

GEORGE·W·
LAMBERT

heroes & icons



9. **Across the black soil plains 1899**

painted at Hornsby, Sydney
 oil on canvas 91.6 x 305.5
 signed and dated 'Geo. W. LAMBERT 1899'
 lower right
 Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,
 purchased in 1899 (550)

Lambert's best-known bush image, *Across the black soil plains* was inspired by his memories of horse teams hauling heavily laden wool wagons across the bare, miry, flat lands of Snakes Plain from Warren to the railway station at Nevertire. He encountered this landscape while droving sheep in the 1890s and was reminded of it during a visit to Warren in 1899. Lambert suggested that Jim Smith, a known identity of the district, was the model for the teamster walking beside the wool wagon and urging the horses onwards (ML MSS A1811, p. 54). It has also been claimed that the teamster was Luke Rollins

from Moree, and Henry Sharkey, who carried a record load from Louth to Bourke.

By portraying the rhythmic rise and fall of the horses' heads and the tilt of the wagon, Lambert created a sense of movement in his image. The horses strain as they pull the load through the mud which sticks to their hoofs like glue, with the leader leaning into the chains to pull others into line. He dramatised the scene by placing the horses in silhouette against the sky and using the chiaroscuro of light and dark, showing the light making its way through the billowing clouds and illuminating the horses' backs. In adopting a low viewpoint Lambert also made the team dominate the image. Apart from the blue in the sky the painting is a harmony of tonally balanced browns, beiges and white.

Placing the large canvas diagonally across the garden shed or washhouse at his mother's home in the Sydney suburb of Hornsby, Lambert began to work on it. He had made colour notes of the landscape, as well as

sketches of Jim Smith's team of horses while staying at Meryon in about 1895–6 (ML MSS A1811, p. 17). He commented that:

As a boy in the bush I did much work with draft [sic] horses ... [One] called Barney had such fine action and such imposing carriage ... and possibly what knowledge I displayed in connection with horses in 'Black Soil Plains' originated with my association with this exceptionally fine animal (ML MSS A1811, pp. 54–5).

He later scoured the area around his mother's home for further models for the horses, and for each one in the team he made two or three oil studies (ML MSS A1811, pp. 54–5).

The painting echoes the spirit of a poem by the Scottish–Australian narrative poet and horseman, Will Ogilvie, 'How the Fire Queen crossed the swamp'. This poem, published in Ogilvie's first collection, *Fair girls and gray horses* (Sydney, 1898), included the lines:



With straining muscles and tightened chains – sixteen pulling like one;
 Withjinglingharnessanddroningwheels
 and bare hoofs’ rhythmic tramp,
 Withcreakingtimbersandlurchingload
 the Fire Queen faced the swamp!

Across the black soil plains inspired other poems such as ‘Across the black soil plains’ by ‘Mousquetaire’ (Gordon Tidy), which was published in the Bulletin, 30 October 1902 and was illustrated by Lambert’s painting.

O nobly manned must be the land, and
 nobly horsed as well,
 Has such a sight as this to show, such
 story has to tell,
 The teamster who so sternly strides, the
 team so strongly strains
 Tillstrideandstrengthbecomeatlength
 across the Black Soil Plains

The picture received an enthusiastic response from contemporary critics. The Sydney Morning Herald wrote on 18 August 1899

‘In this long narrow canvas the young artist paints with astonishing vigour and sense of movement ... in every conceivable attitude the horses tug and strain at the heavy load.’ It was purchased by the Art Gallery of New South Wales at the New South Wales Society of Artists exhibition in 1899 and was subsequently awarded the 1899 Wynne Prize for landscape painting.

More critical of his own work than many others, Lambert wrote in the Australian Magazine, 18 September 1899:

It is strong, ‘masculine’ if you like; the horses are well drawn and painted, the movement and action are ‘all there,’ the teamster (and his dog) are realistic, the sky is good, the colour is harmonious, the subject is popular, and the picture has been purchased for the National Art Gallery – what more can we say? This: that when G.W. Lambert has studied and worked hard for a few more years, both here and abroad (as we hope he will) –

well, then he may paint the ‘picture of the year’.

The painting inspired variations in other media such as Tom Woodman’s glass painting Load of wool 1940, at the Carinda Hotel, New South Wales, as well as a plaster version.

About 1855 Edward Roper painted a landscape entitled Bringing down the wool from a Murray station (National Library of Australia, Canberra), which included a bullock team with a load of wool. Frank Mahony also treated the subject of a wool wagon several times. These images have none of the action or drama of Lambert’s painting, nor the spirit of place. Out of the particular and the personal Lambert created an enduring icon conveying the toil of man and horse and their relationship with the land.

21. Miss Thea Proctor 1903

Painted in London at Lansdowne House, Holland Park
oil on canvas 91.5 x 71.0
signed 'G.W.L.' lower right
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,
purchased under the Florence Turner Blake Bequest in 1961 (OA12.1961)

Australian printmaker, designer, painter and teacher Thea Proctor (1879–1966) was significant in Lambert's life as a friend, colleague and model. She studied with Julian Ashton in Sydney where Lambert was a fellow student. Chaperoned by her mother, she arrived in England in the summer of 1903 and sat for Lambert during the autumn in his studio flat at Lansdowne House, Lansdowne Road, Holland Park, London (AGNSWQ 1962). For this portrait Proctor wore her customary summer outfit for 1903, a softly flowing dark-blue-purple polka-dot dress, the parched front a special feature of the time, together with a wide-brimmed hat. Throughout her life, Proctor presented herself as a woman who was aware of what was stylish, while adapting current trends to her own highly personal sense of elegance.

Lambert arranged his twenty-three-year-old sitter with an imaginary landscape behind her in the manner of earlier artists such as Thomas Gainsborough. He also

worked in the tradition of the prominent society portrait painter, Charles Furse, who created a vogue for airy outdoor portraits. Like Furse, Lambert used fluid paint and superimposed dark shapes against light. He gave Proctor a sophisticated elegance by elongating her neck, torso and limbs. In his modelling of paint he suggested the tactile sensuousness of the skin and fabric he depicted. The languorous, rhythmical forms are in harmony with the rounded shapes of Proctor's face and the sleeves of her dress.

In the landscape behind Proctor Lambert depicted two hounds pursuing a white stag or a unicorn (a fabled creature symbolic of virginity). This small detail provides two possible, divergent, interpretations of the painting. If it is a stag, this could refer to the Greek myth of Artemis, goddess of abundance, fertility, hunting and longevity, who was furious when she discovered the mortal hunter Acteon watching her naked. As a punishment, she turned him into a stag and set his hounds upon him to tear him apart. If the animal is a unicorn it could refer to the maiden in the Hunt of the unicorn tapestries (The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), who tames the unicorn with her charms after huntsmen and hounds pursue the animal and bring it to bay.

In painting this portrait Lambert may also have been influenced by two (or three) remarkable works that he saw in the National

Gallery when he first arrived in London: Rubens's *Le chapeau de paille* c. 1625 and Hogarth's *The shrimp girl* c. 1745. At this time Lambert suggested that Hogarth's painting 'fairly carried [him] off his feet' (ML MSS A1811, pp. 55–6). In his treatise, *The analysis of beauty*, Hogarth recommended the essence of beauty lies in the 'line of grace', or 'line of beauty', against the straight lines of academic classicism. This florid, 'serpentine line', was the fluid aesthetic that Lambert adopted at this time, and especially in this portrait. Like Rubens, Lambert painted his subject in a pose of modesty with a sideways glance. But unlike that of Susannah Fourment (Rubens's subject in *Le chapeau de paille*), Proctor's bosom is not openly displayed, but fully clothed, perhaps to reinforce this modesty. Lambert was not by any means the first to refer to Rubens's painting in his own, and he may also have been referencing the work of the most famous female painter of the eighteenth century, Elisabeth Vigée-LeBrun, and her *Self-portrait in a straw hat* c. 1782 (National Gallery, London), painted in free imitation of Rubens's work.

This was the first painting which Lambert exhibited at the Royal Academy (in 1904), where it was prominently hung. For many years it remained in the possession of the Lamberts. Amy Lambert gave it to the sitter in 1946.



27. Lotty and a lady 1906

painted in London at 2 Rossetti Studios,
Flood Street, Chelsea

oil on canvas 103.0 x 128.3

signed and dated 'G.W.LAMBERT./ 1906'
lower right

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,
purchased through the Felton Bequest in
1910 (492-2)

In *Lotty and a lady*, Lambert presented an apparently everyday kitchen scene in which the housemaid, Lotty, is in command of her kitchen, looking out comfortably at the viewer. The lady, with head in profile and dressed for outdoors in hat and gloves, occupies the upper left of the scene. On the table is a carefully arranged still life with two fish, observed with precision. Neither mistress nor maid engage with these objects. They are lost in thought, posed as the still life.

