

WILLIAM ROBINSON
REFLECTIONS

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Dedicated to Dr William Robinson AO (1936–2025)

The curatorial texts in this catalogue were completed prior to the passing of Dr William Robinson AO. His contributions to Australian art remain deeply influential, and it is with respect and admiration that this writing is now published in his memory.



Esplanade in early light 2019
oil on linen
38 x 82 cm
QUT Art Collection
Purchased 2021

FOREWORD

PROFESSOR MARGARET SHEIL AO
VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT, QUT

The last few weeks have been a time of deep reflection on the life and legacy of Dr William Robinson AO (1936–2025), one of Australia's most significant contemporary artists and a cherished QUT alumnus and member of the QUT community.

Bill's extraordinary artistic vision, grounded in the landscapes of Queensland, has left an enduring mark on Australian art. His generosity also shaped QUT profoundly, through his many years as an arts educator, the gift of his works to the QUT Art Collection, and the establishment of the William Robinson Gallery, which serves as a testament to his enduring impact.

It's rather apt that the first exhibition at the William Robinson Gallery following Bill's passing is titled *Reflections*. The exhibition explores the meditative and elemental presence of water throughout Robinson's practice. Water, in Robinson's landscapes, is more than a visual motif—it is a symbol of transformation, memory, and spiritual depth. Whether depicted as cascading waterfalls, tranquil creeks, or mirrored pools, water becomes a conduit for reflection, both literal and metaphorical.

One work, *Esplanade in early light* (2019), has journeyed from its usual place in my office to join this exhibition. I am particularly fond of this work because Bill had described this series to my husband and me when he and Shirley visited our house for lunch. He reflected on how our view of Moreton Bay and the activities of those enjoying it changed with the tides and that he had sought to capture that in the series to which this work belongs. This work captures a bayside awakening—figures in quiet motion, the day just beginning to stir. Here, the esplanade becomes a place of quiet convergence, where light, water, and people meet in harmony. Like all of Robinson's works, it invites us to pause, observe, and reflect.

It has been a highlight of my time as QUT Vice-Chancellor to work with Bill, his wife Shirley and their family in realising the vision of the Gallery, and to see it become a treasured place of reflection and inspiration. It has been a privilege to share in that journey with so many in the QUT and broader community.

I hope *Reflections*, for all those who visit the exhibition or enjoy this publication, can be an invitation to celebrate the life of this extraordinary artist, and to immerse oneself in the restorative power of his work.



Landscape 43 1989
watercolour on paper
10 x 22 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by William Robinson, 2018

RIGHT:
Passing storm, late afternoon,
Beechmont 1993
oil on linen
137 x 183 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by William Robinson, 2017

NEXT PAGE:
Self portrait with reflection 1989
oil on linen
59 x 50 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by William Robinson, 2018





SHADOWS IN THE WATER

THOMAS TRAHERNE (C.1636-1674)

In unexperienced infancy
Many a sweet mistake doth lie:
Mistake though false, intending true;
A seeming somewhat more than view;
 That doth instruct the mind
 In things that lie behind,
And many secrets to us show
Which afterwards we come to know.

Thus did I by the water's brink
Another world beneath me think;
And while the lofty spacious skies
Reversed there, abused mine eyes,
 I fancied other feet
 Came mine to touch or meet;
As by some puddle I did play
Another world within it lay.

Beneath the water people drowned,
Yet with another heaven crowned,
In spacious regions seemed to go
As freely moving to and fro:
 In bright and open space
 I saw their very face;
Eyes, hands and feet they had like mine;
Another sun did with them shine.

'Twas strange that people there should
walk,
And yet I could not hear them talk:

That through a little watery chink,
Which one dry ox or horse might drink,
 We other worlds should see,
 Yet not admitted be;
And other confines there behold
Of light and darkness, heat and cold.

I called them oft, but called in vain;
No speeches we could entertain:
Yet did I there expect to find
Some other world, to please my mind.

 I plainly saw by these
 A new antipodes,
Whom, though they were so plainly seen,
A film kept off that stood between.

By walking men's reversed feet
I chanced another world to meet;
Though it did not to view exceed
A phantom, 'tis a world indeed,
 Where skies beneath us shine,
 And earth by art divine
Another face presents below,
Where people's feet against ours go.

Within the regions of the air,
Compass'd about with heavens fair,
Great tracts of land there may be found
Enrich'd with fields and fertile ground;
 Where many numerous hosts

In those far distant coasts,
For other great and glorious ends
Inhabit, my yet unknown friends.

O ye that stand upon the brink,
Whom I so near me through the chink
With wonder see: what faces there,
Whose feet, whose bodies, do ye wear?
 I my companions see
 In you, another me.
They seemed others, but are we;
Our second selves these shadows be.

Look how far off those lower skies
Extend themselves! scarce with mine eyes
I can them reach. O ye my friends,
What secret borders on those ends?
 Are lofty heavens hurled
 'Bout your inferior world?
Are yet the representatives
Of other peoples' distant lives?

Of all the playmates which I knew
That here I do the image view
In other selves, what can it mean?
But that below the purling stream
 Some unknown joys there be
 Laid up in store for me;
To which I shall, when that thin skin
Is broken, be admitted in.



LOOKING DOWN, SEEING UP

VANESSA VAN OYEN
DIRECTOR, QUT GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS

Standing before a William Robinson painting is like encountering the physical embodiment of Thomas Traherne's *Shadows in the Water*, a 17th-century meditation on a child discovering reflections in a puddle as portals to "some other world".¹ Robinson's landscapes achieve what Traherne's poetry imagines: worlds where viewers find themselves suspended between sky, water and land, never quite certain which way is up.

