTS

No place gave Conder so much as the Moulin Rouge... I still remember the night when, Conder, May and I having drunk more than was good for us, Conder proposed we should each paint, there and then, a picture of the Moulin; and the wild results I remember, too, when we saw the in the cold morning light.

William Rothenstein, 1931

Magnificent as it was after a garish fashion, it was not the great room with the slender scarlet columns, the walls of mirrors, nor even the garden hung with coloured lanterns that drew Conder to the Moulin Rouge night after night, but the atmosphere, gay yet dangerous, that the place exhaled, the sense it conveyed of life being lived more intensely, more prodigally, than anywhere else. That was what made Conder and the others feel, when they stayed away, as though they were absent from the axis of their world.

John Rothenstein, 1938

Conder is frequently described as a bohemian artist, especially with regard to his years spent in Paris. The term 'bohemian' refers to artistic temperament and social behaviour, which originated in the 19th century and it was well defined by the time Conder came to live in Paris.

Bohemian artists were part of the avant-garde; i.e. they were in the vanguard or at the forefront of innovation and change in cultural practice, disregarding the rules of mainstream society as well as the conventions of academic art. A bohemian lifestyle with the emphasis on frequenting cafés, cabarets and nightclubs, debating, drinking and partying, kept artists in touch with the currents of modern life.

Conder moved easily into the bohemian world of Paris in the late 1890s. He took a studio in Montmartre, the lively, artistic centre of the city, close by cabarets such as the legendary Moulin Rouge. Here he came into contact with some of the most influential artists of the decade, in particular Toulouse-Lautrec. Conder became a regular visitor to the cabarets, absorbing the atmosphere. Scenes of bohemian Paris appear in some of his work.

Conder chose Montmartre for a studio, probably because it was the cheapest option, but the choice had long-term effects on his art. For Montmartre in the 1890s developed into the artistic and entertainment centre of Paris. Le Moulin Rouge, Le Rat Mort, Le Chat Noir and other cabarets were all within walking distance from his studio at 13 rue de Ravignan, halfway up the hill on the way to Le Moulin de la Galette. In these settings he formed friendships with some of the major artistic figures of the decade, in particular Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Louis Anquetin. Contemporaries commented upon the hours he spent at these places, drinking, but also observing.

Ann Galbally, 'Life', Charles Conder Retrospective, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2003



Mardi Gras week in Paris 1891

pen and ink on paper, 10.7 x 10.9 cm  
Manchester Art Gallery. Presented by Charles L. Rutherford 1925

### K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING

#### Mates at the Moulin Rouge

Look at Charles Conder's *The Moulin Rouge* 1890. Research the Moulin Rouge. Where was it located? Does it still exist today? What type of entertainment was featured there? Name a famous dance that was performed at the Moulin Rouge.

Read about artist Toulouse-Lautrec and his excursions to nightclubs. Learn about how he sat sketching at the tables. Find paintings of the Moulin Rouge by Toulouse-Lautrec and compare them to the work of Conder. What similarities and differences are there?

Picture Conder sitting beside Toulouse-Lautrec.

Role-play the two artists working together.

Select some music to be played while the artists are sketching. What other sounds could be heard (laughter, glasses, babble of talking voices)?

Perform a class version of the Can-Can Dance.

Look at Charles Conder's *Mardi Gras Week Paris* 1891

Explore the world of theatre, ballet and opera as an inspiration for Impressionist artists. Consider the work of Edgar Degas and his ballet dancers, Manet's bar at the Folies-Bergère and Renoir's fashionable female spectators at the Opera. What attracted the artists to the subject of the theatre and the stage for their art making?

Present a class play which depicts the artists visiting the theatre, watching performances, listening to the music, eating, drinking and making sketches for their paintings.

Design and make a fantastic mask or hat to wear to a masquerade ball.

### STAGE 6 SUGGESTED CASE STUDY

#### Bohemian Rhapsody

Research the 'bohemian artist' in art history. Who coined the phrase? Where does the word originate? Was it a term associated with visual artists? How were such artists characterised? Investigate their personal philosophy, appearance, living conditions and position in society. Does Conder fit the bill? What was the connection between bohemian artists and the avant-garde? What social, cultural, political and economic factors contributed to the emergence of this new breed of artists?

Charles Conder immersed himself in the life of the bohemian artist in Paris in the 1890s. Investigate why this city, at this time in history, was such a magnet for young artists. What impact did this have on art history, particularly on the development of modernism? Is Paris still the creative heart of the visual arts world today? What has changed?

How did establishments such as the Moulin Rouge contribute to such a fertile period of creativity? Conder took the Moulin Rouge as the subject for several of his paintings and illustrations. Research other artists who have done this. How do their visions compare or differ to Conder's?

Is the spirit of the bohemian artist alive today? Where can evidence of this philosophy on life and art be seen in contemporary culture? How has it changed, if at all, from Conder's era? Debate.



Charles Conder  
**Coogee Bay** 1888

oil on cardboard, 26.8 x 40.7 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with the assistance  
of a special grant from the Government of Victoria, 1979



Tom Roberts  
**Holiday sketch at Coogee** 1888

oil on canvas, 40.3 x 55.9 cm  
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney Purchased 1954

# D

## ARTISTS AND COLLEAGUES

I'm sorry I went without saying goodbye but I feel sure that I shall see you in Paris one of these days – you are such a roving spirit – I missed you very much at the dinner, which was a great success albeit that I felt very crushed sometimes as nearly all the speakers thought it worth while to touch on my imitation of Streeton – I feel a good deal of truth about this but if they'd then said Roberts they might have been nearer the mark – for if there is any distinct school in Melbourne, I won't say Sydney, it's *entirely* due to you.

