



WILLIAM ROBINSON

The Farmyards

Preferring a quieter domestic life after the construction of the Southeast freeway in 1970 the Robinsons moved from inner Brisbane to a farm in semi-rural Birkdale. They kept goats, chooks and cows, giving many of them names. The cows, Josephine and Rosie appear in many of the artist's paintings. He did not begin painting farmyard works until 1980, allowing himself time to become familiar with both the animals and the farming lifestyle before distilling these years of observation and experience into the artworks. The time Robinson spent in the company of his animals enabled him to reveal their humourous and whimsical personalities as if they were real characters and depict their behaviours as they played on the farm.

Robinson sometimes paints portraits of his cows complete with oval frames, which parodies 19th century portrait photography. In many of these cow portraits the animals are viewed from several viewpoints suggesting connections to photographic documentation. Sometimes the artist includes himself and his wife Shirley in his farmyard compositions, with Shirley shifting from the domestic scenes portrayed in the early interiors, to active involvement on the farm. The couple don't appear like farmers in charge of their animals, rather they're on equal footing with the animals, all playing on the farm together.

Robinson recalls some days on the farm as being quite chaotic. He believes that when things get out of hand all you can do is laugh at yourself, which is why he paints these works with a quirky sense of humour. His farmyard works tend to have flat backgrounds and no horizon line. This means that he can compose the image in a way that spreads the action across the whole canvas, letting us focus on the animals. The feeling of chaos is emphasised by the floating and scattered compositional elements – a shift from his previous 'realistic' Bonnard style interiors. Often only parts of the animals are visible, which makes it seem like the paintings are just smaller snapshots of all the activity on the farm. By the time the Robinsons sold their farm, they had 40 chooks, six cows and 70 goats.



IN CLASS ACTIVITY

- [] *Robinson is skilled in capturing the movement and commotion of the farmyard in his paintings. Experiment with his techniques and create your own piece, capturing past experiences of a busy and chaotic art classroom.*
- [] *Robinson has been influenced by many artists throughout his career. Discuss the merits of appropriation. For further discussion, address the complexities of appropriation and the notion of originality in the art world.*
- [] *Many of Robinson's farm animals seem to have their own personalities. Do you feel this is an accurate representation of nature? Why or why not?*
- [] *Create your very own animal portrait in the oval frame provided on the next sheet. Think about your favourite pet or animal, discuss their traits or personalities and think about how this would look, then try to capture them within the oval frame.*