Water pervades Robinson's practice not as mere subject matter but as an organising principle. It appears as creeks threading through rainforest, mist dissolving into its canopy, ocean merging with horizon, and mirror-like surfaces that double the visible world. These aqueous forms generate the conceptual framework through which Robinson explores interconnected themes that define his artistic vision.

His radical spatial perspectives emerge from water's capacity to reflect and invert, creating multi-dimensional viewpoints that collapse conventional pictorial hierarchy. Robinson's landscapes also capture temporal flux, the eternal movement of tides, the Earth's rotation, the cyclical rhythms that water both responds to and embodies. His material engagement with watercolour itself becomes metaphor, exploiting the medium's fluidity, immediacy, and spontaneous behaviour to mirror water's own unpredictable nature. Robinson's atmospheric sensibility finds its fullest expression in reflective moments: the liminal hours of dawn or dusk, or horizons when air and water meet. In these suspended intervals, the boundaries between elements dissolve.

It is well documented that the 1980s marked a crucial period for the development of Robinson's practice when he moved from suburban Birkdale in the bay area of Brisbane to the densely forested Gold Coast hinterland of Beechmont.² The radical shift in environment demanded—and enabled—new ways of seeing that would revolutionise his artistic vision. During this time, he developed his multi-viewpoint perspective in whimsical works such as *Puddle landscape* (1986), where Bill and the cows peer down at their reflections in puddles, while clouds and trees shimmer back from the water's surface and a parrot flies overhead, leaving the viewer uncertain whether the bird is reflected in the water or soaring above it.

Puddle landscape 1986
oil on linen
124 x 173 cm
Private collection, Brisbane



The genesis of this spatial breakthrough can be traced to a specific encounter in Robinson's new environment. While searching for cows and goats that had strayed through broken fences after a typical early evening storm, the artist found himself standing before a rainwater puddle formed by the recent downpour. Here, Robinson witnessed the night sky and moon perfectly mirrored on the water's surface. In this singular moment, looking down yet seeing up, he realised landscape could be portrayed through simultaneous, inverted viewpoints rather than a fixed linear perspective.³

This epiphanic experience would find expression in works such as *Creation night, Beechmont (study)* (1986), where the artist explores this revelatory moment, contributing to a broader transformation in how Australian landscape could be conceived and painted. In the painting, Bill and his wife Shirley gaze into a pool of water, with the moon and surrounding scene mirrored on its surface. We see a glimpse of Bill's and Shirley's reflections on the surface of the moon, and the sky fractured by ripples in the water. Like Traherne's child, the figures in the painting, and we as the viewers, experience a collapse of normal spatial logic. To Robinson, the 'up' and 'down' of traditional landscape painting suddenly seemed arbitrary. Why privilege the view from ground level when the world existed simultaneously from below the earth, at eye level, and in the sky above? Why paint only what one sees from a single position when landscape is a living, breathing volume that surrounds and includes the observer?

From this revelation emerged a series of more monumental works throughout the 1990s, culminating in paintings such as *The blue pools, Springbrook to Beechmont* (2000). This work presents multiple vistas across the Gold Coast hinterland, capturing the journey from Springbrook through the Numinbah Valley to Beechmont—a progression from sunlight through fading day to emerging night. The density and richness of these layered landscapes are conveyed through Robinson's intricate, mosaic-like brushwork. From the top left corner, the viewer's eye moves from the luminous sky to the central floating blue pools of water that reflect the late afternoon light. Beyond the blue pools, the riverbank dries and drops vertically, merging with dense, darkening foliage. As the viewer searches for an anchor point, colour emerges in the right corner where celestial light radiates from the night sky. The blue pools resonate with the cobalt blue in the night sky, and the distinction between 'real' landscape and mirrored landscape becomes indeterminate. These shifting views appear and disappear across Robinson's canvas like glimpses caught while walking. The eye keeps readjusting; the body keeps recalibrating.

In 1994, Robinson relocated to Kingscliff, a coastal community on the beaches of northern New South Wales, while maintaining a studio in Springbrook, about an hour's drive northwest. This dual existence between ocean and hinterland precipitated a significant evolution in his artistic practice yet again, as Robinson moved between

Creation night, Beechmont (study) 1988
oil on linen
76 x 102 cm
Private collection, Brisbane



The blue pools, Springbrook to Beechmont 2000
oil on linen
206.5 x 263 cm
QUT Art Collection
Purchased through the William Robinson
Art Collection Fund, 2013

RIGHT:
Self portrait with goose feathers 1989
oil on linen
198 x 138 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by William Robinson, 2011





the expansive coastline and the enclosed rainforest environment, allowing each landscape to inform and enrich his understanding of the other. Where Springbrook offered mist-laced mountains, winding creeks, plunging waterfalls, and lush rainforest, Kingscliff presented littoral spaces, vast oceanic expanses, undulating shorelines, and the constant interplay between water and light, time and tide.

Importantly, the transition from the hinterland to the coast introduced new temporal possibilities to his work. Robinson's seascapes extend his layering of simultaneous perspectives beyond spatial dimensions to encompass temporal complexity, where his paintings refuse to be contained within a single moment. Time becomes elastic in these works, as his multi-viewpoint perspective adapts to marine environments where distinctions between earth and water, surface and depth, become fluid and inter-penetrable.

