

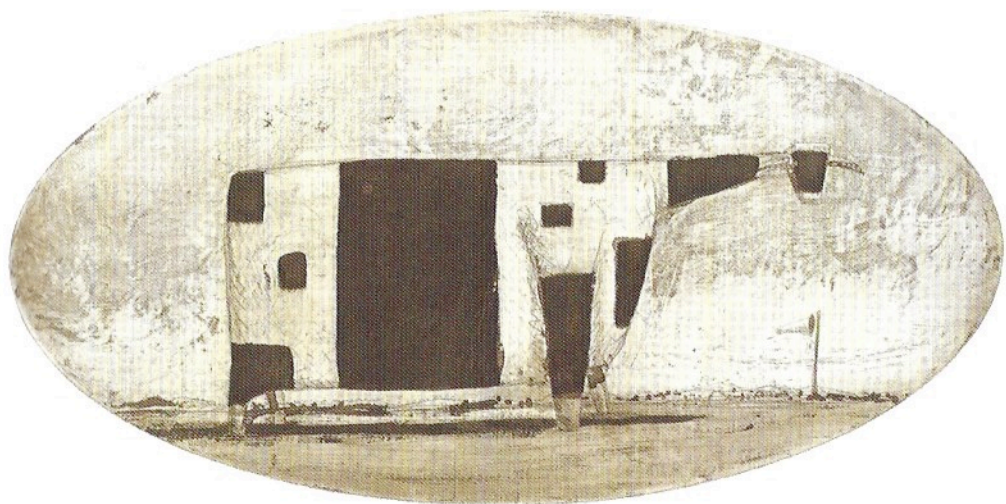
JOHN KELLY



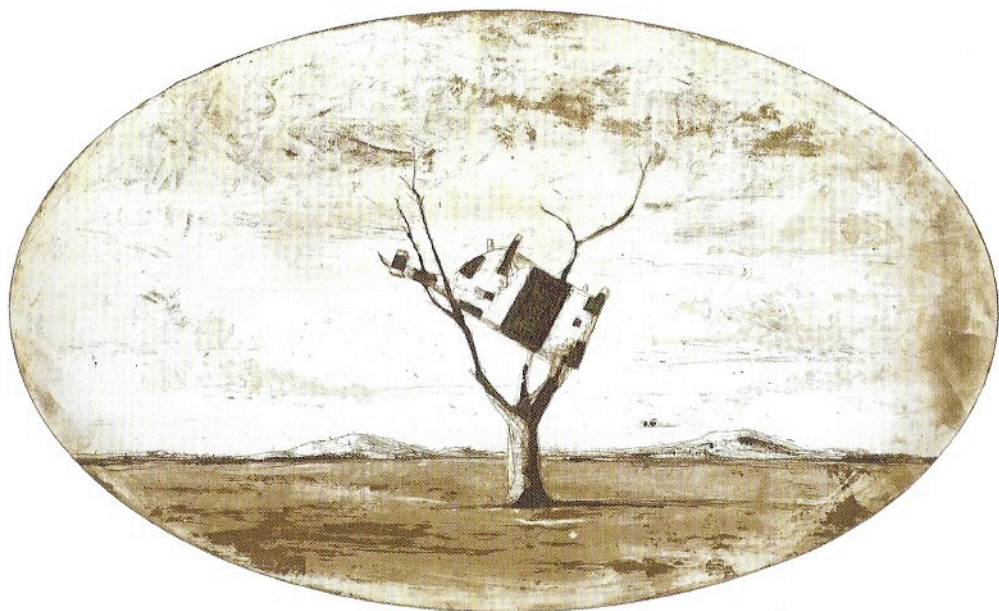
From under my mother's bed

13 May – 1 June 2014

AUSTRALIAN GALLERIES
DERBY STREET



Cow 2005 etching 30 x 60 cm edition 18



Cow up a tree 2004 etching 50 x 75 cm edition 9

AUSTRALIAN GALLERIES
DERBY STREET

Invites you to the opening

JOHN KELLY

From under my mother's bed

Tuesday 13 May 2014 6pm to 8pm

35 Derby Street Collingwood VIC 3066

Current until Sunday 1 June 2014

Open 7 days 10am to 6pm

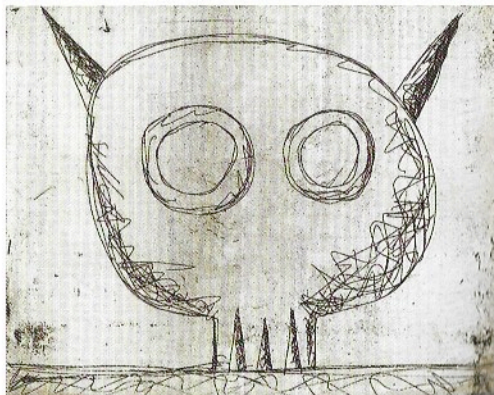
T 03 9417 4303

cerbyst@australiangalleries.com.au

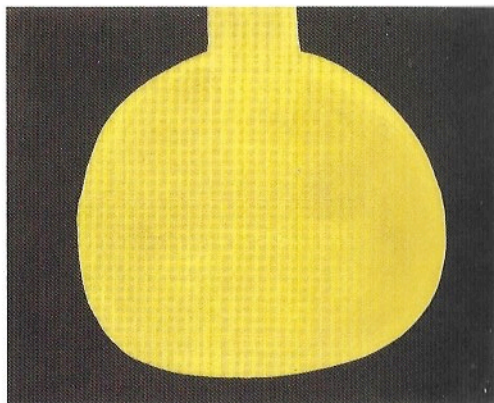
australiangalleries.com.au

In August 2013 John Kelly was in Melbourne on his way from Ireland to join a ship in Tasmania taking him over the Southern Ocean for his three month Antarctic Arts Fellowship. John contacted Australian Galleries to discuss an exhibition of etchings and lithographs that have been made over the last 25 years and were in the care of his parents at the family home in Australia. John and I arranged to inspect these works at the house and on arrival John asked his mother where the works were stored, to which she replied, "under my bed".

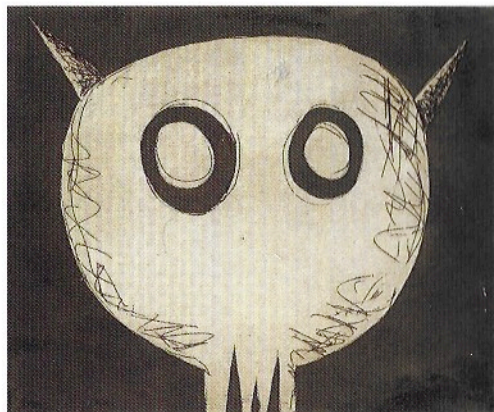
Stuart Purves AM



Aliens 2006 etching 18 x 23 cm edition 9



Nolan's light 2005 colour etching 38 x 46.5 cm edition 9



Alien 2005 etching 38 x 46.5 cm edition 10

If you travel to Hobart, Tasmania and take a walk on the Macquarie Wharf there is a sea-container bar where the drinks in high season are served hand over fist. The structure itself is rather unremarkable but both of its ends are emblazoned with vibrant graphical forms; one is an upright kangaroo and the other a skull-like head; both are painted by the artist John Kelly. The diminutive shebeen, enlivened by the visual touch, is an extension of the MONA FOMA music festival