The model for the lady was Thea Proctor. The model for 'Lotty' was Lottie Stafford, a Cockney washerwoman living in the slum cottages of Paradise Walk in Chelsea. She was a popular model on account of her naturalness, total self-assurance and subtle sensuality. She had a 'swan neck' which greatly appealed to William Orpen, and which he emphasised in the series of works he painted around 1905 – including *The*

wash house 1905 (National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin) – that deal with working-class themes. Lottie also posed for British artists William Nicholson and Walter Sickert.

Lambert painted the work with assured brushstrokes in a restricted palette. He used broader paintwork for the main elements of the picture, with some remarkable crisp flicks of paint, and a more detailed and delicate handling for his depiction of the fish and other still-life details in the foreground.

Lambert's painterly approach and careful design reflects his desire to paint in the manner of Velázquez, and the image resembles Velázquez's *Kitchen scene with Christ in the house of Martha and Mary* 1618 (National Gallery, London). As in a number of Velázquez's works the viewpoints are organised so that we see the table and the objects from above while looking directly at the figures. But Lambert also suggested that he could not have painted Lotty's head had he 'not been so impressed by the work of Manet' (ML MSS A1811, p. 72).

This apparently straightforward genre scene may also have symbolic significance. Lambert may have intended to depict one of the themes of Velázquez's painting, the contemplative versus the active life, with the lady representing the contemplative or leisurely life and Lotty the world of work, necessary for the contemplative life. Lambert

may also be presenting two aspects of one woman, the elegant public face as opposed to the domestic private self.

Further, this painting may also be a comment on class relations. By portraying a housemaid sitting in the kitchen together with the mistress of the house, Lambert challenged traditional Edwardian social roles and behaviours. At this time servants were urged to make themselves invisible when in the presence of their employers, and to this extent the scene is stage-managed. Lotty is posed in a subversive manner with her hand defiantly on her hip, and she wears earrings, something that might be considered unusual for a servant girl. The subject is similar to those of several of Lambert's *Bulletin* illustrations in which he portrayed a mistress with a confident servant – with the servant usually getting the better of her mistress.

The painting was acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria at the insistence of Sir Walter Baldwin Spencer, a gallery trustee, from its exhibition at the Guild Hall, Melbourne, in 1910. It was the first of Lambert's European paintings to be purchased for an Australian public collection, and the only one to be purchased while he lived abroad.



46. Chesham Street 1910

Painted in London at 2 Rossetti Studios,
Flood Street, Chelsea
oil on canvas 62.0 x 51.5
signed 'G.W.L.' lower centre
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,
purchased in 1993 (93.1191)

Chesham Street is one of a group of 'puzzle pictures' that Lambert painted between 1910 and 1914. These paintings appear to have a meaning and yet are not strictly narrative; they invite the viewer to provide their own interpretation.

This is a bravura work that demonstrates Lambert's considerable technical prowess but, more than this, it is a challenging and demanding image which asks 'who is this man and what is going on?'. The man sits boldly in front of the viewer, holding up his shirt and revealing his entire torso. His head is held high, his lips are closed and he looks down at the viewer. His pale flesh, with

the play of light on it, gleams against the dark surroundings. Lambert's friend Hardy Wilson names 'Williams, Lambert's model' as the source for the patient being sounded by a medical man (Wilson 1930, p. 93) and Thea Proctor stated that it was the same model, once a sailor, who posed for the king in *The Shop* (Thomas 1962). However, the features of the half-clad man resemble those of Lambert, and it is probable that Lambert intended to suggest a self-image (using the model's body for the torso).

The picture has been read narratively as a scene in a consulting room with a doctor examining the heart or lungs of his patient. Although Lambert does depict such a scene, this is not the subject of the painting, but the excuse for the composition. Dramatically, the painting is not about a physical examination at a specialist's room in Chesham Street, London, but rather the psychological intrusiveness of that process. In 1901, Freud published his *Psychopathology of everyday life* and, during the decade, his

ideas about exploring the psyche gained wider understanding. This man seems to have nothing to hide, to be literally and metaphorically baring his chest, exposing his heart and soul to the world.

Contemporary critics in Britain, such as P.G. Konody in the *Observer* on 27 May 1910, acknowledged the 'truly masterly painting of a male form'. When the painting was later exhibited in Australia, Lambert's friends also recognised that the subject provided a splendid opportunity for the presentation of nudity. But this is not strictly a male nude. The figure is not naked; he is half clothed and is intentionally shown in this way to give the image greater impact and to make it more sexually charged.

Lambert also had a technical concern in painting this work: he used the subject as an opportunity to depict the male torso using a monochromatic approach, with the play of light on the pale surface of the skin contrasted against the shaded head (ML MSS A1811, p. 74).



53. Miss Helen Beauclerk 1914

Painted in London at Avenue Studios,
Sydney Close, off Fulham Road
oil on canvas 76.5 x 61.0
signed and dated 'G.W. Lambert 1914'
lower left
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,
purchased in 1921 (6110)

The British writer Helen de Vere Beauclerk (1892–1969) was born Helen Mary Dorothea Bellingham. Her father, a major in the army, died in India a year after her birth, and she was adopted by a close family friend, Major Ferdinand de Vere Beauclerk. She studied at the Paris Conservatoire, and for a short time earned her living teaching music and accompanying on the piano. She returned to England at the outbreak of the First World War. She became a close friend of the artist

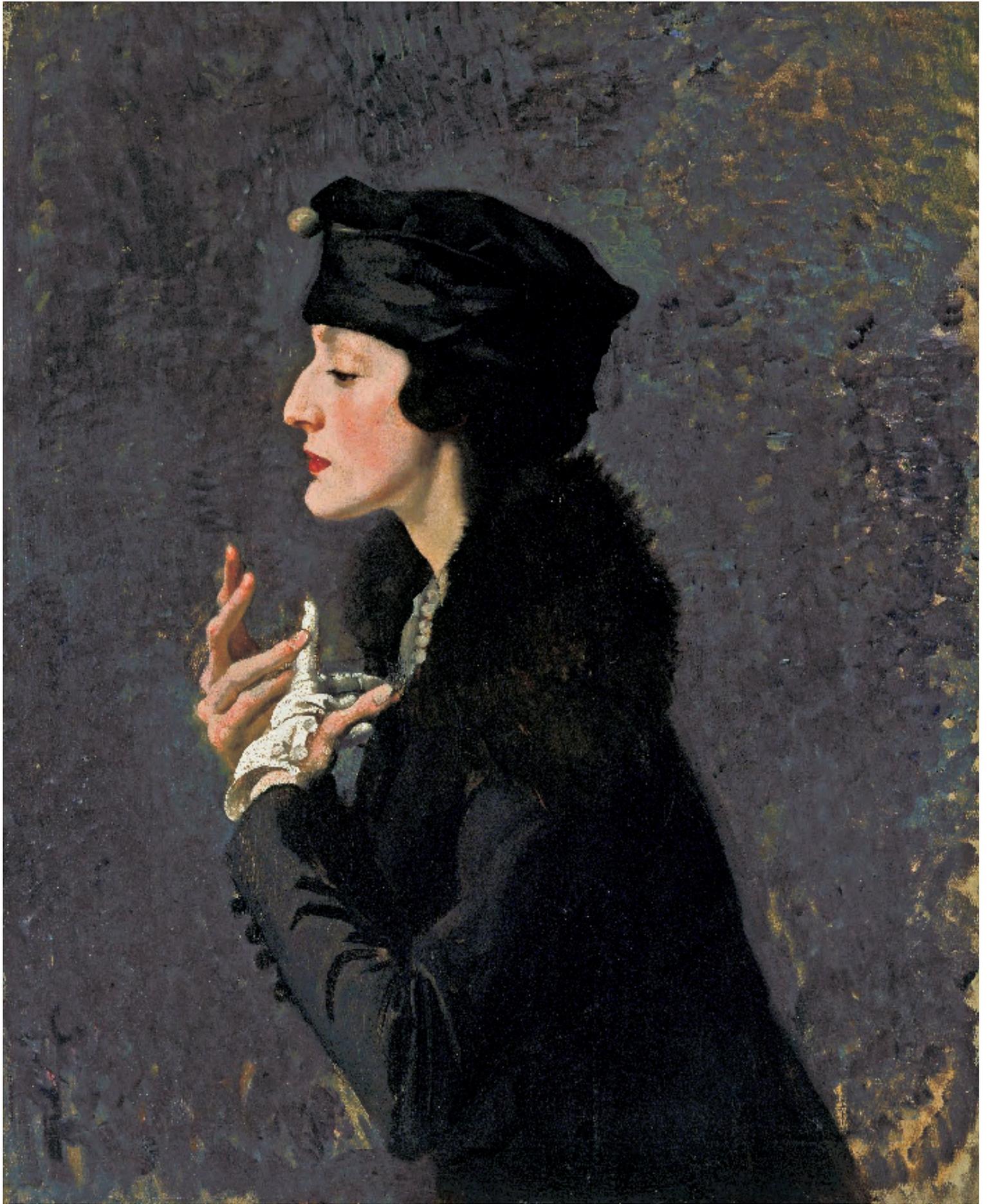
Edmund Dulac and, after he separated from his wife, lived with him from 1924 until his death in 1953. Dulac frequently used her as a model for his illustrations, and illustrated her two novels, *The green lacquer pavilion* (1926) and *The love of the foolish angel* (1929). She also wrote *Mountain and the tree* (1935) and *Shadows on the wall* (1941) and translated into English work by Colette. She was tall and slender with a long neck, and dressed simply and elegantly.