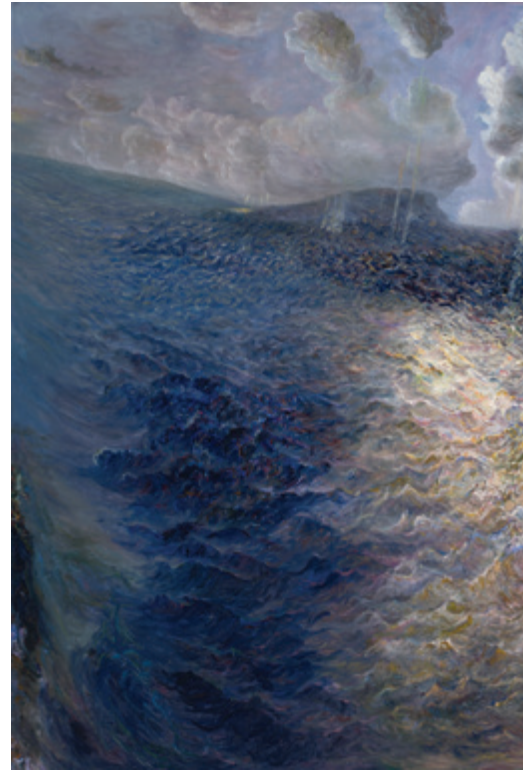
This concept reaches its fullest expression in works such as *Study for Creation landscape: Earth and sea* (1995), where the pronounced curvature of the Earth creates an almost palpable sense of planetary motion. The rhythmic interplay of tides and lunar cycles suggests not merely physical scale but a deeper metaphysical consciousness of the Earth's perpetual rotation and natural cadences. The coastal setting proved pivotal in crystallising Robinson's perception of water as fundamental to landscape experience, dissolving the conventional distinction between stable terrain and flowing water.

In a slightly later work *The sea in yellow light* (1998), turquoise and periwinkle waves wash over the sandbanks, which are visible through luminous, clear water. The conventional boundary between land and sea collapses, replaced by an interconnected field where each element contains traces of the other. Robinson's brushstrokes breathe with tidal rhythm, creating surfaces that shift and flow even as they remain fixed on canvas. Standing before these works, one experiences something akin to being underwater—that weightless, enveloping sensation, where everything ripples and transforms. The experience transcends looking at a representation of landscape and becomes an encounter with the eternal rhythms of tide and time themselves.

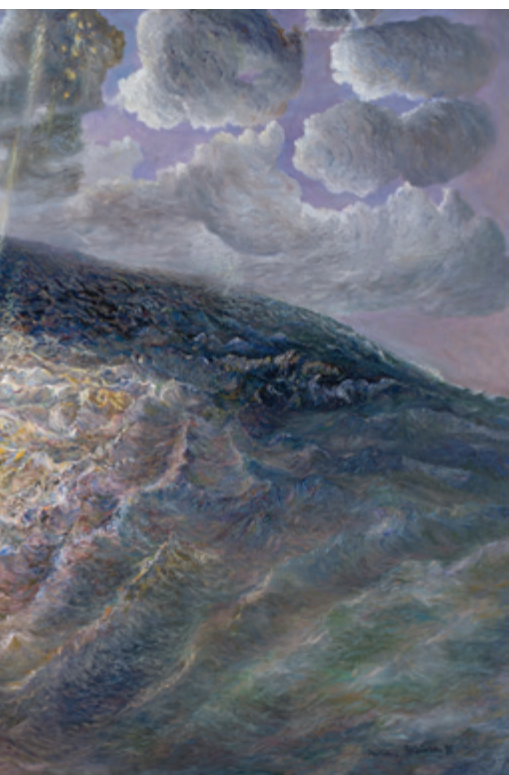
William Robinson's landscapes do more than depict the natural world—they invite the viewer into a state of introspection, where elemental forces like water, light, clouds, and atmosphere become conduits for emotional and metaphysical reflection. His coastal and nocturnal works in particular evoke the sublime not through grandeur alone, but through the immersive power of nature's rhythms and moods.

In paintings such as *Cook Island at night* (1998), Robinson captures the sea as a mirror—reflecting not only the moonlit sky but also the inner states of the viewer. The ocean's surface, rendered with fluid brushwork and shifting tonalities, becomes a site of emotional resonance. Darkness and light intermingle, creating an atmosphere thick

The sea in yellow light 1998
oil on linen
137 x 183 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program by
William Robinson, 2021



Study for Creation landscape: Earth and sea 1995
 oil on linen, triptych
 each panel 91 x 122 cm
 QUT Art Collection
 Donated through the Australian Government's
 Cultural Gifts Program by William Robinson, 2015



with ambiguity, solitude, and awe. Robinson's nocturnes do not simply portray the absence of daylight; they explore the psychological terrain of twilight, where perception softens and introspection deepens.

Clouds and weather play a central role in this emotional landscape. Robinson's skies are never static—they churn, drift, and dissolve, echoing the flux of thought and feeling. Billowing cloud formations, sudden shifts in light, and looming storms suggest inner turbulence or revelation. In works such as *Passing storm, late afternoon, Beechmont* (1993), the sky opens into luminous clarity, evoking moments of insight or transcendence. A rainbow arcs across the scene—a fleeting, radiant bridge between storm and serenity, symbolising hope, renewal, or the quiet aftermath of emotional intensity. Yet, it is water that makes these atmospheric transformations possible. Through rain, mist, and humidity, water mediates between earth and sky, carrying light and colour, and enabling the very reflections that allow Robinson to collapse the boundaries between internal and external worlds. Weather becomes metaphor—an external manifestation of internal states made possible by water's transformative qualities.

Robinson's explorations in the watercolour medium have been crucial in his philosophical and conceptual development. In works such as *Landscape 43* and *Landscape 45* (both 1989), Robinson exploits watercolour's material properties to blur the boundaries between representation and abstraction. The medium's inherent fluidity becomes integral to his vision—pigment flows and pools across the paper, creating organic transitions that echo water's natural movement through the landscape. In *Landscape 45*, a burnt orange sun is caught reflected in a blue pool, with Robinson's mastery in composition allowing sky and water to occupy the same pictorial space simultaneously. This merging of elements recalls the metaphysical ambiguity of his nocturnes, where reflection and reality dissolve into one another.

