



**HORACE HURTLE TRENERRY**  
Painting the Earth

1 December 2022 - 24 February 2023

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**Woodside, S.A.**

oil on canvas laid on cardboard  
49 x 56 cm

For those who know of the artist Horace Hurtle Trenerry (1899 – 1958), he is revered and his lyrical, atmospheric landscapes much admired. Although his career has largely been confined to South Australia, the efforts of Lou Klepac in particular, have brought this talented artist to a greater audience, and a better understanding of the inspiration he drew from his constant observation of nature; truly painting the earth.

Trenerry's debt to nature was recognised as early as 1924 in a review in the *Principal Adelaide Monthly* <sup>(1)</sup>

"Mr Trenerry will assuredly go very far in his loved profession – for that he really enjoys his work is very evident, as also is the fact that he loves to get out into the open, and breathe. One of the great charms of Mr Trenerry's work is that one can feel in them the joyous air in the sunlight, or feel the chill of the evening mists, while cloud drifts and the changing moods of the sky make a very special appeal to him. ... He has never learnt colour work – he's just fought it out with nature."



**(The Blue House)**

oil on canvas laid on board  
25.5 x 29.3 cm





**Port Willunga c.1935**  
oil on canvas laid on board  
58.6 x 50 cm

A further article in 1927 quoted the artist himself as noting: "I have got chilblains and I once nearly got sunstroke for art's sake, for to paint nature you must be afield early and late. The frost soon melts and the sun moves on and no place ever looks quite the same again. This is why there is an endless freshness in landscape work ..."<sup>(2)</sup>

Trenerry fits the stereotypical tortured artist narrative: from early precocious talent to living an isolated bohemian life where art was his all, to his tragic early death from a hereditary neurodegenerative disease. As Klepac notes "he was solitary, poor, temperamental and he received little recognition during his life."<sup>(3)</sup> Certainly, a few key people appreciated his talent, with two of his paintings selected for the Tate Gallery exhibition of Australian Art in 1963 which caught the attention of London critics, with *The Observer* noting him as a "first-rate offshoot of French Impressionism and the Director of

Whitechapel Gallery, Bryan Robertson rating him as a "marvellous painter."<sup>(4)</sup>

Trenerry worked outside any Australian art movement with a unique vision and personal focus. That is not to say he did not have his influences, including Elioth Gruner; Hans Heysen and Kathleen Sauerbier. He came to know Gruner when studying at the Julian Ashton School in Sydney in 1922, where he was drawn to painting the harbour as in *Sydney Harbour* where the texture of the paint and definitive brushstrokes on board and symphony of colours are key features.

On his return to South Australia, Trenerry based himself at Woodside in the Adelaide Hills and held his first successful solo exhibition in 1924. At Woodside Trenerry was offered support and advice from South Australia's most recognised and celebrated artist, Hans Heysen, and images of majestic gum trees became a popular theme in his own work.



**Evening Light, Flinders Ranges 1930**  
oil on board  
40 x 47.5 cm



**The Dray, Woodside 1927**  
oil on canvas on board  
27.5 x 47 cm

*“He evolved intuitively a style which was the result of constant questioning and guiding of his sensations before nature.”*

*Back Road New Hahndorf* depicts a group of sheep sheltering at the base of an impressive gum which reaches beyond the top of the canvas, the adjacent upright gums anchoring the horizontal landscape of the composition stretching back to an almost infinite horizon line merging with the broad, hazy sky. The gum motif is also evident in the dominant gum in *Woodside, Summer Morning*; the protective gum overshadowing the homestead in *The Gravel Road*; *The Dray, Woodside* nestled amongst a stand of gums across the picture plane; Landscape introduces cows, also a feature of many of Heysen’s paintings, against tall gums and their long shadows, their shapes creating an almost cut-out effect against the backdrop of the sky and *Woodside, S.A.*, a masterwork in composition and subtle tones, the touches of red earth a stark contrast to the muted blues of the constructed tree-forms against a low flat horizon line.