Lambert captured Helen Beauclerk's face brilliantly, suggesting the pulsating life under her skin. He reminded viewers of her physicality by showing her putting on her gloves, one bare hand stroking down a gloved index finger on the other hand. At the time that he painted this portrait Lambert began to emphasise the hands of his sitters, which he invested with a degree of nervous energy, as he did in this painting.

As well as creating a likeness of his fascinating subject, Lambert was interested in the beauty and texture of the whole of his paint surface. The background is thinly painted in expressive dabs in many colours, including chrome yellow, blue, purple and black.

Contemporary critics appreciated the abstract, decorative qualities of this painting, as much as its likeness. The Observer critic, P.G. Konody, noted on 17 June 1917, 'These portraits are convincing and full of character; but the interest aroused by the life-like representation is never allowed to distract attention from the more abstract qualities of the work'.

The portrait was purchased by the Art Gallery of New South Wales when first exhibited in Australia at the Fine Art Society in 1921. It was their first purchase of Lambert's work since the 1890s.



38. Portrait group (The mother) 1907

Painted in London at 2 Rossetti Studios,
Flood Street, Chelsea
oil on canvas 204.6 x 162.5
signed and dated 'G.W.LAMBERT 1907'
lower left
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane,
purchased with the assistance of S.H. Ervin
in 1965 (1.1046)

During the early 1900s, images of women and children were a favourite subject for traditional and more modern artists alike. In *Portrait group (The mother)*, Lambert contrasted two women: one wearing the kind of billowing dress worn in feminist and artistic circles, and the other standing next to her with her hand placed cavalierly on her shoulder, wearing a fashionable black satin waisted coat and a high-necked dress. In this way he contrasted the supple, rounded form of one woman against the more statuesque figure of the other, and in so doing suggested the difference between a woman's role as a mother and that as an independent woman. As with his other family groups he used his wife and children as models, together with their artist friend Thea Proctor.

This is one of a number of images of women and children that Lambert painted, to which he gave objective titles such as *Equestrian* (portrait of a boy (cat. 26) and *Holiday in*

Essex (cat. 44) rather than the subjective 'The artist's family' or 'Amy, Maurice and Constant'. He intended his wife and children to signify the 'ideal' mother and children and not to represent themselves. He sometimes depicted his second son Constant dressed in a frock that was then used for baby boys, as in this work, and generally with his genitalia hidden, so that he could be viewed as any child and not specifically as this particular boy-child.

Lambert's depiction of the boy in the long coat with his feet firmly planted on the ground looking out of the picture with an expression of roguish defiance resembles Velázquez's portrait Philip IV of Spain in brown and silver 1632 (National Gallery, London). The stance of this figure also recalls Hans Holbein's portrait of Henry VIII or Reynolds's mock-heroic Master Crewe as Henry VIII 1776 (private collection). Lambert appropriated the pose, which through its common usage had become part of the general vocabulary of art. Lambert admitted that 'the pose and atmosphere are traditional enough; and has actually no more relationship with Spanish art than with anything modern' (ML MSS A1811 p. 70). What is more, the costume came about by accident. Maurice was originally going to be painted in a white shirt, but one day he was fooling around with his father's coat and Lambert, delighted with this image, incorporated it into the painting.

In this family group Lambert worked in the tradition of prominent society portrait painter Charles Furse. Like Furse, Lambert did not seek to paint a naturalistic outdoor image, particularly in his depiction of the landscape and the placement of the figures in it. Rather, he wanted to create a decorative effect, using the billowing forms of the clouds to enhance the rounded shapes of the figures, and deliberately placing dark shapes against light. In discussing this picture Lambert observed that 'the dextrous brushwork, the following of the contours, the suave movement of drapery and clouds – are distinctly influenced by Furse'. (Lambert 1924, p. 13)

The painting received favourable comment from contemporary London critics. *The Times* suggested on 4 May 1907 that the painting was 'full of promise for the future', while P.G. Konody, who became a staunch supporter of Lambert's work, noted in the supplement to the *Observer* on 5 May 1907 that it was 'painted with such freshness and such musical sense of colour that it is as bracing as a sea-breeze after the studio-made articles that abound all round'. He went on to suggest that Lambert's 'chief aim seems to have been the realisation of a decorative effect by rhythmic arrangement of line and balance of masses'.

This work is reported to have been Amy Lambert's favourite portrait group.



82. A sergeant of the Light Horse 1920

Painted in London at 25 Glebe Place, Chelsea
oil on canvas 77.0 x 62.0
signed and dated 'G.W.LAMBERT./ 1920.'
lower right
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,
purchased through the Felton Bequest in 1921
(1182-3)

A sergeant of the Light Horse is a tribute to a type of Australian, generally a product of a rural background, who became part of the national mythology during the First World War: the Light Horseman.

Lambert posed his subject in his flannel shirt, sleeves rolled up and forearms bare, seated in the open air before a ridge of scrubby hills and a blue sky. He is in a meditative position, with eyes glancing downwards. The Light Horseman holds his much-prized plumed hat to his chest – as if he has removed it in respect for his dead comrades, about whom his lowered eyes suggest he may be thinking.

The portrait is painted in the high-key palette which Lambert adopted as a result of his appreciation of Botticelli's paintings from fifteenth-century Florence and his desire to paint a picture which would look good under any light. Botticelli's influence can also be found in the downward look, the elegant, slender neck, the long-fingered hands with clearly delineated nails and the sculptured features of the face.

This work demonstrates Lambert's observance of a balanced structure: the oval head is counterpoised against the circular form of the hat. The head is silhouetted against the brilliant blue, cloud-dotted sky and separated from and lifted above the V-shaped outline of the hills, which is

mirrored in reverse in the shoulders, followed through with a repetitive echo in the (sergeant's) stripes of the jacket and the angle of the elbow, and seen again in the pointed curl of the hair and the angular chin.

Lambert gave this serviceman a sensuousness through his sharp-focus rendering of flesh and musculature, and in the way he portrayed the taut neck and wiry arms. As Hans Heysen observed, 'the feeling way the eyes have been painted and the expression of that sensitiveness around the mouth are truly wonderful' (Thiele, p. 295).

This image of a Light Horseman matches the official account of the Australian Light Horseman who served in Palestine. H.S. Gullett wrote: 'So far as a distinctive type has been evolved it is ... young men long of limb and feature, spare of flesh, easy and almost tired in bearing'. The long-limbed, lean and languid figure that Lambert portrayed fits easily with such a description. So too does this soldier's rather sensitive glance for, as Gullett observed, the Light Horseman 'for all his unconventional ways ... was at least distinguished by shyness and reserve. The young countryman leads a simple and peaceful life. He bears himself modestly ... A felt slouch hat, a shirt with sleeves rolled to the elbows, long trousers ...' (Gullett 1936, pp. 34–6).

The model for this Light Horseman is reputed to be Thomas Herbert Ivers (1881–1940), a sergeant with the 1st Signal Squadron who was employed colouring contour maps for the War Records Section in Palestine. He met Lambert during the latter's visit to Damascus in 1919. Ivers was granted leave to assist Lambert with his large battle paintings in London from September 1919 to February 1920.

This work is about an Australian type, his relationship to the countryside and his memories of his mates. Lambert created a new model for a military portrait; instead of the noble, the dashing and the heroic subjects of previous wars he presented a humble, but not humbled, man; he is shown in all simplicity without the pomp of his full-dress uniform, without the glamour and superior status of a horse, and he is the stronger for this. As Alexander Colquhoun wrote in the Melbourne Herald, on 11 May 1921, this was seen as 'a truly distinctive figure, and constitutes the most original and descriptive presentation of a Digger which we have yet seen here'.

More important is Lambert's use, in this painting, of the image which perfectly matched certain powerful ideas current in the then-young Australian commonwealth. The image met a need for national self-definition. Australians who were formed by bush life, by working with animals and the elements in a blond land under a blue sky, would become the no-nonsense, unceremonious soldiers who excelled at war in the lands of the ancient Mediterranean, but knew its cost, were appalled by it, and would not romanticise it. They were tough, wiry and tender.

It is also significant that the landscape setting in biblical Palestine has been made to resemble the familiar convention of a blue-and-gold Australian landscape.