Working with rather than against the medium, Robinson generates atmospheric effects in more traditional representations such as *Landscape 44* (1989), where wet-on-wet applications capture the shifting light and veils of smoke from fire. He orchestrates watercolour's tendency toward bleeding and merging, allowing complex layering in which earlier washes remain visible beneath subsequent applications. These luminous depths echo the emotional terrain explored in his larger landscapes—spaces where surface and reflection interplay, and where elemental forces like clouds, light, and water become metaphors for inner states. Just as his oils evoke the sublime through immersive rhythm and mood, his watercolours distil that experience into something intimate and immediate: a quiet meditation on perception, memory, and the fluid boundaries between self and the world.

Robinson's exploration of reflection extends beyond landscape into his self portraits, where the artist becomes both observer and observed, embodying the very dissolution

UPPER RIGHT:
Landscape 45 1989
watercolour on paper
23 x 28 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by William Robinson, 2018

RIGHT:
Landscape 44 1989
watercolour on paper
16 x 22 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by William Robinson, 2018





of boundaries that defines his practice. *Self portrait with reflection* (1989), a precursor to the major Archibald Prize finalist painting *Self portrait with goose feathers* from the same year, shows Robinson appealing to the viewer in his absurd yellow raincoat and gumboots. Yet there is a profound nature to this work. The hessian bag on his head makes him appear equally like a monk or fool, embodying the sacred and ridiculous simultaneously.

This painting speaks to the deeper truth of Robinson's practice: his reflections are not passive copies but active participants, as present and vital as the things they reflect, sometimes more so. Like Traherne's child whose reflected figure's "feet against ours go",⁴ Robinson's figure meets and recognises the viewer's gaze, creating an encounter where his painted landscapes possess their own agency of observation. The viewer becomes drawn into these reflected spaces, feeling as though one could step through the surface into the inverted world below.

When Robinson captures clouds hovering ambiguously between reflection and sky, paints pools that shimmer like portals to other realms, renders seascapes where ocean and atmosphere merge into a single field, or creates self portraits where artist and landscape become indistinguishable, he records the precise moment when observation becomes participation, when the boundary between observer and observed begins to blur. In teaching viewers to look down and see up simultaneously, Robinson invites them into suspension, where fixed perspectives dissolve and one is held between dimensions. Here, the deepest truths are found not in choosing between earth and sky, but in surrendering to the luminous uncertainty of inhabiting both.

Cook Island at night 1998
oil on linen
137 x 183 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program
by William Robinson, 2021

1 Thomas Traherne, 'Shadows in the Water', Poetry Foundation, accessed July 31, 2025, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50448/shadows-in-the-water>.

2 Victoria Hammond, 'The Viewfinder', in *Darkness and Light: The Art of William Robinson*, ed. Lynne Seear (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 2001), 52.

3 Ibid., 51.

4 Thomas Traherne, 'Shadows in the Water'.



William and Shirley swimming 1987
oil on linen
76 x 102 cm
Private collection, Brisbane

RIGHT:
William and Shirley, starry night 1995
glazed stoneware bowl, wheel thrown
by Errol Barnes
8 x 45 cm diameter
Private collection, Brisbane





A thin waterfall plunges from a towering height into a circular pool that serves as the anchor point for this painting. From this central point, the landscape unfurls outward, as if radiating from the sacred water source. The dark pool of water spills onto a curving river that widens and shifts in colour—from dark blue to iris, peach, amber and deep forest green—reflecting both the changing hues of the dawn sky and the surrounding trees.

Rolling hills and steep cliffs cascade across the canvas to form the surrounding landscape. Rich in visual rhythm, the terrain is animated by trees that fan outward, while Robinson's small, repetitive brushstrokes ripple and pulse across the canvas to form the grassy bushland. Like the waterfall, the scene is restless, fluid, and alive. This is not a static view, but a flowing current, carrying the viewer through nature's ceaseless transformation.

KATHERINE DIONYSIUS

Crack of dawn 1988
oil on canvas
142.5 x 198 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by William Robinson, 2016



In the late 1980s and '90s, Robinson collaborated with ceramicist Errol Barnes to produce ceramic works with Robinson's imagery. These watercolour works on paper are some of the preliminary designs for a series of large ceramic plates. The circular, concave form of the plates affords Robinson a means of experimenting with composition and perspective. The two upper plates pictured here become circular pools where Bill and his wife Shirley swim nude among reflections of stars and clouds. In the lower work, Bill and Shirley are depicted half submerged in water, cradling their heads in their hands as they gaze up towards the sky. On either side of the figures, circular pools of water reflect the sky at different times of the day: a blue starry night, and a rich amber dawn or dusk. The figures are depicted half in light, half in shadow. These works explore a series of dualities—up and down, night and day, water and sky. The plates act as portals, collapsing conventional understandings of the landscape.

SOPH GIBSON

L-R: *Untitled (Ceramic study 32)* 1989
watercolour
56 x 76 cm
Private collection, Brisbane

Untitled (Ceramic study 23) 1989
watercolour
56 x 76 cm
Private collection, Brisbane

Untitled (Ceramic study 33) 1989
watercolour
56 x 76 cm
Private collection, Brisbane

Many of Robinson's works create a dazzling illusion of sky and water as one, with passages of blue appearing as both clearings in the canopies and pools with reflections. In *Landscape with noon reflection* (1985), these collide into a singular focal point, where a vibrant orange sun is reflected peeking out from behind a series of deep purple clouds across the centre of the work. Interpreted as a reflection of the midday sun, the narrow passage of blue shown behind the sun becomes a winding river. Tree trunks sprout from the riverbeds in various colours, growing up and down, away from the river. These trees join into a singular canopy that encircles a pale blue sky.

