

Keys to the collection— Stories

Eugene von Guérard

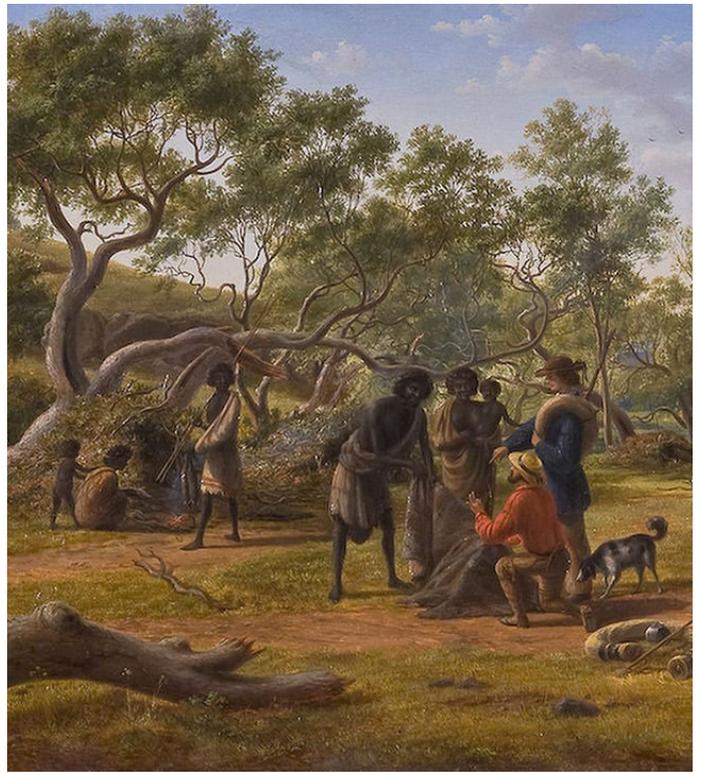
“Eugene von Guérard is arguably Australia’s, and certainly Victoria’s, most important colonial landscape painter.”

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

1811 Eugene von Guérard was born in Vienna, Austria. As a teenager he went on sketching trips with his artist father, where he learnt much about drawing. Later he went to Rome to learn landscape painting from Giovanni Battista Batti.

1838 He studied at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art in Germany. Here he learnt to paint directly from nature and was introduced also to the softness and subtlety of Dutch landscape painting. Von Guérard’s interest in the mystery and majesty of nature, along with an interest in science, influenced his painting.

1852-82 Von Guérard came to Australia to search for gold. He had modest luck at the Ballarat goldfields but after about a year he moved to Melbourne to resume painting. He painted in Australia for 30 years. In this time he made many sketching trips throughout the country to explore and document often remote landscapes. He later used these on-the-spot sketches to paint magnificent canvases in the second half of the 19th century which show us many aspects of the Australian landscape and life at this time. His paintings are a very important part of Australian history and art.



1870 Von Guérard was appointed drawing master at the School of Art at 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—

Eugene von Guérard travelled to the Ballarat goldfields with other hopeful prospectors. He drew pictures of what he saw along the way. As he passed through the landscape outside Geelong he saw ox-drawn wagons coming down the hills into the Moorabool Valley, with the You Yangs in the background. Aboriginal people camped in their mia-mia shelters made from branches and leaves. In this painting two miners stop to buy a possum-skin cloak for cold nights. The European men are dressed in the clothes gold miners wore at the time. They carry swags so they can camp when and where they need to. Von Guérard made numerous pencil and ink drawings as he travelled and used these to create paintings back in his studio. His paintings illustrate Aboriginal life at the time and tell us about the lives of European settlers in Australia.

**Geelong
Gallery**

Victorian Curriculum level 2 to 6
geelonggallery.org.au/learn

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

G E E L O N G
E E L O N G
E L O N G
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N G A L L E R Y
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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

Questions

What meeting/encounter does Eugene von Guérard's painting *Aborigines met on the road to the diggings* illustrate?

Why are his landscape paintings so important in Australian art?

Research

Look at the painting and list the features which tell us about:

- Aboriginal life at the time.
- How gold miners lived.
- How did they get to and from the goldfields.

Activity

Draw the painting as a similar scene as it might look if this meeting took place today. Copy the features which may not have changed for 125 years and add features which would now be seen on this same site near Geelong.