The work was purchased for the National Gallery of Victoria, on the advice of its director Bernard Hall, from Lambert's return-to-Australia exhibition at the Fine Art Society's Gallery, Melbourne, in 1921. It was reproduced on an Australian one-dollar stamp issued in 1974.



54. Important people c. 1914, 1915, 1921

painted in London at 25 Glebe Place, Chelsea
oil with pencil on canvas 134.7 x 170.3
signed 'G.W.LAMBERT/ CHELSEA/ SYDNEY'
upper centre (in cartouche on cart)
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,
purchased in 1930 (557)

Who are these important people? Lambert presented a group of ordinary people at a time when the subjects of group portraits were often people with wealth or status in society. He mocked the assumption that importance is a matter of money or property. He created an allegorical image representing a range of qualities that are possessed by people in the world: motherhood and the new life and energy of future generations; physical prowess and the fighting forces of the world; business and administrative acumen; and the ongoing activities of the world, represented by the red cartwheel.

Lambert's portrayal of these working people and his strong characterisation appealed to his contemporaries, but they found it an enigma; they were puzzled about the subject and how the oddly assorted group of figures fitted together into one scene. They considered it to be a most incongruous group, made more so by being grouped in front of a cart above the sea. They would have preferred a more literal story to Lambert's allegorical one. The Observer critic, P.G. Konody, suggested on 26 April 1914 that 'one could accept it as a triumphant assertion of the theory that it does not matter what a picture represents, so long as it be well painted'.

The Daily Express critic observed on 16 April 1914 that the flower girl

has her momentary importance since the advent of Eliza Doolittle and her 'horrible language'; the prize fighter has as big a public following as the musical comedy 'star'; and on the importance of babies Blue-books and Royal Commissions galore have often insisted.

The reviewer proceeded to ask of the gentleman with the top hat in Lambert's painting, 'is he a stockbroker' or 'merely a professor of phonetics?'. In his most famous play, *Pygmalion* (1912), George Bernard Shaw made fun of social snobbery and the way people judged others according to class. Important people was not an illustration of Shaw's writing, but it was a variation on his socialist ideas, showing a flower girl and a prize-fighter posing with the authority of eminent citizens.

The woman who initially posed for the mother, flower girl or costermonger was a professional model, a young unmarried mother from Battersea whose baby, shown in the rush basket, died while the painting was in progress. (Lambert reworked the head a year later, using another model, Eunice Graham; see the drawing, cat. 56.) The model for the boy was a boxer, Albert Broadrib, who was training for his first fight and who Amy Lambert said arrived 'escorted by a bodyguard of one or more trainers, who watched over his feeding and smoking' (Lambert 1938, p. 55). The model for the businessman was William Marchant, the head of Goupil Gallery, a man of great charm and affability who had retired to Hove but travelled to London for the sittings. Lambert made several pencil sketches for various figures in the group. The signature with the inscription 'Chelsea/Sydney' indicates that he reworked the painting again in the second part of 1921.

Lambert commented that although 'many people think this picture was influenced by certain movements which were going on in London' his approach was more influenced by the Italian primitives and Botticelli. It was a 'desire to create a picture which would look good in any light ... It was the working within a fixed limitation, a little span of which Puvis was so proud ... It was the beginning ... of a reverence of rule, of order' (ML MSS A1811, p. 76). It was a decorative composition, a concern with the arrangement of shapes. To this end Lambert deliberately flattened

the forms, placing an emphasis on line and strong design. He intentionally used a high-key, pastel palette and created a dry, chalky texture for his paint, 'working wax and turpentine into his paint to do away with shininess and the unevenness of surface' (Lambert 1924, p. 15). He drew with pencil into his paint to outline the figures.

Lambert's decorative and colourful arrangement of figures in fixed poses, nonetheless, resembles those in the paintings of Eric Kennington, William Strang and other British realists with whom Lambert exhibited. Important people was shown in 1914 alongside Kennington's *Costermongers*, and the reviewer for the Daily Mail, 24 April 1914, described these paintings as 'huge staring groups of life-size people, represented in a brutal airless way, though with a great deal of technical cleverness', and acknowledged that they were protests against the 'namby-pamby' of the usual group compositions.

When exhibited at the International Society's 1914 exhibition, Important people was a succès de scandale. It received greater critical attention than any of Lambert's previous works, with the reviewer from the Daily Express suggesting on 16 April 1914 that the painting would 'provide dinner-table discussion for the next fortnight'.

Although highly admired and greatly controversial during his lifetime, this painting was still owned by Lambert at the time of his death. The Australian critic Basil Burdett wrote that 'Important People assumed its place unchallenged as the most complete pictorial essay' in Lambert's memorial exhibition, and went further to suggest that it was 'perhaps the most important pictorial conception achieved by Lambert' (Burdett 1930).



61. The convex mirror c. 1916

Painted at Cranleigh, Surrey
oil with pencil on wood panel 50.0 x 50.0
private collection

This painting presents a group of people in a reflected image. They stand in the low-beamed living-room of Belwethers, a cottage in the village of Cranleigh. The former country cottage of Mrs Halford, Lambert's patron and friend, had been taken over by her daughter Mary and her son-in-law Sir Edmund Davis after her death in 1915. Sir Edmund stands at the window in the background; his wife, dressed in black, sits at the table; a maid serves tea; Amy Lambert, dressed in blue, stands; Sir Edmund's sister-in-law Amy Halford sits with her hands on her lap; and the artist looks out of the image in the foreground. The oak beams in the ceiling take up half the picture and become, in the reflection, curved instead of straight lines, causing the design to flow in a circle – disturbing the very solidity of the room.

It is a jewel-like piece of painting, with the lustre of a looking-glass, in which Lambert explored the distinction between how things appear in the picture or in a mirror, or how they are in life itself. He placed the artist within the painting on a separate plane from the other people within the scene, and showed him ignoring them and looking out to the viewer – observing the entire scene through a convex mirror. His hand thrusts forward, without a brush, spread wide as it would when distorted in a mirror.

In 1916 Lambert visited Cranleigh, Surrey, when his son Constant became seriously ill with osteomyelitis while he was a scholarship pupil at Christ's Hospital school in Horsham,

West Sussex. (Cranleigh is situated halfway between Guildford and Horsham.)

Constant's condition was so grave that Lambert and Amy moved to Cranleigh to be near him. To pass the time, and determined not to give way to brooding over his sick son, Lambert painted *The convex mirror*, the reflection of a room in this cottage. Yet Lambert captured some of his sadness at the death of Mrs Halford (who acted as a grandmother to his children) and his anxiety over his son's illness, as well as the universal unease and apprehension created by the First World War, in the way he presented the world through a convex mirror – disturbed and distorted.

Lambert carefully constructed the painting, drawing the lines of the beams and other structural elements onto the wood panel before commencing the painting. He used fine brushes to convey the scene. In addition to his masterful depiction of the illusion of a room viewed through a convex mirror, he also captured a soft light coming through the windows and lighting up the tablecloth and the cane chair.

Lambert saluted the sixteenth-century Italian mannerist painter Parmigianino's illusionist tour-de-force, *Self-portrait in a convex mirror* 1523–24 (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) in this painting. Like Parmigianino Lambert painted his work by looking at himself (and the others in the room) in a curved mirror and then recreating the effect. As in Parmigianino's work, he captured the way the mirror widens the scene, enlarging everything nearby and making everything distant seem further away. But most significantly, like the Italian master, he created a display of virtuosity.

Many artists have included a convex mirror in their work, such as van Eyck in *The Arnolfini portrait* 1434 (National Gallery, London) in which the mirror probably reflects the painter himself; Quentin Massys in *The moneylender and his wife* 1514 (Musée du Louvre, Paris), which reflects the artist and the outer world into the picture; and Caravaggio in *Martha and Mary Magdalene* c. 1598 (Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan), in which the artist used the mirror to enable Martha to reproach Mary for her vanity.

The mirror device was fashionable at the turn of the century, and frequently used by artists such as William Orpen. Orpen depicted himself reflected in a convex mirror on the wall behind his subjects in both *The mirror* 1900 (Tate, London) and *A Bloomsbury family* 1907 (Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh) – a device Orpen borrowed from van Eyck's *The Arnolfini portrait*, which he would have known in the National Gallery. Likewise, genteel interiors, universes of the private individual, were popular subjects during this period, particularly in the exhibitions of the New English Art Club. In this work, Lambert depicted mistresses and maids, and the daily domestic ritual of tea. He depicted people reading and reflecting in the comfort of familiar surroundings. He also showed the master looking out the window and the wider world beyond. And he presented sun coming through the windows and lighting up the interior.

Thea Proctor wrote in *The Home* on 1 July 1930 that *The convex mirror* 'has the exquisite finish of the Dutch Masters, and shows that a present-day artist could also paint small things in a large manner'.