In this work, both areas of sky puddle and flow like water yet they remain distinguishable as sky, framed by the lines of treetops at the top and bottom of the composition. By disrupting any sense of predictable direction, the artist plants us firmly within a landscape that is dynamic and changing, as fluid as a flowing creek itself. This work was created soon after Robinson moved to a large property in Beechmont. Living in the hinterlands afforded the artist a more intimate understanding of these landscapes as shifting and evolving. With each step taken, the landscape moves with us, as the trees sway, waterways flow and clouds change shape. Capturing these dynamic qualities in the landscape would soon become Robinson's primary artistic focus.

SOPH GIBSON

Landscape with noon reflection 1985

watercolour

74 x 55 cm

QUT Art Collection

Donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by William Robinson, 2009





In his Archibald Prize-winning painting *Self portrait with stunned mullet* (1994) Robinson portrays himself as a fool—standing knee-deep in water, clad in a raincoat and sou'wester, and clutching a flailing fish in each hand. The fish allude to the absurd humour of the Monty Python sketch, *The Fish-Slapping Dance*, while Robinson's facial expression echoes William Hogarth's *The shrimp girl* (1740–45), a spirited portrait of a young shellfish vendor. Robinson's satirical tone and self-deprecating humour in this and other self-portraits have been widely discussed. Less attention, however, has been paid to this work's treatment of water as metaphor and compositional device.

This self portrait was created shortly after Robinson relocated to Kingscliff, a small coastal town in northern New South Wales. His depiction of himself standing in water may suggest, on one level, a symbolic immersion in the landscape. Yet the fact that he is only knee-deep hints at a liminal state: between two worlds, or two phases of life. He is in the water, but not of it—he remains grounded, neither fully submerged nor entirely dry.

The large canvas is dominated by the rippling, turquoise water, interrupted only by a narrow sliver in the upper right corner that reveals a tilted horizon and pale blue sky. This angled horizon evokes the skewed compositions of Paul Cézanne, who sought to create tension and movement in his scenes by capturing multiple viewpoints within a single frame. Robinson's unconventional horizon introduces a kind of compositional chaos, perhaps to unsettle our sense of orientation, or to reflect the perpetual motion of water and the shifting ground beneath our feet.

KATHERINE DIONYSIUS

Self portrait with stunned mullet 1994
oil on linen
197 x 164 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by William Robinson, 2011





The octopus pot 1993
glazed earthenware sculpture
thrown by Errol Barnes
25.5 x 52 cm diameter
QUT Art Collection
Gift of the artist under the
Cultural Gifts Program, 2002

LEFT: *Life savers* 1995
glazed stoneware, wheel thrown
by Errol Barnes
45 x 40 x 40 cm
Private collection, Brisbane



Summer Self Portrait I

William Robinson ca

Robinson's beach scenes may initially appear as departures from his other seascape works. However, they reveal how his astute observational skills adapt to new environments while retaining a core aesthetic sensibility.

In *Summer self portrait I* (2004), Robinson transforms the beach into a densely layered tableau of activity. The composition is deliberately crowded, with figures scattered across the sand in various states of leisure and play. A wide view allows multiple narratives to unfold simultaneously, capturing the tidal rhythm of beach life.

Humour also plays a central role in Robinson's democratic approach to his subject matter in the beach scenes. Each beachgoer is rendered with careful attention, maintaining individuality despite the crowded scene. Their comical, self-contained experiences contribute to the collective energy of the composition, underscoring Robinson's ability to observe and elevate everyday moments.

This characteristic humour appears in his earlier ceramic artworks, notably *The octopus pot* (1994). Here, Robinson creates a three-dimensional, semi-functional object using two inverted seashell forms—one as the pedestal and one as the dish—to house a miniature aquatic theatre. Taking centre stage is an octopus in a pool of water, its tentacles reaching outward to connect with the series of figures frolicking around it.

VANESSA VAN OUYEN

Summer self portrait I 2004
colour lithograph
54.5 x 76.5 cm
QUT Art Collection
Gift of the artist under the Cultural Gifts Program, 2008



Moreton Bay, Brisbane (1979) is an illuminating example of Robinson's emerging mastery of atmospheric effects that would define his practice. Created before the family's move to Beechmont, the painting demonstrates Robinson's evolving understanding of how water and atmosphere generate emotional resonance within landscape.

The composition's sophistication lies in Robinson's dual treatment of spatial elements. The foreground establishes a human-made environment through the white building's red roof, and cultivated garden—rendered in rich, warm tones with detailed mark-making. This focal point grounds viewers in a specific place while the sea and sky dissolve into loose, gestural forms and atmospheric ambiguity.

Most significantly, the work demonstrates Robinson's experimentation with boundary dissolution that would become a key feature of his major landscape paintings. While maintaining a traditional horizon line separating sea from sky, the artist skilfully blurs these divisions, creating visual flow between elements. Rain spills from the clouds, creating an ethereal atmospheric presence, and connecting earth, water, and air into a unified environmental experience.

VANESSA VAN OOYEN

Moreton Bay, Brisbane 1979
coloured pastels and gouache
62 x 46.5 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by William Robinson, 2009

Landscape with moon and bathers (1988) epitomises Robinson's understanding of his surroundings. The work is both a masterful interpretation of light and a reflection of the artist's harmonious relationship with the landscape he immerses himself in. A search for the bathers referenced in the title leads us to a circular pond in the lower left of the painting. Here, the pale silhouettes of Bill and Shirley swimming in the water are camouflaged alongside the reflections of drifting clouds. The artist and his wife are not only immersed in the landscape, but a part of it, swimming along the edge of the tree canopy reflected in the water.