It is likely that it was through Heysen’s influence that Trenerry made a painting trip to the Flinders Ranges in 1930 where Klepac notes a development in his art as he appears to be “more aware of picture plane, reducing space and distance into tones and texture with his even downward brushstrokes.”<sup>(5)</sup> The landscape in the Flinders Ranges was different, grander and more open so Trenerry looked to more effective compositional devices to convey this. The glowing colour in these works is intense,



**Woodside Pastoral 1930**  
oil on canvas  
35.6 x 41.2 cm



**Back Road New Hahndorf, S.A. 1937**  
oil on canvas laid on cardboard  
57 x 50 cm





**Early Morning, Willunga 1935**

oil on canvas on marine ply  
40 x 50 cm

however the deep tones are more limited as these works are often more about shapes and design and capturing atmosphere, as evident in *Evening Light, Flinders Ranges*. There is a sense of poetry and music and indeed Trepper turned to using musical titles akin to Whistler.<sup>(6)</sup>

The titles of his paintings also reveal Trepper's concern with the change in the landscape under the effects of climate and time, reflected in such titles as *Dusk, Sydney Harbour; Evening Light, Flinders Ranges; Woodside Landscape, Summer Morning; Early Morning, Willunga*. As noted in the Memorial Exhibition of 1964 "In his humble way Trepper could be called the Monet of South Australian painting."<sup>(7)</sup>

Around 1933, Trepper moved to Port Willunga, which was to be the next great location of influence for his art, represented here through paintings including *Port Willunga* and *Early Morning, Willunga*.

"There were red cliffs overlooking beaches still sparsely populated even in the height of summer; rows of weather-beaten tamarisk trees in empty fields sweeping down to the sand; pink roofs and crumbling walls of long deserted farmhouses; lines of jagged pine trees pointing untidily towards sugar-loaf hills at the far

perimeter of Aldinga; a church with its single spire marking the edge of ploughed fields; and dirt tracks cutting through escarpments green in winter, khaki in summer..."<sup>(7)</sup>

Many works from this period are characterised by a use of cooler colours, a greater freedom of expression, and his development of a chalky paint texture. Faced with the landscape of cliffs over the water in a quiet rural area, Trepper continued to show himself as an instinctive painter, "He evolved intuitively a style which as the result of constant questioning and guiding of his sensations before nature."<sup>(8)</sup>

The outbreak of the second world war coincided with the onset of symptoms caused by Huntingdon's Chorea, eventually depriving Trepper of movement and forcing him to hospice care by 1951. He had lived most of his life in isolation, perhaps a necessary factor for him to focus on his painting: "Living alone in a quiet hillside cottage affords that detachment from outside influences which is so necessary in order to be in true sympathy with Nature."<sup>(9)</sup>

It is his connection with nature and transposing in paint on canvas his vision that continues to



**Woodside Landscape, Summer Morning**

oil on board  
39.5 x 47 cm



**The Homestead, Lower Flinders Ranges c.1932**  
oil on canvas  
34.5 x 39.5 cm



**The Gravel Road, Woodside**  
oil on canvas on board  
26.1 x 32.5 cm



**Landscape**  
oil on board  
38 x 34 cm



**Piccadilly Valley 1927**  
oil on canvasboard  
26 x 34 cm

captivate viewers to this day, from his “quietly lyrical compositions of Adelaide Hills subjects, through more wiry images of south coast landscapes of the middle period, to the great chalky, almost metaphysical serenity of his last paintings.”<sup>(10)</sup>

– Ruth Lovell

**FOOTNOTES:**

1. 4 July 1924 p 30 as reproduced in Klepac, 2009, p.12
2. The Advertiser 16 July 1927
3. Klepac 2009, p.10
4. Klepac, 2009, p.9
5. Klepac, 2009, p.14
6. see Klepac, 2009, p.17
7. Barry Pearce in Klepac, 2009, p.32
8. Klepac, 2009, p.22
9. ‘Apostle of Sunshine’, News 15 July 1927
10. Barry Pearce in Klepac, 2009, p.33

**REFERENCES:**

- Horace Trenerry Memorial Exhibition, South Australian School of Art, 1964
- Lou Klepac, *Horace Trenerry*, The Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 1970
- *A Tribute to Horace Trenerry*, Carrick Hill, Adelaide, 1988
- Betty Snowden, *A Fleurieu Heritage*, Kathleen Sauerbier and Horace Trenerry, Adelaide, 1998
- Klepac, *Horace Trenerry*, The Beagle Press, Sydney, 2009

**COLLECTIONS:**

- National Gallery of Australia
- Art Gallery of New South Wales
- Art Gallery of South Australia
- Queensland Art Gallery





**Sydney Harbour c.1922**  
oil on canvasboard  
16 x 22.5 cm

**COVER**

**Back Road New Hahndorf, S.A. 1937** (detail)  
oil on canvas laid on cardboard  
57 x 50 cm

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