88. Anzac, the landing 1915 1920–22

Painted in London and Melbourne
oil on canvas 190.5 x 350.5
signed and dated 'GW LAMBERT 1918–1922'
lower right
Australian War Memorial, Canberra,
commissioned in 1919, acquired in 1922
(ART02873)

On 25 April 1915 Australian and New Zealand troops landed on Gallipoli at dawn. It was one of two main assaults on the Gallipoli peninsula. The Anzacs were to land near the promontory of Gaba Tepe, about halfway up the peninsula, while British forces landed at Cape Helles, at its southern tip. The two forces were to converge on the central mass of the Kilid Bahr Plateau, which dominated the Dardanelles Strait. The Anzac troops had expected open country, but instead were confronted with steep, scrub-covered heights, and climbed the precipitous cliffs under Turkish gunfire.

Lambert depicted the landing at the moment when the Australian troops were climbing the steep, rocky hillside. He showed the hugeness of the landscape and the smallness of the men. He portrayed many of the soldiers as dead, or falling, with puffs of smoke in the sky. He wrote:

visitors to the Museum... complain there is a lack of fire, a lack of action and of the terror of war, but on the facts ... we must accept that men equipped as these men were, moving upwards on this particular place, without any idea of where the enemy was, what they had to do, would look just like this small swarm of ants climbing, no matter how rapidly, climbing painfully and laboriously upward through the uneven ground and spiky uncomfortable shrubs (ML MSS A1811, p. 75).

Lambert portrayed the scene looking up at the cliffs and the mass of soldiers clambering up them, a different perspective from the majority of interpretations of this event, such as Charles Dixon's *The landing at Anzac, 25 April 1915* (Archives, New Zealand) which showed the scene from above with the men climbing out of boats and wading ashore. By adopting this viewpoint Lambert made the seemingly inaccessible heights seem

as much the enemy as the Turkish forces. Through his massive canvas, the harsh jagged outline of the cliff and the dark brown mass of the terrain silhouetted against a strident yellowed sky, Lambert conveyed the psychological impact of climbing these slopes. He helped viewers realise the endurance of the soldiers clambering upwards. Through his use of colour and abstract forms, he evoked the emotion of the occasion. And he showed the soldiers as small, faceless figures to create a visual metaphor for the scant regard in which these Australians' lives were held by those in charge of the campaign.

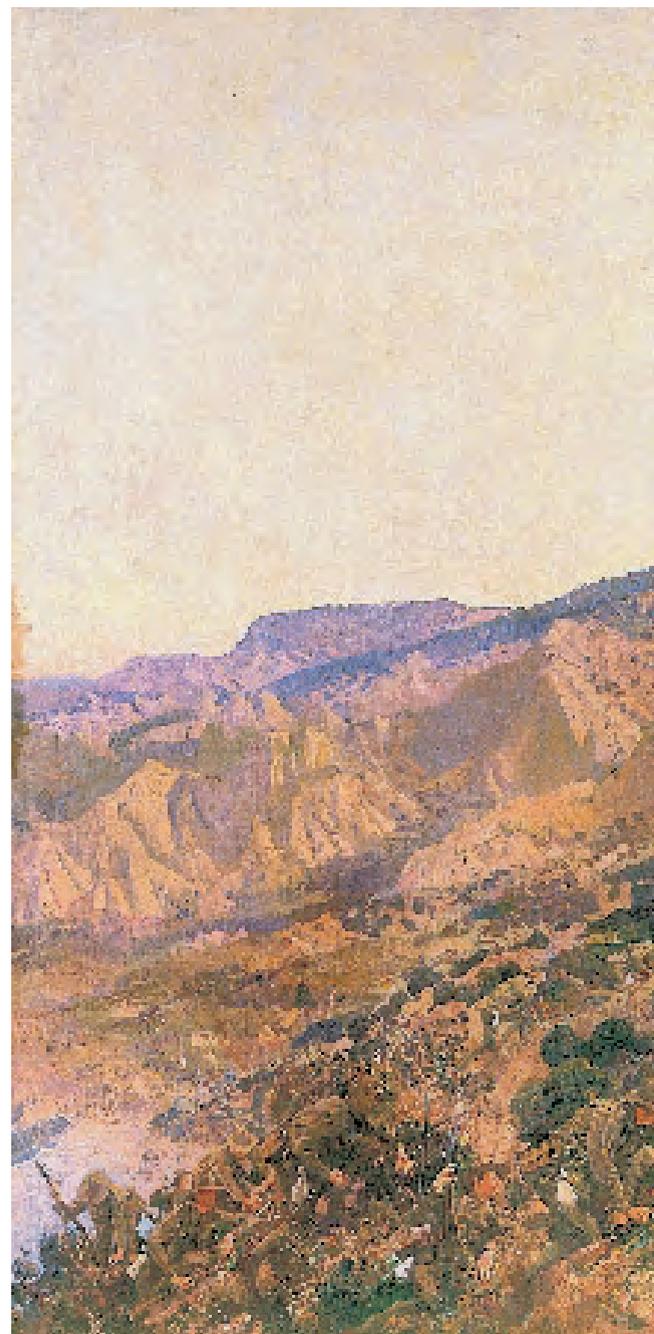
Lambert obtained facts about the landing from the Australian official historian C.E.W. Bean and other members of the Australian Historical Mission during his visit to Gallipoli in February–March 1919. At that time he painted oil sketches of the terrain at Gallipoli. Back in his London studio he made pencil studies of his models, dressed in uniform, as if climbing a steep cliff. From these, and from his oil sketches made on site, Lambert prepared a pencil design of the composition and a rough oil sketch. His son Maurice, an aspiring sculpture student, assisted his father by preparing the canvas and transferring the design onto it from Lambert's composition drawing. The canvas, advanced this far, was rolled up and shipped out to Australia in February 1921. In Australia, Lambert was assisted by Louis McCubbin, who helped by under-painting the sky, which Lambert worked over afterwards. McCubbin's assistance was of a mechanical kind, and not visible on the surface of the painting.

Alexander Colquhoun reviewed the painting in the *Melbourne Herald* on 4 May 1922. He wrote:

This is not a pretty picture, nor a cheerful one, and there is an uncanny lack of anything individual or personal in the scrambling, crawling, khaki figures scarcely discernible against the rocky precipitous ground. It speaks, however, as a declaration of sacrifice and achievement in a way that no other war picture has done.

Colquhoun understood that by representing these Australians climbing this specific cliff, Lambert conveyed the universal experience of people overcoming obstacles.

The painting was commissioned by the Australian government through the Australian High Commission in London in 1919, for £500, as part of the official war art scheme. Lambert began the painting in London and completed it in Sydney for the opening exhibition of the Australian War Museum, Melbourne, on Anzac Day 25 April 1922.





89. Self-portrait with gladioli 1922

Painted in Sydney
oil on canvas 128.2 x 102.8
signed and dated 'G.W. LAMBERT./ SYDNEY./
1922' lower left
National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, gift of
John Schaeffer AO in 2003 (2003.93)

In *Self-portrait with gladioli* Lambert deliberately depicted himself as a precious, self-assured aesthete. In this, he visualised the thoughts expressed in a letter to Amy on 25 November 1921:

I am a luxury, a hot house rarity ...
Scoffed at for preciousness. Despised
for resembling a chippendale chair in a
country where timber is cheap (ML MSS
97/10, p. 379).

He was a dedicated artist who worked to the point of exhaustion, but he portrayed himself, not as he was, but as the affected, self-admiring dandy he thought others considered him to be.

To paint himself thus required, as the critic for the Australasian newspaper suggested on 24 February 1923, 'courage, self-analysis and amazing technical skill'. His gaze is quizzical; he placed himself under self-scrutiny. He stood in an apparently careless attitude, but studiously posed, with his hands splayed out and showing 'articulations of nerve and sinew'.

Lambert was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy on 23 November 1922 – the only Australian painter ever to be so honoured. This self-portrait might be viewed as Lambert's statement of achievement. He stands smiling, in his artistic brown velvet gown, with a purple scarf around his neck and a vase of gladioli before him, like someone who has just received a medal on a ribbon and a bouquet of flowers. In other self-portraits such as *Self-portrait* c. 1907 (cat. 37)

he depicted himself with a paintbrush in hand, but here he showed himself posing. Lambert's stance in this portrait resembles that of the first President of the Royal Academy, Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his *Self-portrait* c. 1780 (Royal Academy, London), in which, dressed in his academic robes, he stands aristocratically with his right hand on his hip (although not with his left arm raised). Lambert's pose could also be viewed as a witty adaptation of the classical marble sculpture, the *Hermes Logios*, an image of the god of eloquence, who, like Lambert in this portrait, stands with one arm raised, as if speaking.

Gladioli are the birth flower of those born between 22 August and 22 September, as Lambert was. *Gladiolus* is derived from the Latin word *gladius*, meaning sword, on account of the shape of its leaves, which look like a two-edged sword; gladioli are sometimes known as sword lilies. In Roman times the flowers were presented to victorious gladiators. The flower is thus a symbol for victory. It can also symbolise strength of character.