The trees lining the pond's banks are illuminated by caustic patterns, as the rippling water bends light into fluid shapes that dance across the surface of the bark. To the right of the trees' canopy is an expansive sky, where a bright gibbous moon floats among the clouds like a fellow bather. The sky is seemingly endless, as the atmosphere on the horizon turns a fuzzy lavender hue along the distant mountain ranges. *Landscape with moon and bathers* (1988) submerges us in the landscape, as if we are floating alongside Bill and Shirley, looking up at the world around us.

SOPH GIBSON

Landscape with moon and bathers 1988
oil on linen
94 x 118 cm
QUT Art Collection
Purchased through the William
Robinson Art Collection Fund, 2011





When a beam of light meets a raindrop, it refracts and disperses into a spectrum of wavelengths, forming a rainbow. In much the same way, Robinson's works harness the interplay of water and light to produce colour, creating a visual magic that surpasses the sum of its parts. Rainbows reappear throughout many of Robinson's watercolour and oil paintings in the 1980s; the South East Queensland rainforests become a version of Eden, where he and Shirley play the roles of Adam and Eve. In biblical stories, the sight of a rainbow is a reminder of God's promise to never send another great flood to Earth. It symbolises that hope prevails in the face of stormy weather. This positivity radiates from these works, as Bill and Shirley delight in the nature around them under rainbow-filled canopies.

SOPH GIBSON

William and Shirley at Botan Creek c.1987
oil on linen
76.5 x 51 cm
Private collection, Brisbane





Rainforest with rider and bather 1987
oil on linen
143.5 x 199 cm
Private collection, Brisbane

LEFT: *Landscape 38a* 1989
watercolour on paper
56 x 76 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by William Robinson, 2018



Robinson returned to his beloved farmyard works as subject matter in 2014 after almost three decades of their absence from his practice. Living in inner city Brisbane, he found inspiration in his archive of pencil drawings from his years at Birkdale and Beechmont. As Nick Earls discusses in *William Robinson: A New Perspective*, these new farmyard works “are, partly at least, about relationships. Still life taught him to forage for objects and experiment with their grouping and placement... and now he applies that in the farmyard scenes to animals, objects, reflections”.¹

Robinson has described this work as a study of an exhibition opening event, with the farmyard scene functioning as metaphor for social dynamics. The rooster commands attention as the star ‘on show’, while various familiar characters mill around—the nervous black Australorp in the foreground, others preening for attention, and some with their heads down, remaining oblivious to the social theatre at play. This account from the artist adds another layer to the water’s significance; the reflective pool becomes not just a drinking source but a stage mirror, capturing both the performers above and their reflections below.

VANESSA VAN OUYEN

Drinkers and reflections 2017
oil on linen
36 x 31 cm
QUT Art Collection
Purchased 2018

¹ Nick Earls, *William Robinson: A New Perspective* (Brisbane: QUT, 2018), 83.

CHRONOLOGY

1936

Born in Brisbane on 16 April, the second of four children to Ada, née Vogt, and Robert Robinson.



1943-49

Family lives in Fairfield, a southern Brisbane riverside suburb. Spends early schooling at Junction Park Primary School at nearby Annerley.



1950-53

Attends Brisbane State High School, South Brisbane. In 1953 sees the exhibition *French Painting Today* in Brisbane,

including works by Georges Braque, Fernand Léger, Henri Matisse, Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso, which leaves a lasting impression.

1954-56

Commences training as a primary school teacher at Queensland Teachers' Training College, Kelvin Grove. In 1955 awarded a two-year scholarship and embarks on an art teacher training course at Brisbane's Central Technical College. In 1956 awarded the College's Godfrey Rivers Memorial Medal for excellence in painting, sculpture, applied art and drawing.

1957

Appointed instructor in art at Central Technical College and works part-time towards the art teacher's diploma and diploma in drawing and painting, which he completes in 1962.



1958-59

Marries Shirley Rees, a former commercial art student at Central Technical College. The couple settles in Gaythorne,

an inner north-west suburb of Brisbane, and the first of their six children is born in 1959.

1963-69

Commences six-year tenure as an art lecturer at Kedron Park Teachers' College. Family moves to Coorparoo on Brisbane's southside. In 1967 holds first solo exhibition at Design Arts Centre, Brisbane.

1970-71

Family moves to a three-hectare farm at Birkdale on Brisbane's eastern outskirts. Appointed Senior Lecturer in Art at Kelvin Grove Teachers' College (until 1975). In 1971 travels to Sydney to see Pierre Bonnard exhibition, which exerts a strong influence on his art, apparent in his compositions of still life and domestic interiors. The latter frequently employ mirrors or doorways to present multiple points of view.

1975

Begins focussing on landscapes of Redland Bay district and Moreton Bay. Moves to Toowoomba for six months to teach at Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education.

1976-77

Starts teaching at North Brisbane College of Advanced Education (until 1981). In 1977 holds first solo exhibition at Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane. Farmyard life becomes the main subject matter in his art from the late 1970s.

William Robinson, 1937

William Robinson, c.1949

Ada Robinson, William Robinson, Shirley Robinson, Margaret Rees, 1958



1982–87

Appointed Senior Lecturer in Art at Brisbane College of Advanced Education (until 1989). His work is included in *Australian Perspecta* 1983, a major biennial surveying contemporary Australian art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. In 1984 moves with family to 80-hectare farm at Beechmont in Queensland's Gold Coast hinterland and begins to paint the precipitous landscape of this subtropical rainforest area. Many works from this period such as *Puddle landscape* 1986, *Moonshine landscape* 1987 and *Four seasons* 1987 (his first multi-panel work, commissioned by Queensland Art Gallery) employ reflections in water

as a central motif. Produces hundreds of preliminary watercolours that emphasise movement and multiple viewpoints. Awarded the Archibald Prize for portraiture in 1987 for *Equestrian self portrait*.

