

## **Bushrangers**, by William Strutt

Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne



William Strutt (English, 1825–1915)

**Bushrangers**, Victoria, Australia, 1852, 1887

oil on canvas

75.7 × 156.6 cm (canvas)

104.5 × 186.0 cm (frame)

Gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest, 1973

University of Melbourne Art Collection

1973.0038

*Bushrangers* depicts a group of travellers being robbed on St Kilda Road in what is now the Melbourne suburb of Elwood. Although this crime did in fact take place in 1852, not far from the burgeoning, gold-rich colonial city, this depiction was reimagined a quarter-century later in England, where William Strutt carefully completed the characters and composition, exhibiting the painting at the Royal Academy.

Strutt was a member of an artistic family and in 1850 struck out on an adventure to Australia, spending 11 years in Melbourne before returning to England.

In colonial Australia, bushrangers played a role in the perception of the wildness of the landscape and identity of the settlers, their stories influencing Australian law and folklore. Bushrangers like those seen pawing loot at the left of this picture were often ex-convicts or poor settlers who broke the law to survive – some were even viewed as heroes. Bushrangers like the central figure have become Australian legends, as exemplars of boldness, rebellion and the strength of the Australian people.

The captives in the painting are miserable and Strutt has included some objects that may be interpreted symbolically, such as the overturned Bible.

*Bushrangers* is one of the most studied and mythologised works in the University of Melbourne Art Collection.

## Teaching ideas

The University of Melbourne's curriculum is rich and varied, and changes from year to year. For more teaching ideas, [contact a collection manager](#).

### Collection Management

Using paintings from the Ian Potter Museum of Art, develop knowledge and skills relating to cataloguing, significance assessment and other collection management tools.

### Principles of Professional Practice

Describe in detail scenes depicted in works of art in the Ian Potter Museum of Art, to acquire skills in the principles of imaging, and observational assessment proficiency, in clinical practice.

### Global Literature and Postcolonialism

View works of art from the Grimwade Collection of Rare Books in the Baillieu Library to develop knowledge of the subject matter, styles and narrative conventions used by colonial, postcolonial and diasporic writers and artists.

### Urban Legends: Melbourne Intensive

Visit the Ian Potter Museum of Art to find examples of how Australian histories and identities are expressed in the urban landscape of Melbourne. Explore meanings of places, both real and imagined: from the city to the suburbs to the bush.

### Australian Art

View examples of colonial art in the Ian Potter Museum of Art to build an understanding and visual knowledge of the concept of 'Australian art' and how it was constructed from the mid-19th century to the 1960s.

### Art, Market and Methods

Study William Strutt in the context of the changing status of the artist, determining authenticity and value, and the role of materials and markets in constructing meaning.

### Conservation and Object-Based Learning

Extract evidence from paintings on their materials, techniques and wider values.

### Law, Justice and Social Change

Consider Australian bushrangers and other outlaws as a case study in the issues of class and economic struggles.

### Encounters with Writing

Using objects such as paintings as triggers for memory and creativity, initiate and develop detailed knowledge through self-initiated creative writing projects.

### Statistics

Choose an artist, such as William Strutt, to examine art market indices and carry out standard statistical procedures using a statistical computing package.

## Intersecting objects

William Strutt (English, 1825–1915)  
**Study for *Bushrangers* (middle section)**, c. 1886  
pencil on paper  
31.8 × 17.3 cm  
Purchased 1980  
University of Melbourne Art Collection  
1980.0028



J.W. Lindt (German/Australian, 1845–  
1926)  
**Body of Joe Byrne, member of the Kelly  
Gang**, photographed 1880,  
printed c. 1910–40  
albumen silver photograph  
9.8 × 14.5 cm  
Gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade  
Bequest, 1973  
University of Melbourne Art Collection  
1973.0256

## References

Chris McAuliffe, [*Bushrangers, Victoria, Australia, 1852*, by William Strutt], in Chris McAuliffe & Peter Yule (eds), *Treasures: Highlights of the cultural collections of the University of Melbourne*, Melbourne University Publishing, 2003, p. 36.

Heather Curnow, *William Strutt*, [Sydney]: Australian Gallery Directors Council with the assistance of the Australia Council Visual Arts Board and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1980, pp. 54–8.

Henry F. Skerritt, 'William Strutt', in *Visions past and present: Celebrating 40 years*, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, 2012, p. 43.

Angela Woollacott, 'Frontier violence and political manhood', in *Settler society in the Australian colonies: Self-government and imperial culture*, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 152–78.

John Poynter & Benjamin Thomas, *Miegunyah: The bequests of Russell and Mab Grimwade*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2015, pp. 158–9.