

# William Robinson - How Now Brown Cow!

*“As I scrutinised this archive of my work it was like a stranger trying to muscle me.”*

My art has walked with me as I lived my life and now reflects the progression from family life in the suburbs to farm life at Birkdale and Beechmont. It has followed our moving to Kingscliff while keeping a small studio at Springbrook and from there Moreton Bay to Bardon.

I wasn't born a farmer, and it took a while living on a small farm before I collected cows. They were big and always hungry. My cows thought of me as their protector and every relationship on the farm had to be thought out carefully. For example, carrying food for the cows and cows in season had to be considered and a great indicator of the behaviour of tank sized animals. These things were important when including cows in paintings.

I was searching for a way to include cows in my artwork. It was as though I had a monster living with my flowers, chooks and people. The pictorial relationships with a variety of animals had new rules of composition and were hard to include in the mystic doorway of painting. A painting of this subject is quite different from the forces in a still life and an interior.

These artworks developed towards paintings that had enormous cows. This was a balancing act that had to put a 'monster' in the doorway waiting in the wings to enter centre stage while also balancing the stillness and movement in a picture.

In the early 80's I had a 'Cow' exhibition at the Ray Hughes Gallery in Brisbane. These cow artworks I created were something I couldn't relate to anybody else's work. They came about after carefully observing their unique shape and personalities. I decided to go to the past and see how people were portrayed as photography developed, particularly old Victorian photos in oval frames possessing the shape of space, relationships and frozen time. The cows have frozen expressions, but they haven't got the same expression. Each one is frozen in its own time and the use of conté gives them a flat surface like a photo.

The formality of the Victorian photographic influence gave way to art works demonstrating chaos and lack of control. The silences and the

noises which are going on in the picture can be compared to a work of music. It has the same kind of spatial relationships. Where there is something going on with 3 or 4 cows in the picture, there's silence, there's movement and there is a number of things starting to relate to one another. The placement of things gives the picture its life force.

There's a certain amount of art which only comes to life as it's being made on the paper. What started as an idea of 4 cows running at the top of the paper turned into something more on the bottom. In this drawing the cows are running towards you all at once as if you are holding fresh hay. I've frozen them in time at the top and I've even further frozen them by wrapping them all up. I've paid homage to Christo and used it as an art prop. I've given it a reason –if Christo can wrap up a cliff, I can wrap up my cows.

I didn't dispense with any part of my life from my painting. In the 'Traffic Jam' drawing I did a few cows running creating a hazard. When they were running at you it was like dodging a bus. I suppose some of these are studies of the movement of cows captured in the air with udders and tails swinging.

All artists constantly change their work in its creation and these changes, if left, can sometimes add to the life and authenticity of the picture. Corrections to drawings if unaltered show the risks and vulnerability taken in making it. The marks become part of the artwork keeping the integrity of the picture and form a trail that you've left even the pin holes used to hold the paper.

While my later work is more developed and more complete, looking back at these early drawings I can see the movement, the ideas, the freshness and naivety. Initially revisiting these works was challenging but now that they have been brought together these art works are comforting, like greeting someone I haven't seen in a long time.

William Robinson, 2024