



Countess."

"Toby."
Terrier "Young Dick."

Mr. J. BRYANT'S Pointer "Fan."

Mr. BANNER'S Bull Terrier "Nelson."
Mr. S. H. BIXDON'S English Setter "Cigar."

Mr. G. CHISAP'S Rough Terrier "Jack."

DOGS

in Australian Art

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Press

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AIREDALE

Visitors to Napier Waller's home in Melbourne recalled that the first sound heard there was 'Baldur's deep bark and the scuttering of claws on the polished wood floor. And if, after he has tumbled in advance down the stairway that leads to the studio, all thought of Baldur disappears from your mind in the presence of what you find there, it will return later'. Baldur was one of the three pet Airedales belonging to Napier and Christian Waller. Like other artists of the 1920s, the Wallers were interested in theosophy and various forms of spiritualism; hence the esoteric names of their dogs: Siren, Undine and Baldur. Originally known as Waterside Terriers, Airedales are the largest of the terriers and were popular in the Aire Valley. Victorians, like the Wallers, were keen on the breed and it was in Victoria that the Airedale Terrier Club was formed in 1929, one of the first pure dog breed clubs in Australia.

Mervyn Napier Waller (1893–1972)
The hunt c 1925
Watercolour on paper,
34.5 x 62.0 cm
Private collection

In this painting the three dogs are depicted together for the first time. The eldest had already been included in *The Pastoral Pursuits of Australia*, a



mural for the now-demolished Menzies Hotel in Melbourne. This portrait of his wife was Napier Waller's only major easel painting. After the First World War, in which he lost the use of his painting arm, he confined himself to murals, mosaics and stained glass. He said that this was because he realised 'that modern painting is disconnected with life – that it exists in an artificial hot-house . . . I sought for something that should touch life intimately'. Art made for public spaces gave him this opportunity, and his pet Airedales found themselves represented in various historical and allegorical works. With their elegant proportions and clear lines, they seem strangely suited to Waller's art deco world.

In time this portrait became a poignant memento for the artist. Only five years after it was done, his wife suffered a complete mental breakdown. Advised by pseudo-mystics like the American Father Divine, she withdrew from all human contact. In this portrait there is already a sense of her fragility.

Mervyn Napier Waller (1893–1972)
Christian Waller with Baldur,
Undine and Siren at Fairy Hills 1932
Oil and tempera on canvas mounted on
composition board, 121.5 x 205.5 cm
Collection of the National Gallery of
Australia, Canberra, purchased 1984 (49895)



AMERICAN COCKER SPANIEL



Dobell at work on his self-portrait with Casey standing before the easel and Suzie watching from behind. Dobell House Archives.

William Dobell produced some of Australia's most distinctive portraits, including images of Dame Mary Gilmore, Helena Rubinstein, Margaret Olley and others. Yet Dobell found it very difficult to paint himself. In 1965 the American collector Harold Mertz commissioned him to paint a self-portrait, offering him the considerable sum of \$5000 for it. Dobell returned the cheque uncashed. Yet Mertz did eventually acquire this work, one of six oil studies. It was painted in 1968, two years before Dobell's death.

It shows the artist looking into a mirror, with easel in hand, at work on the self-portrait. Spirals of cigarette smoke weave around him and one of his pet Cocker Spaniels sits close by, watching. Dobell has given himself a wizened, somewhat inscrutable face. Thick rimmed glasses, as in many of his portraits, both accentuate the eyes as well as disguise them. We know that Dobell was feeling his age when he painted this work and his sister Alice, whom he nursed at home, died whilst he was working on it. He confided to a friend, 'I have this terrible fear that I will just drop dead and won't be discovered for days', adding his real concern, 'What will happen to my dogs?' These concerns, however, were not enough to stop him chain smoking or drinking heavily. On 15 May 1970 he was found dead on the kitchen floor. His evening meal was still untouched and his distressed dogs were sitting at his side.

Dobell's spaniels, Suzie the eldest and the younger Casey, were an important part of his life. Reports vary about whether they were of the English or rarer American breed. By 1800 spaniels had been divided into two distinct groups: 'starters', who were responsible for springing game, and 'cockers', who were used to flush and retrieve woodcock from undergrowth. The breed was very popular in Europe and the New World. Minor differences emerged between the English and American dogs and in 1946 the American Kennel Club recognised the American Cocker Spaniel as a separate breed. It is thought that the first American Cocker Spaniels came to Australia during the Second World War.



William Dobell (1899–1970)
Self portrait 1968
Oil on board, 73.0 x 118.0 cm
Private collection
Image courtesy of the Dobell Foundation

AMERICAN FOXHOUND



Mark Ashkanazy's photograph of Terry Batt with his Airedales, Bella and Fergus.

