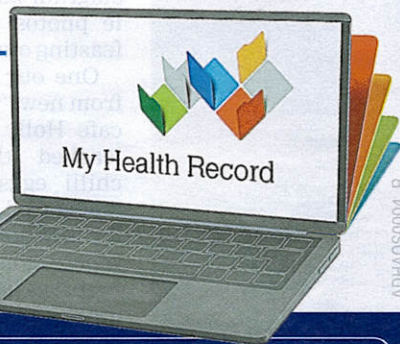




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First impressions

✦ Jacqui Taffel

Director Catherine Hunter has made many acclaimed films about creative Australians, including Jeffrey Smart, Sidney Nolan and Margaret Olley.

Her latest documentary brings a little-known Australian painter to light, who grew up in Darlinghurst, ended his days in Watsons Bay, and was one of the most influential impressionist painters in 19th century France. He was friends with van Gogh and Rodin, painted with Monet and influenced Matisse, but few have heard of John Russell.

John Russell — Australia's French Impressionist introduces an extraordinary, groundbreaking artist and iconoclast who cared nothing for the rules of the society he was born into.

The film starts with the dramatic scenery, waves



Artist Luke Sciberras on Belle Ile in France in the documentary.

crashing on the rocky shores of Belle Ile, the remote island off France where Russell lived and painted for 20 years. Hunter says the landscape has barely changed in the past 100 years. "It is always great when you can match up the locations with the paintings."

Curator Wayne Tunnicliffe, who put together the John Russell retrospective

now showing at the Art Gallery of NSW and also visited Belle Ile for the film, says Russell was born into the establishment, but lived his life on the edge of the most avant-garde art practices. "He chose to live a very unconventional life."

The documentary is showing on ABC iView until November 30; for the full story see wentworthcourier.com.au

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