established by the redoubtable David Walsh; a connoisseur of all things artistic and a collector who is much enamored of Kelly's eye catching paintings. (He owns seven paintings and one sculpture). The icons in question are cheeky appropriations of images that loom large in Australian art. On the one hand the kangaroo and its accompanying ring-like sun is an elaboration of the Australia Council for the Arts logo, while the head is a nod to Sidney Nolan's reductive modern abstraction called *Moonboy* c. 1939-40, a yellowish form on a darkened ground that is not dissimilar from a logo.

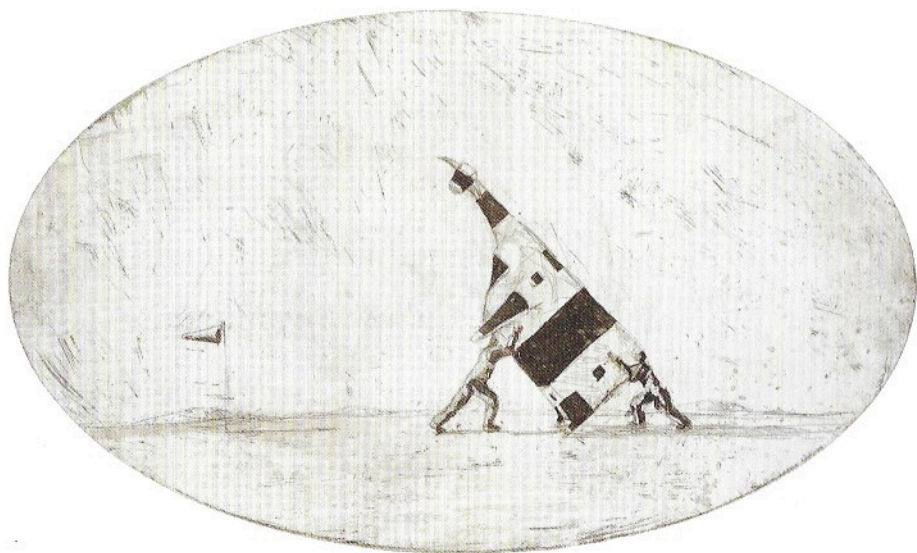
For Kelly both of these motifs have been borrowed as platforms for experimentation and for reflecting on ideas and feelings that are at once deeply personal and also pertinent to contemporary cultural life. His 'Moonboy' heads are construed with alien visages, sometimes as skulls and possibly as demonic spirits. His kangaroos bound through desert terrains heading ever onwards in a pantomime prod at Australia's 'official' idea of culture. Certainly they are playful, irreverent even, but the questions they raise are serious. Is art about the poetry or is it really no different from commerce? Is it the sublime moment of vision (Nolan's 'Moonboy') or a product subordinate to the brand (the Australia Council logo)? Will an artist be funded for his or her personal perspective or only if their work embodies the government sanctioned criteria? This is highly relevant to Kelly, who is much sought after by collectors but stridently at odds with those who would seek to control the content of our arts, (as indeed certain elements of the Australian arts bureaucracy and more alarmingly the occasional reactionary prime minister have sought at times to do). Mirthful these images clearly are, but their impetus is deeply rooted in an ethos of artistic freedom.