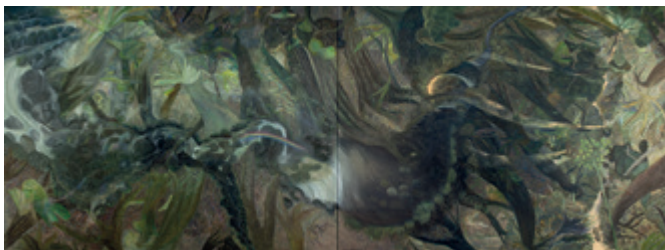


1988–89

Completes first *Creation landscape* painting in 1988, the first of a series of seven multi-panel paintings that spans 15 years. Retires from teaching in 1989 and pursues artmaking full-time. QUT is established in 1989, amalgamating former institutions the Central Technical College, Kedron Park Teachers' College, Kelvin Grove Teachers' College, North Brisbane College of Advanced Education and Brisbane College of Advanced Education.

1990

Awarded the Wynne Prize for landscape in 1990 for *The rainforest*, a diptych which



follows a freshwater creek as it snakes through a dense, lush tropical landscape. Begins making lithographs. Travels overseas for the first time, visiting Greece, England, France, and Italy.



1991–92

The Robinsons' lives are devastated by the loss of two of their children. The artist becomes increasingly introspective and his work more contemplative. During this time, completes *Creation landscape: Water and land* 1991, reflecting nature's moods and the pursuit of the sublime. In 1992, commences 'Mountain' series of five sombre landscape paintings, which the artist considers among his finest work.

1994–96

Moves to Kingscliff on the northern New South Wales coast, where the changing moods of the sea and sky become a primary inspirational focus for his

Moreton Bay, Brisbane 1979
coloured pastels and gouache
62 x 46.5 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by William Robinson, 2009

Puddle landscape 1986
oil on linen
124 x 173 cm
Private collection, Brisbane

Equestrian self portrait 1987
oil on linen
136 x 188 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by William Robinson, 2011

The rainforest 1990
oil on linen, diptych
188 x 492.5 cm overall
Collection, HOTA Gallery
Acquired through funds from Gold Coast's business and art loving community 1991

Creation landscape: Water and land 1991
oil on linen, triptych
183 x 732 cm overall
Private collection, Sydney



work. Paints large-scale diptych *Dark tide, Bogangar* 1994, which is purchased by Queensland Art Gallery. Acquires a rainforest studio at Springbrook. In 1995, wins the Archibald Prize for the second time, with *Self portrait with stunned mullet*, depicting himself standing in shallow water, holding a fish in each hand. The first monograph on the artist, *William Robinson* by Lynn Fern, is published by Craftsman House. Travels to Paris where he makes lithographs at Atelier Bordas (and he makes subsequent prints there in 1998, 2000, 2004, and 2006). In 1996, is awarded the Wynne Prize again for his seascape triptych, *Creation landscape: Earth and sea* 1995.



1998

Awarded honorary doctorate by his alma mater, QUT.



2000-01

Returns to live in bayside Brisbane. Holds first solo exhibitions at Philip Bacon Galleries in Brisbane and Australian Galleries in Melbourne and Sydney. Lou Klepac's (ed.) monograph *William Robinson: Paintings 1987-2000* is published by The Beagle Press, Sydney. First major survey exhibition of his work is shown at Queensland Art Gallery. Lynne Seear's (ed.) monograph *Darkness & Light: The Art of William Robinson* is published in association with the survey. Robinson officially opens the QUT Art Museum and his work is included in the inaugural

exhibition. Paints largest single-panel work, *The blue pools: Springbrook to Beechmont*, depicting pools of water that reflect the changing sky.



2003-05

The exhibition *Place and Memory: The Graphic Work of William Robinson* is presented at QUT Art Museum and later tours to various galleries in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. Sells property at Springbrook and purchases coastal retreat near Byron Bay. Produces a number of paintings that depict coastlines where the rainforest meets the sea.

2007-08

Appointed Officer of the Order of Australia (AO). In 2008 moves from bayside Brisbane to the city's inner west.



2009

The William Robinson Gallery opens at QUT with the inaugural exhibition *Realms*

Self portrait with stunned mullet 1994
oil on linen
197 x 164 cm
QUT Art Collection
Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by William Robinson, 2011

Creation landscape: Earth and sea 1995
oil on linen, triptych
187 x 721.6 cm overall
Collection of S & J Ford

William Robinson with his honorary doctorate from QUT, 1998

William Robinson in his studio, 2005

William Robinson speaking at the opening of the William Robinson Gallery in Old Government House, 2009

of Vision: The Art of William Robinson, presenting an overview of the artist's practice

2010

Returns to painting in the still life genre, largely as a result of moving back to live in the inner suburbs of Brisbane. *Hinterland: The Rainforest Works of William Robinson* opens at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT, examining the landscapes produced while the artist lived in Beechmont and Springbrook.



2011

Celebrates his 75th birthday. The William Robinson Gallery and QUT Art Museum host a major exhibition of key works from the artist's oeuvre and publish the accompanying monograph *William Robinson: The Transfigured Landscape*. *William Robinson: A Portrait of the Artist* opens at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT, a comprehensive exhibition of self-portraiture.

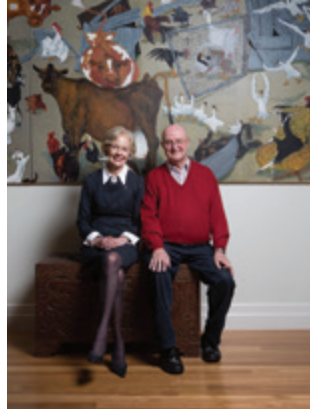
2012

William Robinson: Insights, guest-curated by artist Davida Allen, art historian Betty Churcher AO and David Malouf AO, opens at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT.