Opposite: Terry Batt (1949–)
Double happiness: The year of the dog 2006
Oil and wax on linen, 152.0 x 152.0 cm
Private collection
Image courtesy of the artist and Niagara
Galleries, Melbourne

Terry Batt's artworks often have a heraldic quality about them. Although he paints with more than the five colours allowed to heraldic artists, his preference is for a limited palette and his works are characterised by their symmetry of design. Also, like the best heraldic art, they are frequently both cryptic and humorous. The medieval artists who devised the painted shields for Europe's knightly classes enjoyed 'canting', or making visual puns. Some of their references are obvious: Beatrice would be represented by three bees, Falconer by falcons. Others, however, were much more subtle. Although Batt's paintings have an immediacy imparted by their strong graphic images, there is the added pleasure of decoding them, of unravelling the many political, historical and personal motifs included. As one review noted, 'Batt's paintings and sculptures act as visual puns, a humorous and autobiographical take on order and rationality in the late twentieth century'.

The painting *Double Happiness: The Year of the Dog* was used on the cover of the catalogue to Batt's exhibition in 2006 – the Chinese Year of the Dog. Although there is a clear reference to the painting *Hound in a Field* by Canadian artist Alex Colville, Batt has taken these dogs out of a landscape context and given them a more formal significance. The American Foxhound is a cousin to the English Foxhound. It was originally bred from dogs brought from England in 1650 and later crossed with French and Irish hounds.

Batt has painted dogs before, in 2002 using two Beagles in a work entitled *Circle of Trust*. This was executed on two panels and the position of the dogs was reversed so that they touched in the middle, while moving outwards to the edge of the painting. The dogs mirroring each other in *Double Happiness* recall *shuang xi* or 'double happiness'. The Chinese custom of repeating the symbol for 'happiness', particularly during New Year, is thought to bring good luck. Although Batt's painting is not intended to reproduce a Chinese character, it does have a calligraphic quality to it, suggestive of the pictograms which make up the Chinese alphabet.



AMERICAN PIT BULL TERRIER



Cherry Hood with Kelly and Red.

Opposite: Cherry Hood (1960–) *Daisy* 2005
Watercolour on paper, 150.0 x 101.0 cm
Private collection
Image courtesy of the artist
and Tim Olsen Gallery, Sydney

“She’s a pedigree Colby dog”, Serenity says, patting her hind end’. These words appear in the opening chapter of *Harold’s End* by J.T. LeRoy. Colby Pitt Bull Terriers are a distinctive American breed, dating from the 1880s. Serenity is an American street kid, prostituting himself in order to buy heroin for himself and food for his dog Daisy. Larry, to whom he introduces Daisy, is just another potential ‘trick’. As artist Cherry Hood remarks: ‘such a deceiv-ingly cute little book about such a horrific subject.’ Hood was chosen as its illustrator in 2005 when author Jeremiah ‘Terminator’ LeRoy saw an article about her in *Art News*.

After the book was published, the *New York Times* reported that, ‘the gay male ex-truck-stop prostitute turned literary-wunderkind was really a girl from San Francisco, whose sister-in-law wrote the books’. The news that the author of this and other award-winning novels was a failed musician who paid her sister-in-law to dress up as LeRoy created a sensation. The novels had been promoted as autobiographical and LeRoy had become a popular idol, championed by celebrities Marilyn Manson and Courtney Love.

When the media frenzy calmed down, critics returned to the text itself. Many maintained that the work deserved the acclaim it had initially received. Hood’s illustrations were also singled out for praise. One reviewer wrote, ‘there is a very creepy beauty in the color plates that accompany the text . . . which convey a sense of bruised innocence’. Bruised innocence and vulnerability are exactly the qualities that Hood manages to capture and the medium of watercolour is perfect for this. Hood also manages to imagine and then visualise each of the pets – a dog, a snake, a rat and the snail Harold from which the book takes its title – through the eyes of their owners. Animals give unconditional love and Hood’s illustrations turn on the paradox that, while these street kids manage to survive by not engaging – either in their work or in ‘normal’ human relationships – it is the loyalty and love of their pets that bring them through it all, with at least some humanity intact.



