

# Presentation Abstracts

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# Frederick McCubbin revisited: identifying and reconciling previous interventions in three paintings from the National Gallery of Victoria collection

Full presentation

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Amongst the National Gallery of Victoria's holdings of Frederick McCubbin paintings is a group of enigmatic works that are believed to have once formed part of the McCubbin family collection, but were subsequently gifted or sold to the gallery. This group includes *The North Wind* (c.1888), *Melbourne 1888* (1888) and *Portrait* (1893).



Frederick McCubbin (c.1888) *The North Wind*, oil on canvas on plywood, 91.9 × 152.3 cm

Collectively these works encapsulate McCubbin's early ambitions, including his growing interest in nationalistic and familial themes. Unfortunately they also share a common history of previous interventions, including significant format changes, broad over-painting, and in the case of *The North Wind* and *Melbourne 1888*, posthumous signing and dating.

Although the importance of these works is clear, with *The North Wind* and *Melbourne 1888* charting a crucial transitional moment in McCubbin's career, the gallery was hesitant to display such altered works out of respect for the artist. Yet the prospect of accommodating their treatment within the painting studio's busy work program proved prohibitive due to the significant resources required.

Over the last several years, critical funding from the Bank of America Art Conservation Project and Hugh D.T Williamson Foundation has enabled major treatment and research programs to be undertaken on all three works.

These projects have facilitated a better understanding of the nature and extent of interventions that were undertaken whilst in the care of the family, and how these have influenced the appraisal of the artist's work and legacy, as well as provided an opportunity to renew our understanding of McCubbin's art practice and his key role in the Australian Impressionist movement.

Raye Collins is employed as Conservator of Paintings at the National Gallery of Victoria, where her research and treatment program focusses primarily on late nineteenth and twentieth century paintings. Raye was a former Hugh D.T. Williamson Fellow in her department, and has held a variety of public and private sector positions.

Johanna Ellersdorfer holds a Master of Cultural Materials Conservation (Melbourne University) and a Bachelor of Art Theory (University of NSW, College of Fine Arts). She completed the Graduate Intern program at the J Paul Getty Museum, and was H.D.T Williamson Foundation Fellow in Paintings Conservation at the National Gallery of Victoria.

Michael Varcoe-Cocks is Head of Conservation at the National Gallery of Victoria, where he was employed as a paintings conservator for seventeen years, in a role primarily focussed on collection-based research and treatment of works produced between 1850-1950. Michael also co-curated the 2011-2012 NGV touring exhibition *Eugene von Guérard: Nature Revealed*.