

5 Malakoff Street, North Caulfield, Vic, 3161
Telephone: (61 3) 9509 9855 Facsimile: (61 3) 9509 4549
Email: ausart@diggins.com.au Website: www.diggins.com.au
ABN.19006 457 101

LAURINE · DIGGINS · FINE · ART



EMANUEL PHILLIPS FOX 1865-1915

Spring, Heidelberg 1900-01

oil on canvas laid down on board

43 x 69.5 cm

signed lower left: E Phillips Fox

Exhibited:

The Artists' Camps: Plein Air Painting in Melbourne 1885-1898, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne, 7 June -11 July, 1984, cat. 85

Literature:

Ruth Zubans, *E. Phillips Fox: His Life and Art*, The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 81, 219, cat no 115

Helen Topliss, *The Artists' Camps: Plein Air Painting in Melbourne, 1885-1898*, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne, 1984, p.62, illus plate 85

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In Phillips Fox's *Spring, Heidelberg* 1900-01 noonday might and the sunny palette of the Impressionists give way to the cooler, muted tones of the French Barbizon School, of naturalism touched with romanticism. The textural richness of the foreground, applied with the broad brush of the Impressionists, nevertheless, captivates the eye, as do the emerald greens and vivacious lights reflected in the still waters. It brings to mind another turn of the century painting by Fox, the masterly *Moonrise, Heidelberg* 1900 in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria. Alike in scene and mood, their resemblances continue in the evocation of the tranquility of parting day or the rising of the moon through veiled light. The illusion of moisture is so dense in both paintings that it is almost palpable. It engenders a sense of the fruitfulness of nature, of green fields and the springtime fullness of the Yarra River, seen again in *The Pool* 1899 in the collection of the Box Hill City Council. Of *Spring, Heidelberg* and its related landscapes, Ruth Zubans, in her definitive work on Fox, wrote of 'glistening, moisture-laden scenes that impart an enchanted view of the land'.¹

After finishing at Melbourne's National Gallery School in 1886, Fox studied in Paris at the Académie Julian and the Ecole des Beaux Arts. The summers gave him the opportunity to paint *en plein air* in Brittany, at the Pas-de-Calais, and St Ives in Cornwall before his return to Melbourne in 1892. The following year he and Tudor St George Tucker established the Melbourne Art School based on French teaching methods and painting out of doors, especially at their summer schools at Charterisville, Heidelberg. *Spring, Heidelberg*, with all its appealing French overtones, was painted there.

In October of 1900, before leaving for London to undertake the terms of the commission from the National Gallery of Victoria for the painting, *The Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay*, Fox held a solo exhibition at Melbourne's Old Court Studio. Many landscapes were included, the art critic for *The Age* praising one for 'the vigor and dexterity of the execution'. Of others, he found 'Some of the smaller landscape studies particularly charming', and admiring 'a beautiful and original scheme of color' in another and 'the glitter and freshness of nature' in a third.² Like concerti in paint, each of these Heidelberg landscapes delights in the seemingly endless varieties of green and subtle harmonies found in nature, set peacefully beside the gently flowing Yarra.

David Thomas

1. Zubans, op. cit., pp. 81-82

2. 'Art Notes', *The Age*, Melbourne, 17 October 1900, p. 5