



REMEMBRANCE DAY



Sydney-based artist Steve Lopes' Exposed Wood, Mont St Quentin, 2017, oil on canvas



# FIELDS OF WAR AND PEACE

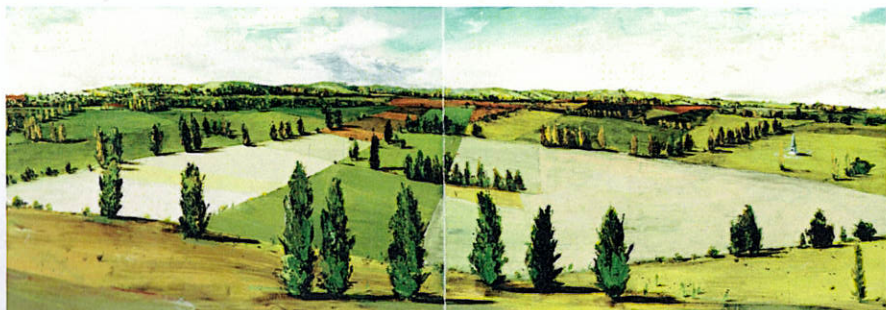


BY MELANIE EGAN

The loose  
earth shook.  
The very hills  
were stirred.  
The silence  
of the dead  
was all I heard.

ON THE WESTERN FRONT,  
BY ALFRED NOYES (1916)

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**O**ne hundred years ago this month the guns fell silent on the Western Front, the most infamous battlefield of World War I (1914-18). It was a battlefield that ran over hundreds of kilometres from the Swiss frontier, through France and Belgium, to the North Sea. More than 46,000 Australians and 2700 New Zealanders died on the Western Front, about five times the number killed during the Gallipoli campaign.

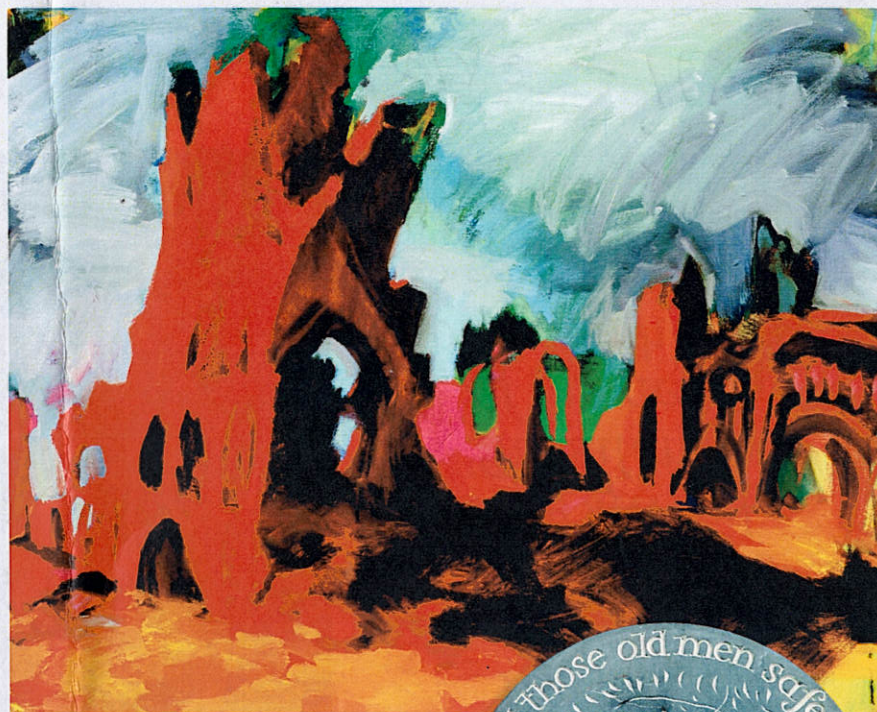
“For the soldiers who fought there, the Western Front was remembered for trench warfare with its horrors of massive artillery barrages, clouds of poison gas, the incessant deadly chatter of machine guns and belts of impenetrable barbed wire,” says Brad Manera, senior historian and curator at Sydney’s Anzac Memorial.

Last year a group of 12 well-known Australian artists visited the Western Front to create works that responded to the battlegrounds and the effects the war had on Australian communities and culture. Arising out of the artists’ experiences and personal insights is a travelling exhibition titled ‘Salient: Contemporary Artists at the Western Front’, which explores the

differences between a century ago and now.

Today the Western Front is a place of verdant pastures, thriving farms and bustling villages. But the war has left its scars on the countryside. There are fields of stark rows of white crosses in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries. Trenches, craters and other battle remnants pockmark the landscape in parts. Every year farmers still dig up unexploded grenades and shells.

Sydney painter Michelle Hiscock was particularly interested in the way the landscape was able to renew itself after the destruction. “It’s as if the landscape had become a giant open-air cathedral, where so much carnage



*Clockwise: Amanda Penrose Hart’s Corbie; Wendy Sharpe’s Cloth Hall Ypres; a slate medallion by Ian Marr from his series Three Medallions After Simonides for Hill 60, Battle of Messines; artist Ross Laurie sketching*

*BOW - the*



**Above:** Luke Sciberras's Polygon Wood. **Left:** Michelle Hiscock's Tree, Caterpillar Crater. **Below:** The 12 Australian artists visited historical sites. **Above right (bugle):** Deirdre Bean's Call to Home



and destruction gave way to this incredible feeling of peace," she says.

Both grandfathers of her husband, art critic Christopher Allen, fought in the war. One was Major General Arthur Samuel 'Tubby' Allen, who later fought the Japanese on the Kokoda track in World War II.

The other, Private Maitland Richard Stanley Paine, was gassed at Passchendaele. When visiting the site with her fellow painters, Hiscock read out a letter written by Private Paine to his parents.

*"I don't like to say much about this day (October 12, 1917), and it would have broken your heart to have seen our lads lying about after the attack. Getting the wounded out was terrible work, as it was necessary to go through miles of mud to get back to the first aid posts. My God, this was a sorry business."*



*The artists were struck with that contrast of the terror 100 years ago, and how serene it looks today*

Stanley survived, but like most veterans of war, he rarely spoke about his experiences.

"The artists were struck with that contrast of the terror 100 years ago, and how serene it looks today," says Robert Heather, director of the New England Regional Art Museum.

"The huge numbers of dead and missing left me, like many others, shaking my head with disbelief," reflects Walcha-based

artist Ross Laurie. "Boys from my town, like many others, died on these battlefields. How does one paint such a thing?" **R**

**'Salient: Contemporary Artists at the Western Front', is showing at: Anzac Memorial, Sydney, October 22 to February 17, 2019; Bank Art Museum Moree, March 5 to April 29, 2019; Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre, May 11 to June 30, 2019; Tweed Regional Gallery, November 21, 2019 to February 16, 2020.**



**WORDS FACT**

There are seven ways to spell the sound 'ee' in English. This sentence contains all of them: 'He believed Caesar could see people seizing the seas'.

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