But in addition to being a portrait of achievement and victory, this painting is also a portrait of jest, of self-mockery. It is an image which brings to mind the lines in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience* (1881), which caricature the aesthete:

Though the Philistines may jostle, you will
rank as an apostle in the high aesthetic
band,
If you walk down Piccadilly with a poppy
or a lily in your mediaeval hand.
And every one will say,
As you walk your flowery way,
'If he's content with vegetable love which
would certainly not suit me,
Why, what a most particularly pure young
man this pure young man
must be!'

In his *Self-portrait with gladioli* Lambert presented himself in his velvet gown with tongue in cheek. He showed himself with not one poppy or lily, but a whole bunch of gladioli to show 'how he ranked as an apostle in the high aesthetic band'. As much as suggesting Lambert's arrogance, it indicates his sense of humour and his delight in creating conceits.

Some of his former colleagues (like Hardy Wilson), perhaps jealously, thought he had become enamoured of praise, and they no doubt considered this portrait to be a true expression of his being. C.R. Bradish described him in *Table Talk*, 14 July 1927, as being 'tricked out in brocade', 'strutting bloated with its whole consequence', but then asked 'why should not George Lambert be vain?'. 'His precision as a painter, his occasional magnificence as a draughtsman ... entitle him to stand among Australian painters wearing a crown of gold feathers if he feels that way'. However, not everyone maintained Lambert was lordly: the *Sydney Mail* reported on 13 September 1922 that he scorned any reference to 'artistic genius', and that he preferred 'to be told by a critic that he had "done his job well," as one might address a bricklayer'.

Self-portrait with gladioli was purchased in Adelaide, in 1923 by a private collector, T.E. Barr-Smith, at its first exhibition ('Lambert and Heysen: An exhibition of portraiture, still life, and landscape', at Preece's Gallery). The price, £1000, was the highest paid for a work by Lambert during his life. It was not publicly shown again until Lambert's memorial loan exhibition in Sydney in 1930, although it was widely known through its reproduction as a frontispiece in *The art of George W. Lambert*, published in 1924.



94. The squatter's daughter 1923–24

Painted at Michelago, Monaro district,
New South Wales
oil on canvas 61.4 x 90.2
signed and dated 'G.W.LAMBERT/ A.R.A.
1923–24' lower right
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,
purchased with the generous assistance
of James Fairfax AO, Philip Bacon AM
and the people of Australia in 1991 (91.537)

The squatter's daughter created a stir in Australia when it was first exhibited in 1924 because Lambert was concerned with creating a new way of painting Australian landscape. He assimilated the blue-and-gold palette that Streeton had used to convey the heat and glare of the Australian scene, but he moved from an intuitive response to the land to a more formalist approach. He counterbalanced the strong verticals of the trees with the triangular shape of the hill and the horizontal streak of green grass in the lower centre of the picture. He painted with tight, controlled brushstrokes, so the image seems still, but lifelike, with the trees and grass embalmed by a sharp, scintillating light. He observed in around 1927 that 'when the Applegum gilded by the dying sun comes up for technical analysis, the memories of Giorgione's famous tree ... make it look more beautiful' (ML MSS 97/8, item 5).

The illusionism of the scene encourages us to look at it as an image of a particular person in a specific place at a certain time – as a picture of Gwendoline 'Dee' Ryrie in white shirt and jodhpurs leading her horse (which Lambert had given her) across the family property, Micalago, during the Christmas and New Year of 1923–24.

Lambert's prime interest, however, in *The squatter's daughter* was in conveying a universal squatter's daughter. He gave

it a generic title rather than the specific 'Gwendoline Ryrie at Micalago', to indicate that it was an image of Australian life.

Lambert attacked the intuitive approach to landscape and, in response, critics such as Howard Ashton maintained that Lambert's work lacked emotion. But this was his aim. He advised young landscape painters that there was always perfect design in nature and that they should reduce it to definite forms, as he had simplified the mass of the hill and sharpened its outline in *The squatter's daughter*.

He portrayed the figure of the squatter's daughter as if she were located artificially in her environment, as if she were a cut-out shape pasted onto it. He described her as passing 'gracefully across the foreground' and looking 'like a figure on a Greek vase' (ML MSS 97/8, item 5), indicating that he purposely presented her in profile in an arranged pose and detached from her setting. He intentionally created a stylised view.

That the girl is not immersed in the landscape (as in *A bush idyll* c. 1896, cat. 3), but merely passes across the land, is appropriate. By the 1920s many Australian landowners did not need to work their properties themselves but were able to employ others to do so, and a number of city dwellers had the time and money to visit the rural areas for their health and for recreation. *The squatter's daughter* reflects this new relationship of Australians with the land.

Lambert's formalist response in this painting inspired other painters. Hans Heysen wrote on 20 August 1924 that it was 'different from anything else painted in Australia' (ML MSS 285/87), and in 1930 that it was a picture which 'in its search for character and form', was 'an object lesson for the young landscape painters of Australia' (Lambert 1930). In 1931, Lionel Lindsay commented:

When the 'Squatter's Daughter' was first shown, to the best of my knowledge, only three Australian artists proclaimed its originality and truth. Such a break with suave sentiment and surface drawing met with a protective opposition – here was almost attack upon established income. It was pronounced hard, untrue, unsympathetic. To-day we know this landscape to possess the largest local truth, supreme draughtsmanship and design, and to exhale the very spirit of Australia (AA 1931).

As a result of Lambert's example and his denunciation of the sentimental Australian landscape, artists began to make changes in their work. They came to believe that they should now explore organic form, seek greater simplicity and use sharper contours.

Lambert thought highly of *The squatter's daughter*, asking 500 guineas for it at a time when he received only £500 for his most significant battle painting, *The charge of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade at the Nek* 1924 (cat. 95), on which he worked for several years. Lambert sold *The squatter's daughter* to George Pitt-Rivers in England in 1926.

Henry Lawson had published a poem called 'The squatter's daughter' in 1889, of which Lambert no doubt was aware. It related the story of a wealthy squatter who encouraged his daughter to become engaged to a wealthy lordling; however, she elopes with a stockman instead. Eventually the father becomes reconciled with the daughter and son-in-law.

In 1910 a silent film was produced, based on a 1907 stage melodrama with the same title and same cast. It was written by Edmund Duggan and Bert Bailey. In 1933 *The squatter's daughter*, a sound film, featured a strong young horsewoman in jodhpurs who saves the family property.



85. The white glove 1921

Painted in Melbourne
oil on canvas 106.0 x 78.0
signed and dated 'G.W.LAMBERT/ 1921.'
lower right
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,
purchased in 1922 (4807)

This is a lively bravura portrait of a modern Melbourne woman of fashion, style and elegance. It has an arresting vitality. Her belongings, a luscious blue stole, elegant feathered hat and jewelled ring, are as much the subject of this work as is Miss Collins herself, and contribute to it a sense of opulence. Her flamboyant pose, with her head slightly tilted back and poised to one side, and her arms caught in mid-action, matches her vivacious personality. Her eyes appear to be laughing in accord with her smile and she seems to be deliberately posing or hamming it up for the artist.

The subject, Miss Gladys Neville Collins, was the daughter of J.T. Collins, lawyer, Victorian State Parliamentary draughtsman, and trustee of the Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria. Lambert appears to have enjoyed painting her portrait and described her to Amy on 10 December 1921 as 'a dear girl [who] sits for the fun of

it and because her Dad thinks I am it' (ML MSS 97/10, p. 393).

Lambert portrayed the individual features of Miss Collins but, with her collaboration, he arranged them to denote a characteristic type. Miss Collins's tilted head, her half-open mouth, half-closed eyes, and almost-bare right arm suggest an individual sensuality, but they also indicate a form of codified (sexual) behaviour. Lambert's portrait presents a witty version of the pose of Bernini's *Ecstasy of St Teresa* 1645–52 (Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome), an established expression of the ecstatic experience, and one which was subsequently taken up by photographers, film-makers and advertisers.

What is more, Lambert presented Miss Collins in a variation of the pose used by Joshua Reynolds in his portrait *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse* 1784, which in 1921 (the year Lambert painted this portrait) the Duke of Westminster had controversially sold to The Huntington Library and Art Collection in California. By associating Miss Collins with this classic image of a leading actress, he hinted that she was playing a role in this portrait. It is also possible that Lambert knew Sargent's *Portrait of Ena Wertheimer: a vele gonfie* of 1905 (Tate, London), a lively portrait of Ena wearing as a joke a black feathered hat and billowing cloak, painted

essentially in black and white. It is similar to Lambert's painting in its sense of extravagant posture and light-heartedness. If nothing else, both paintings are a reflection of the spirit of the times.

