



# *Belle Ile*

Euan Macleod & Luke Sciberras

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An exhibition of paintings by Euan Macleod and Luke Sciberras from their expedition to Belle Ile, France: a journey inspired by the landscape and memory of the expatriate Australian painter John Peter Russell (1858-1930).

11 June – 6 July 2019

King Street Gallery   
on William 



Front cover: Euan Macleod *Looking out sea cave Belle Ile* 2019 oil on acrylic on polyester 100 x 124 cm  
Opposite: Luke Sciberras *Back to the sun, Belle Ile* 2018 oil on board 120 x 160 cm





## EUAN MACLEOD

John Peter Russell has often been relegated to the status of an eccentric footnote in the history of Australian painting; an artist who was involved with figures such as Van Gogh, Matisse and Monet, but who, until recently, has not been properly acknowledged in his own right. While I was aware of Russell's work, it wasn't until I encountered some of his paintings in the Hong Kong collection of a friend, Michael Nock, that I took much notice. Seeing them in an unexpected context made me look at them in a fresh way. These were astonishing paintings of wild seas and sheer cliffs; my kind of subject. Finding out the details of Russell's life made me more intrigued. Here was an artist who didn't push himself in the market place, who stood back and promoted others whom he thought needed the recognition (and money) more.

Belle Ile is synonymous with Russell and most of his best works were inspired by this one place. The idea of going there was compelling - to understand what drove him and his work. Michael Nock had been in discussion with the Art Gallery of New South Wales in regard to lending paintings for the forthcoming retrospective exhibition and was aware that a group was travelling to Belle Ile as part of the lead up to the show. Curator Wayne Tunnicliffe was being filmed on site by filmmakers Catherine Hunter and Bruce Inglis who were also hoping to make a documentary featuring Luke Sciberras. Also on the trip was author Sarah Turnbull, who had been researching Russell for a doctoral thesis and book. Michael suggested we tag along and do some painting.

Luke and I were already in France looking at WWI sites with another group of painters, so travelling on to Brittany seemed a perfect idea. Arriving there after the trip to the Western Front was a shock. I had found Flanders extremely depressing with graveyard after graveyard reminding me of the terrible loss of life that occurred on that flat, nondescript countryside. In contrast, Belle Ile was inspiring, with the verticality of the sea cliffs and huge rock towers emerging from the wild sea. I loved the way people were wandering around the edges of the cliffs with no barriers (apparently people fall off quite regularly).

At most places I go to paint, I try to get to grips with by painting what I see. The initial plein air paintings are direct and more or less representational. They are an attempt to understand a place. Although I prefer oil paint with its vivid colours and textural qualities, it is a difficult medium to travel with, especially when it comes to carrying wet paintings back home. With Belle Ile I took acrylic paints, paper and a small fold-up table to work on.

While working at Belle Ile, I felt that what I was doing was too dark and wasn't capturing the place. By comparison, Luke's work was full of colour and life. Now I realise that my expectations, after having looked so long at Russell, were of the kind of bright, colourful place the Impressionists had painted, but my works were abidingly dark and grey. Both light and dark are present at different times and, ultimately, each of us sees what we want to see.

*With special thanks to*

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Manly Art Gallery & Museum for developing the exhibition Belle Ile: Luke Sciberras & Euan Macleod (13 July – 2 September 2018).



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