2013

William Robinson: The Farmyards opens at the William Robinson Gallery,

QUT, celebrating the artist's whimsical depictions of farm life. Completes *The garden*, the first multi-panel work produced in ten years, since *Creation landscape* series.



2014-15

William Robinson: Infinite Sphere opens at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT, focussing on the artist's use of multipoint perspective. Begins revisiting farmyard works based on his sketches from 1984 and produces a multi-panel oil stick farmyard work. *William Robinson: Inspirations*, guest-curated by The Honourable Quentin Bryce AD CVO, opens in 2015 at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT, honouring the artist's longstanding role as an art educator.

2016

Celebrates his 80th birthday. The William Robinson Gallery hosts a high tea and conversation between the artist and the Honourable Quentin Bryce AD CVO. *William Robinson: Genesis* opens at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT,

exploring Robinson's works on paper and their connections to his major paintings.



2017

Eternal Present: The Still Life Works of William Robinson, guest-curated by art critic John McDonald, opens at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT. *William Robinson: Genesis* tours to the Embassy of Australia in Washington D.C. Paints *Drinkers and reflections* 2017, depicting a group of chickens drinking from a reflective pool of water.



2018

The international tour of *William Robinson: Genesis* continues at the Australian Embassy in Paris. The exhibition returns to

Creation landscape: The ancient trees 1997 oil on linen, triptych, installation view, *William Robinson: The Transfigured Landscape*, QUT Art Museum, 2011 200 x 819.3 cm overall Private collection, Sydney

The Honourable Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO and William Robinson, 2015

Drinkers and reflections 2017 oil on linen 36 x 31 cm QUT Art Collection Purchased 2018

Installation view of *William Robinson: Genesis*, Australian Embassy, Paris, 2018



Australia to tour to Hamilton Gallery in Victoria and S.H. Ervin Gallery in Sydney. *William Robinson: Nature Imagined* opens at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT, exploring how Robinson's work draws upon his imagination and his capacity to summon memories of places he has experienced. The William Robinson Gallery publishes a book on Robinson's life written by celebrated author Nick Earls, titled *William Robinson: A New Perspective*.



2019
William Robinson: Elixir of Light, guest-curated by Robinson's former art student Maureen Hansen, opens at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT, focussing on Robinson's profound understanding of natural light.

2020

William Robinson: By the Book, guest-curated by Nick Earls, opens at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT. The exhibition includes an immersive audio recording of the book guiding visitors through artworks, photographs and artefacts from the artist's life.

2021

Celebrates his 85th birthday. A major survey of the artist's landscape paintings, *Lyrical Landscapes: The Art of William Robinson*, is guest-curated by the Honourable Quentin Bryce AD CVO at the Home of The Arts (HOTA) at the Gold Coast. *William Robinson: Nocturne* opens at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT, illuminating the artist's fascination with the shimmering night sky.



2022

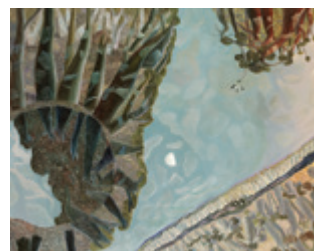
The artist's wife, Shirley Robinson (née Rees) passes away. *Love in Life and Art*, an exhibition honouring her role in nurturing the artist's practice, opens at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT.

2023

Equestrian self portrait, the artist's first Archibald Prize-winning painting, tours nationally with the exhibition, *Archie 100: A Century of the Archibald Prize*. *The Painter and the Printmaker* opens at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT, bringing together four decades of the artist's printmaking to celebrate his mastery as a colourist and mark-maker.

2024

The Queensland Ballet draws inspiration from the artist's oeuvre for three performances in the 2024 season of *Soirée*. *Numinous: The Landscape Paintings of William Robinson* opens at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT, presenting works that capture a sense of the unknown, the infinite and the divine.



2025

Robinson passes away on 26 August surrounded by his family. *William Robinson: Reflections* opens at the William Robinson Gallery, QUT, tracing water as a recurring motif throughout Robinson's practice.

William Robinson and Nick Earls, Old Government House, 2018

Creation night, Beechmont (study) 1988
oil on linen
76 x 102 cm
Private collection, Brisbane

Shirley in candy striped pants 1975
oil on linen
60 x 75.5 cm
Private collection, Brisbane

Landscape with moon and bathers 1988
oil on linen
94 x 118 cm
QUT Art Collection
Purchased through the William Robinson Art Collection Fund, 2011



Farmyard 59 community water hole 2017
oil on linen
66 x 82 cm
Private collection, Brisbane

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QUT Galleries and Museums
Queensland University of Technology
GPO Box 2434 Meanjin/Brisbane
Queensland 4001 Australia
wrgallery.qut.edu.au

Contributors

Professor Margaret Sheil AO
Vanessa Van Ooyen
Katherine Dionysius
Soph Gibson

Project team

Vanessa Van Ooyen
Katherine Dionysius
Renae Belton
Blair Walkinshaw
Soph Gibson

Designer Lisa Rafferty

Copyeditor Evie Franzidis

Photographers Louis Lim, Jon Linkins, Richard Stringer and Carl Warner

Typeset in Lora

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William Robinson: Reflections

William Robinson Gallery

23 September 2025 to 30 August 2026

PRINCIPAL PATRON

PHILIP BACON AO
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Cover image:

Landscape with moon and bathers
(detail) 1988
oil on linen

QUT Art Collection

Purchased through the William
Robinson Art Collection Fund, 2011



Dr William Robinson AO (1936–2025)
William Robinson Gallery, QUT, 2022