Conder to Tom Roberts, aboard 'Austral', Albany, 2 May 1890

Conder appears to have had a very sociable personality, enjoying the company of others. This is apparent from the many portraits of Conder painted by his artist friends. In addition Conder's paintings have strong parallels with those of his Australian colleagues. Several were painted alongside Tom Roberts and Arthur Streeton.

Conder's *Coogee Bay* and Roberts' *Holiday Sketch at Coogee* were both painted on the same day in 1888. Looking at the two paintings, it is possible to visualise the two artists side by side on the hill above Coogee, gazing down at the beach. Interesting comparisons can be made between the two works: the different approaches of each artist are apparent.

In a celebrated parallel moment of the history of Australian art, he [Conder] and Roberts painted together at Coogee during Easter 1888. The excursion was a defining one ... Roberts minimised human presence in his version of Coogee, launching the gaze virtually unencumbered into a Sydney sky tinged with alizarin to convey its dampness. Conder, standing somewhere to the left of his companion, made his sky shimmer like mother-of-pearl, and could not help but echo it through the luminous garments of a mother and daughter in the foreground, the latter pulling playfully at a thin branch. Roberts created a brilliant wedge of landscape realism. Conder wove a small, poetic spell of human incident.

Barry Pearce, 'Between worlds: Conder in Australia', *Charles Conder Retrospective*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2003

### K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING

#### Painting Alongside Conder

Look at Charles Conder's *Coogee Bay* 1888 and Tom Roberts' *Holiday Sketch at Coogee* 1888.

Look closely and spot the similarities and differences of the two paintings.

Guess where the two artists were standing in relation to each other when they were painting. What clues help you to make your guess?

**Role-play** Tom Roberts and Charles Conder painting alongside each other. What would they wear and take with them? What materials would they use? Invent conversations they would have together.

**Conduct** a class sketching trip outside the classroom to a nearby park, playground or beach. Instruct the students to draw the scene.

**Display and discuss** the finished works. What similarities can be recognised in the compositions? What differences are there in the way the students represent the same subjects?

### STAGE 6 SUGGESTED CASE STUDY

#### Parallel Visions

Integral to Charles Conder's development as an artist was his involvement in the Heidelberg School and his relationship with Tom Roberts. Investigate the influence artists can have on each other, both personally and professionally. Is this relationship particular to modernist schools of painting or a consistent phenomenon throughout art history? Investigate. How have such relationships promoted the transmission of knowledge and innovation in visual arts practice?

Investigate major periods in Australian and International visual art history. Starting with Conder's *Coogee Bay* 1888 and Roberts' *Holiday Sketch at Coogee* 1888, locate examples of artists working as colleagues. Analyse the influence of their relationships by comparing and contrasting their work. Examine how works such as Conder's and Roberts' effect the audience's understanding of the subject matter and of the artists' engagement with their world.

In an age of mass and instant communication, do contemporary artists work in schools or closely as colleagues today, producing works simultaneously on similar subject matter? Investigate. What factors, in visual arts or wider society, if any, have altered or hindered this practice? Debate.



#### The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition catalogue 1889

cover and advertisement designed by Charles Conder  
wood engraving on handmade paper, 17.7 x 10.6 cm  
printed by Fergusson and Mitchell, Art Printers, Fancy Stationers of Melbourne  
State Library of Queensland's James Hardie Library of Australian Fine Arts, Brisbane. Purchased 1990



#### Impressionists' camp 1889

oil on paper on cardboard, 13.9 x 24 cm  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Gift of Mr and Mrs Fred Williams and family 1979

## Afterthoughts: some personal reflections

Poor Conder! his early death deprived the world of Art of many beautiful examples of his fantastic and original genius; but it is pleasant to think that his five years sojourn in Australia laid the foundation for those colour poems, those charming medleys of pearly blossom and azure skies upon which his claim to a place amongst the immortals must be based.

Julian Ashton, 1917

I remember once, as a child, hearing the front-door bell, and expecting a friend, I hurried into our high dark hall. Instead of my friend stood a figure of tragedy. Its eyes were still blue and its hair golden. But beneath the gold hair the skin was grey and the rims of the blue eyes were red. Instead of entering it lingered, I felt, lonely and ashamed, until my father came out with a greeting.

Two years later, on the 9th of February 1909, Conder died in the Virginia Water Asylum.

John Rothenstein, 1928

While I was staying at Bradford there came a letter from Max [Beerbohm], telling me the news of Conder's death. This, though not unexpected, was a blow no less... In some ways Conder was more adventurous than other painters; he was instinct with inventive powers, and could put down a complicated composition with extraordinary ability, giving life and beauty to his figures.

To say that he belonged more to the eighteenth century than to his own, is too obvious. His art was based partly on his sense of style, of gesture, of artificial comedy, ... on his subtle observation of actual life... His richly suggestive art is at present underrated; but its vitality, I am sure, when the moment comes, will blossom again in men's eyes.

William Rothenstein, 1932

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