Prior to the 'kangaroo' and 'Moonboy' appropriations, Kelly came to prominence as a painter and sculptor of cows, or rather their paper mâché simulacrum. These images take their inspiration from Australia's high point of modernity; a period of artistic ferment that Kelly admires profoundly and which continues to influence his work. His cows allude to the well-known painter William

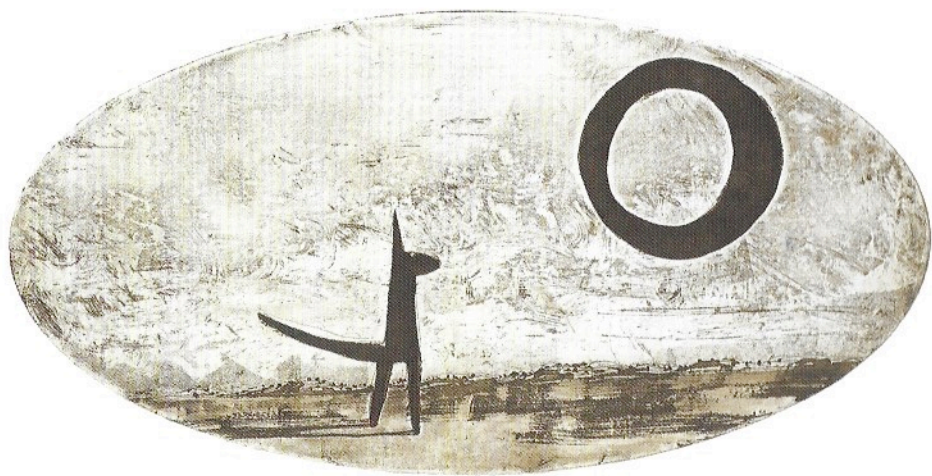
Dobell (1899-1970) who once painted bovines for a living (military issue subterfuges designed to disguise as farmland RAAF airstrips and airplanes from Japanese bomber pilots). Kelly's cows are figurative yet somewhat abstract. Poised between two schools of painting, they extend the old debate about which way painting should go, the figure or the field; like Nolan before him the artist has opted for both.

There are many ways that one might respond to Kelly's images. Their immediacy is such that we readily chuckle at their whimsy, yet as much as they appeal to our humor Kelly's images are loaded with argument and invective. As modes of persuasion his triumvirate (kangaroo, Moonboy and cow) are not too far from the Ethos, Logos and Pathos of ancient Grecian debate - their emotional appeal, their pathos is evident, while their logic and authority stem jointly from personal experience and research. (We think for instance of Kelly's excoriating critique of the Australia Council's investment in marketing the art of Australia, stemming from a report commissioned from advertising mavens Saatchi & Saatchi. Kelly's response took shape around a suite of poems and finally as an ongoing series of paintings). Not unlike the artist himself, these paintings and works on paper are arguments in visual form designed to inscribe a way of seeing and to assert an artistic way of being, standing for an art that is free of institutional demands, for a commitment to subjective experience and vision, and for cultural production anchored in a regionally specific history. Not that any of this is without cost. Championing the autonomy of the artist in an era where art is routinely co-opted by social, political and commercial interests is to run the risk of being labeled as a reactionary. Kelly knows this and he doesn't care a jot, neither for that matter should we. After all, where would we be if the singular and outspoken voices were erased from our cultural sphere? Little wonder that the artist continues to be much admired.

This current exhibition *From under my mother's bed* features John Kelly's limited edition works on paper; these examples having been maintained by his family since as early as the 1990's and added to with each new body of work. Included here are the archetypal images for which Kelly is best known: kangaroo, Moonboy and cow. Also seen are early works based on the well-known 'Punch and Judy' puppet show, thus providing a new perspective on the theatrical dimensions of Kelly's practice.



Two men lifting a cow 2004 etching 50 x 55 cm edition 9



Roo 2005 etching 30 x 60.5 cm edition 9

JOHN KELLY



Red roo 2004 screenprint 70.5 x 100 cm edition 10



Deconstructed monument 2005 etching 20 x 25 cm edition 10

AUSTRALIAN GALLERIES

MELBOURNE: Derby Street 03 9417 4303 | Stock Rooms 03 9417 2422 | SYDNEY: Royston Street 02 9360 5177

enquiries@australangalleries.com.au australangalleries.com.au Design and Production by  Publishing Member Australian Commercial Galleries Association