In this portrait Lambert used a limited range of colours to great effect: a dark Manet black and a Gainsborough blue, with the addition of purple in the jewel on a chain around her neck. Lambert paid close attention to the clothing, capturing an array of textures – the lustrous steel-blue silk of her stole, the fluffy white fur collar, the white leather gloves, the transparent black lace sleeve and the black velvet of the hat wreathed with white ostrich plumes.

Lambert painted the portrait with broad brushstrokes, and spontaneously, as a kind of 'performance in paint'. When exhibited, it stood out from the prevalent brown tonalist portraiture painted at this time by other Australian artists, such as John Longstaff and W.B. McInnes. (W.B. McInnes's much more restrained *Portrait of Miss Collins* was awarded the Archibald Prize for 1924 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales).

Lambert's tour de force was purchased for 600 guineas by the Art Gallery of New South Wales when it was shown at the New South Wales Society of Artists exhibition in 1922; at that time the highest price paid by a public gallery for a portrait by an Australian artist.



95. **The charge of the 3rd Light Horse Brigade at the Nek, 7 August 1915**
1924

Painted in Sydney at Lambert's Randwick studio
oil on canvas 152.5 x 305.7
signed 'G.W. LAMBERT' lower right
Australian War Memorial, Canberra,
commissioned in 1919, acquired in 1925
(ART07965)

The Nek was a vitally important position on the northern end of the Anzac front line. At dawn on 7 August 1915 the Australians and Turks faced each other over this narrow strip of open ground on the Gallipoli peninsula. The Australians were met with a torrent of gunfire, and four out of five who took part in the assault were killed or wounded. In its futility, this was one of the great tragedies of the First World War. It was intended as a feint to help operations elsewhere, but the Turks had been warned and, through an error in timing, the preliminary bombardment of the enemy lines ceased seven minutes before the assault, allowing the Turks time to man their positions after sheltering during the bombardment. The Australians were massacred.

Lambert depicted the tense drama of the awful moment when the Australian soldiers charged forward across the rocky plateau as the line of Turkish soldiers fired at them. He showed the Australian soldiers running, thrusting, hurtling forward; as the Sydney Guardian observed on 26 November 1930, he presented them thrust 'into the air like marionettes jerked into eternity', so that 'you can almost hear the crack of the bullets'. Lambert portrayed a kneeling soldier at the centre right of his painting, with his stunned face and bullet wounds, like stigmata, on his hands suggesting the sacrifice of these men led like lambs to the slaughter. He used a narrow picture plane with the figures on one plane and the landscape behind them on another, a device that makes the soldiers appear to leap out from the canvas but which

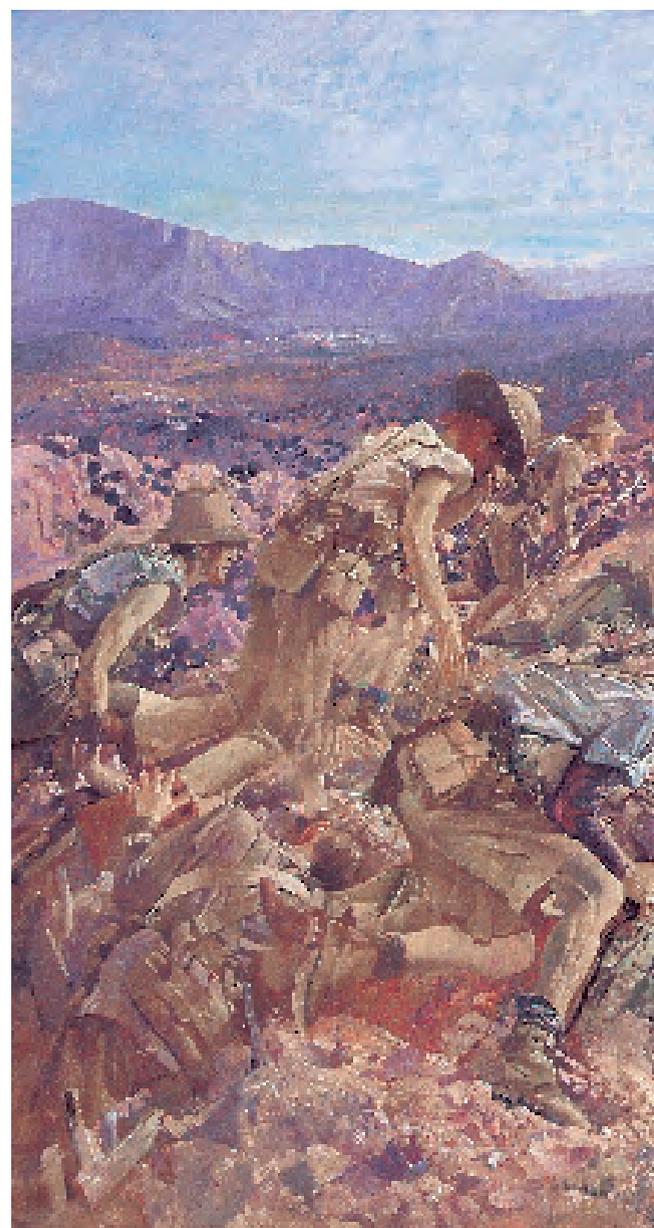
also contributes a sense of unreality to this dynamic image of battle action.

Lambert presented this event within the context of a beautiful, silent and undisturbed landscape – in dramatic and ironic contrast with the brutal reality of war. The sky, the purple-misted distant hills, can be seen as Lambert described them to Amy on 6 March 1919, to sit 'stern, unmoved, callous of the human' (ML MSS 97/4, item 1, p. 75). A reviewer for the Sydney Morning Herald noted on 11 September 1924 that the 'cold, bleak, mountains seem to point to the moral of "how vain a thing is man"'. Lambert was conscious of the irony of war taking place in a scene of beauty, and how it emphasised the violence of the human action by locating it within this setting. He commented to Amy on 17 February 1919 that 'evidence grins coldly at us noncombatants, and I feel thankful that I have been trained ... to stop my emotions at the border line. From the point of view of the Artist Historian the Nek is a wonderful setting for the tragedy' (ML MSS 97/4, item 1, pp. 25–7). The lyrical landscape, however, can also be viewed as offering hope: through nature's eternal cycle it will continue to grow, to regenerate and will eventually cover up the scars left by the war disease that took place on it.

During his tour of duty in 1919 with C.E.W. Bean on his fact-finding mission to Gallipoli, Lambert went over the ground where the charge at the Nek had taken place, at the time of day that it had occurred, and made sketches of the terrain. He noted the bones that littered the ground, and the cruel presence of death, and in his letter home on 16 February 1919 he observed to Amy that 'the gruesome is ... scattered all over the battlefield' (ML MSS 97/4, item 1, p. 17). Bean provided him with an account of the action, and discussed with him how a man might fall if hit on one side and spin around. In his London studio in 1920 Lambert made pencil sketches of models dressed in uniform, posing as if taking part in the action, and a pencil design of the composition. He seems

not to have returned to the subject until late 1923, when he was settled in a spacious studio in a military hospital at Randwick, Sydney. There he worked from an oil sketch of the terrain made at Gallipoli, and from the pencil sketches made in London.

In depicting battle scenes Lambert used particular historical events to make generalised images, the tragedy and horror of war. He described this painting as the most dramatic



of his war commissions, reporting to the Melbourne Herald on 18 March 1921, before he recommenced working on it, that he was finding it 'the most elaborate and difficult'. The Sydney Morning Herald's critic noted on 11 September 1924 the way Lambert avoided the 'spectacular element of war' and revealed its 'grim reality', observing that the painting 'strikes a chill to the heart'. Table Talk's reviewer commented

on 13 September 1924 that it showed war 'stripped of all its glamor', and the Sydney Guardian's commentator remarked a few years later, on 26 November 1930, that it was 'one of the most graphic close-ups of war ever painted'. In his account of the Gallipoli expedition, Gallipoli mission (1948) Bean observed that in this painting Lambert created 'a rather terrible work and meant to be so'. It is an image which

epitomised Lambert's personal attitude to war as a ghastly debacle that 'wrecked one's faith in human reasonableness and laughed hideously at love and culture' (ML MSS 97/3, pp. 179–80).

The painting was commissioned by the Australian government through the Australian High Commission in London in 1919, for £500, as part of the official war art scheme.



106. Geelong Grammar School war memorial 1923–27

modelled in Sydney at Lambert's Randwick studio in 1923–25
cast into plaster in Sydney by A. Murray under Lambert's supervision in 1925
cast into bronze by Alloy Castings Company, Melbourne, in 1927
bronze 244.0 x 146.0 x 136.0
Geelong Grammar School, gift of the Old Geelong Grammarians Association in 1927

This war memorial was commissioned by the Old Geelong Grammarians Association on 9 June 1923, to commemorate the eighty-eight old boys of the school who were killed during the First World War (ML MSS 97/7, items 22 and 23).