AUSTRALIAN CATTLE DOG

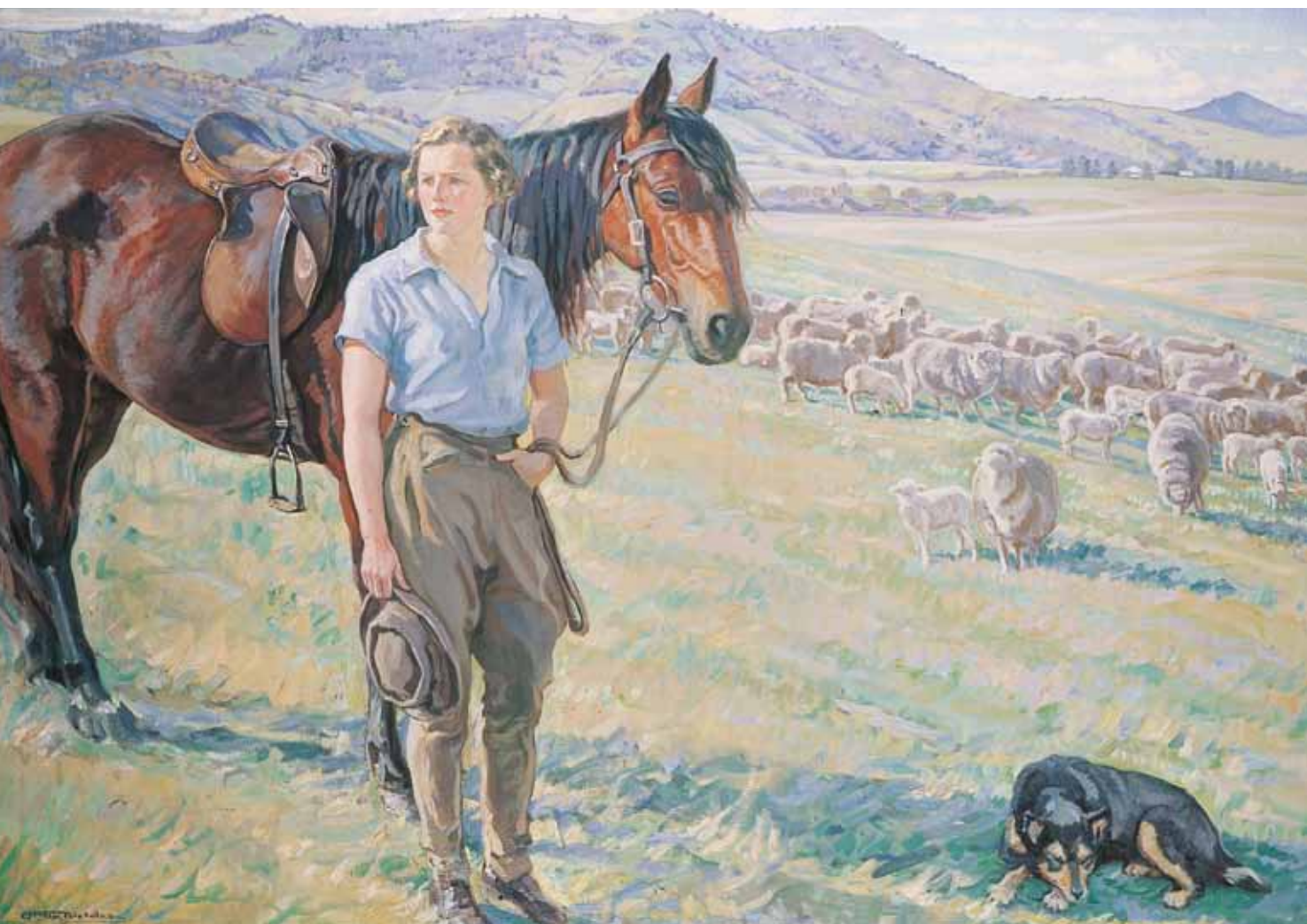
When this painting by Hilda Rix Nicholas was shown in 1937, it was singled out as 'typically Australian in both subject and treatment'. By treatment, the reviewer probably meant the artist's choice of colours and the way she applied paint. Ironically, these were influences of study in France and in the light-saturated world of North Africa. The subject of the painting, a pastoralist out among livestock, is more typically Australian. However, by casting a woman in this role the work departed from convention. Once again, Nicholas took inspiration from French models, where women working the land were routinely made a subject of art.

As curator Tracy Cooper-Lavery has noted, the works of Hilda Rix Nicholas are unique, 'because they approach the scenes from a female perspective. Often the figures are portrayed close-up, giving an intimacy that is absent in masculine depictions of the landscape'. Like her male counterparts among artists and writers, Rix Nicholas was interested in constructing a mythology of the bush as a place where national identity is forged. Unlike them, however, she inserted women firmly into this context. Henry Lawson wrote of a 'Land where gaunt and haggard women live alone and work like men/Till their husbands, gone-a-droving, will return to them again'. In this painting, it is the woman who has gone-a-droving and the atmosphere is one of affluence rather than hardship. Even the sheep seem contented. So much so that the cattle dog, which is normally pictured alert and at work, is shown resting.

The model for *The Fair Musterer* was the governess on a property in southern New South Wales, where Rix Nicholas and her husband established themselves in 1928. Rix Nicholas gave birth to her only child in 1930, when she was 46. This work was painted five years later. The 'Blue Heeler' was a working dog on the property. Developed in Australia as a herding dog, Australian Cattle Dogs have become a much-loved national breed, largely because of their stamina, intelligence and loyalty to owners. Cattle dogs, which occur in two colours, have a habit of nipping at the heels of stubborn sheep and cattle – hence their popular name of red or blue heeler.

Gerry Wedd (1957–) *Beastie* 2012
Earthenware, 15.0 x 15.0 cm
Private collection





Hilda Rix Nicholas (1884–1961)
The fair musterer 1935
Oil on canvas, 102.3 x 160.4 cm
Collection of the Queensland Art Gallery,
Brisbane (1:1178), purchased 1961