This bronze group is symbolic of the triumph of youthful heroism over evil. Two war-weary Australian soldiers, one in the full fighting

equipment of the French trenches, the other representative of the Light Horse of Palestine, are placed at the base of the sculpture. Bowed down with fatigue, they support on their shoulders the weight of an immense bird, which has the attributes of an eagle combined with those of a vulture, symbolic of the Spirit of War. The bird struggles to avert the deadly thrust of the long, two-handed sword held by the youth. This central figure is portrayed naked (except for a close-fitting headpiece and armour about his loins) to suggest the spirit of youthful heroism. In showing his hero near-naked, Lambert transformed the orthodox images of the slayer, such as those of Saint George, to create a work about the Allied victory over the Germans on one level and the human conquest over the warlike spirit on another.

The sculpture was devised to be viewed in the round: the eagle's wings and the soldiers' bodies provide an energetic, diagonal outward force, which acts as a counterpoint to the

downward pressure of the vertical figure; and this dialectic between movement and inertia gives the group a dramatic tension.

Lambert started to think about the sculpture in 1922 (ML MSS 29/5), and made over forty pencil studies for this group. He did not begin work on the full-scale sculpture until he had moved to his Randwick studio in October 1923, where he was able to set up a large armature for the sculpture and model the work. About this time he said 'I know for myself that which is easy is not worth doing, and that nothing matters to an artist but the fulfilment of his gift' (Lambert 1938, p. 156). The final work was unveiled at Geelong Grammar School by the Governor-General, Lord Stonehaven, on 24 June 1927.



121. Henry Lawson memorial 1927–30

modelled in Sydney at Lambert's Randwick studio
cast into plaster in Sydney by George Perugia under Lambert's supervision in 1930
cast into bronze in London by A.B. Burton, under Maurice Lambert's supervision in 1930
bronze 250.0 x 130.0 x 135.0
signed 'G.W. LAMBERT A.R.A./ A.B. BURTON FOUNDER 1930/ LONDON' on base
Botanic Gardens Trust, Sydney, gift of the Henry Lawson Memorial Fund committee in 1931

Henry Lawson (1867–1922) wrote poetry and short stories about Australian life which had a popular appeal; he became a legendary figure in his lifetime. He established a natural colloquial voice and wrote in a lucid, understated prose style, with immense sympathy for the hard lives of those who lived in the bush. His stories include 'The drover's wife', and two of his collections, *While the billy boils* (1896) and *Joe Wilson and his mates* (1901), remain classics of Australian literature. Like the majority of Australians, Lawson lived in a city and had limited experience of country life. During his last twenty years he only wrote spasmodically, as he suffered from alcoholism and mental illness. He was the first Australian writer to be granted a state funeral, attended by the Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, and the Premier of New South Wales, Jack Lang. Lawson's image appeared on Australia's first ten-dollar note, issued in 1966 (ADB).

In this sculpture Lambert created a lifelike, roughly dressed individual, accompanied by a swagman, a dog and a fence post, an image that was eminently natural and Australian. The Sydney Morning Herald critic suggested

on 26 March 1930 that 'the central figure shows a remarkable likeness to the poet', and certainly Lambert portrayed him with his identifiable bushy eyebrows and moustache. He faithfully captured the posture and dress of a particular man at a specific time, but he was concerned principally with evoking a state of mind: he showed Lawson making the gesture he usually did when he was searching for a thought or reciting verse. By showing Lawson in the company of a swagman ('Sundowner' was the term in 1930) and dog, Lambert suggested the poet's allegiance to the poor and humble, and created a visual metaphor of Australian mateship.

Lambert's carefully constructed but understated work embodies the poet's prose style, which was consciously crafted to have a natural effect. Such a laconic naturalness has become an identifiably Australian characteristic, and to this extent Lambert's approach in this work also conveys an Australian attitude.

The sculpture also has a more general aspect: the swagman and his dog could be characters from one of Lawson's bush stories. The old man hints at the older Lawson himself, a man who became a dishevelled figure as a result of alcoholism and mental illness. In this way Lambert created a specific image of the two ages of Lawson, and a universal one of the two ages of man.

Lawson's son Jim posed for the figure of Lawson, and the model for the swagman was Conrad von Hagen (Wilson 2004, p. 145). Lambert, however, went beyond mere likeness: Lawson's pose, with his outstretched right arm and stooped back, resembles that of St John in Rodin's *St John the Baptist preaching* 1878–80, which Lambert may have known from the cast presented to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1902.

The seated swagman in this sculpture, his right hand held up to his face and left arm relaxed over his knee, may derive from Rodin's best known work, *The thinker* 1880, which Lambert may have known from a cast which was acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1921. The pose of the standing figure is also like that of the classical marble sculpture *Hermes Logios*, the god of oratory. And as noted above (see cats 102, 103), the pose of Lambert's loose-kneed gesturing figure of Lawson also resembles that of Michelangelo's marble sculpture *Bacchus* 1497 (Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence), and that of the swagman is similar to Michelangelo's depiction of the prophet *Jeremiah* in the Sistine Chapel, Rome.

The sculpture was formally commissioned by the organising committee of the Henry Lawson Memorial Fund on 18 November 1927, though Lambert had been notified of his selection in December 1926. The committee had raised funds from the public, including thousands of school children (ML MSS 97/7, item 27). The brief had specified a work of art which showed Lawson as an Australian of the bush, as well as an accurate bronze likeness of him. The sculpture had to be dressed as a bush worker without coat or vest, with his shirt open to the neck, close fitting trousers (not riding breeches), boots of the type worn by Australian soldiers during the war and a soft felt hat which had lost its stiffness (ML MSS 97/5). Apart from the soft felt hat, Lambert's sculpture met the committee's specification.

In 1926 Lambert had made several pencil studies for this group, and a sketch for the proposed group in its Sydney parkland setting. The final work was unveiled in the Domain, Sydney, on 28 July 1931 by the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Philip Game.



George W. Lambert,
assisted by Arthur Murch

120. Recumbent figure of a soldier
(Unknown soldier) 1928–30

modelled in Sydney at Lambert's
Randwick studio
cast into plaster in Sydney by George Perugia
under Lambert's supervision in 1929
cast into bronze in London by A.B. Burton
under Maurice Lambert's supervision in 1931
bronze 45.0 x 75.0 x 197.0
signed 'G.W. LAMBERT/ ARA 1929/
ASSISTANT/ A.J. MURCH' on right rear
of the base
St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, gift of the Roman
Catholic sailors and soldiers

Recumbent figure of a soldier is a starkly simple, natural image of a typical Australian digger. Lambert portrayed this soldier with a bullet hole in his left breast, his right arm reaching towards this wound as if to still the pain, and through his frowning brow capturing the soldier's last spasm. Particular attention is given to the accuracy of the uniform: there is caked mud on the puttees and the soles of the boots are shown as being slightly worn.

In this sculpture, Lambert commented on the human condition, creating a

peaceful vision of death by showing the soldier looking 'through closed eye lids at something he can no more understand than you & I can understand' (ML MSS 97/3, p. 105). On viewing the plaster the Sydney Morning Herald's critic was struck by the natural expression on the soldier's face and observed on 29 June 1929 that the figure had a 'smile of peace' and read it as 'satisfaction at a duty nobly done'. The soldier's calm appearance led the Sydney Morning Herald's commentator to remark on 7 March 1931 that 'death in war would be beautiful if it only came thus'.

The soldier's long, lean body was typical of the Light Horsemen in Palestine; his face was, as Lambert suggested 'Australian yet handsome' (ML MSS 97/3, p. 105), and as the Sydney Morning Herald's commentator perceptively observed on 7 March 1931, like those on the Sydney beaches.

During the war a number of artists portrayed their fellow soldiers as rough and awkward, but by the end of the war artists began to create heroic images in which the Anzacs were ennobled and portrayed as bronzed heroes. Lambert's soldier is in this tradition: he is an idealised national champion who was part of contemporary cultural attitudes and values and who became an integral part of the Australian identity.

Lambert received his commission to make 'one bronze recumbent figure of Soldier life size' from the Roman Catholic Sailors and Soldiers on 19 April 1928 – for £1200 (ML MSS 97/7, item 28). He had made several pencil studies for the figure then, once the commission was confirmed, made a full-size plaster figure cast from clay. His assistant Sten Snekker was the model. Snekker and the clothed plaster figure then lay on two benches, side by side, while Lambert explored minor variations in the dress on the plaster figure. From this Lambert moulded a second clay model on a third bench. He asked Murch to assist him in modelling the figure, and gave Murch credit for this by asking him to co-sign the sculpture.

Lambert held a private view of the plaster in June 1929, before it was sent to London for casting into bronze. The final work was unveiled at St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, by Archbishop Kelly on 26 July 1931, after Lambert's death.

As Australia did not have an official tomb of the unknown soldier until 1993, Lambert's recumbent figure came to be known informally as Australia's 'Monument to the unknown soldier'.

