

# MARKS OF FIRE

A LOOK THROUGH THE BRAND

AT LIFE ON THE LAND QLD 1870 TO NOW



## EXHIBITION CATALOGUE





Above: Exhibiting artist, Jan Ross-Manley.  
Image courtesy of the artist

Cover image: Old farm doors branded with local brands, burned at 16 August 2015 Branding Party.  
Image courtesy of the artist

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## A LOOK THROUGH THE BRAND AT LIFE ON THE LAND QLD 1870 TO NOW

Paintings, drawings, photographs, mixed media,  
installations and poetry by local artist, Jan Ross-Manley.  
Contemporary works inspired by life on the land,  
from early cattle stations to modern farming.

This exhibition received financial assistance from the  
Gladstone Region Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF),  
a partnership between the Queensland Government  
and Gladstone Regional Council.

EXHIBITION ON DISPLAY AT THE  
GLADSTONE REGIONAL ART GALLERY & MUSEUM:  
17 DECEMBER 2015 - 27 FEBRUARY 2016

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### SOME INSIGHT FROM THE ARTIST:

This exhibition draws inspiration from many sources. The rich legacy of farming in Queensland and the ephemera connected with everyday life on the land have been the substance for many works. Farmers watch the weather, the state of their fence lines and the calendar marked with clearing sales, cattle auctions, agricultural shows and field days. The farmer's trademark and business card is the livestock brand. The Brand Muster on 16 August 2015 highlighted the living cultural heritage of many local brands. Many of these working brands were verified as original registrations from the First Queensland Brand Act in 1872; often to the delighted surprise of the brand holders. Gladstone Council was found to be carrying 1872 brands for the Calliope and Miriam Vale Pounds. These brands, whilst still in registration, had been redundant for many years and remained largely forgotten. The first and third brands ever registered in Queensland were found in the area. CA1, the first brand, still grazes the foothills of Mount Larcom for Targinnie Holdings. The third brand registered, MH1, is owned by the Acton Land and Cattle Company, based in Rockhampton. The fabled Gracemere brand A1A is still registered to the Archer Family, and worn thin through years of use. All these brands and many more are now down on the *Branding Board* as testament to the long agricultural history of the region.

The branding iron has been used as an artmaking tool in many pieces; from the early work *Pastoral Portrait 2 Moncton Hills* made in mid 2014, up to, and culminating in, the recent long assemblage *Marks of Fire #1-7*. Here brand tester boards have been cut and collated into a dynamic design stretching along the gallery wall. Another farmer's tool, the earmark plier, has been used as the artmaking tool for *Forest Vale Earmarks*. The actual plier was used to cut stencils through which oil stick was applied to build the image. In *Ekka Country*, a large collection of vintage wool felt agricultural ribbons were used as the art making medium, for a broad brush 'painterly' effect. Only stud farms are allowed to show at the big agricultural shows; so farmers prize any ribbons won as markers of stock quality. First, second and third are denoted by blue, red, and green respectively; with the landscape in *Ekka Country* quietly echoing this convention.

The work *Brahman* references the beef industry in Central Queensland and the stark contrast between eastern and western attitudes to the zebu breed. Early stations usually began as sheep enterprises then changed to cattle as the heat, burr and dingo predations proved unfavourable. Hereford cattle were the original stock, but tick and climatic conditions induced visionary cattlemen to cross breed with the hardy zebu lines to develop new breeds like the Australian Brahman and Droughtmaster. Manso and Monkey were two foundational sires in the Australian gene pool, introduced through progeny from the USA. The new cattle crossbreeds took sometime in mid century to gain wide acceptance. Now they are firmly established as the backbone of the Australian beef industry. These breeds are superior in heat and pest resistance, their ability to withstand drought conditions and to put on weight for age during good seasons. Historically the humped back cattle also met aesthetic prejudice from the West, reflected in the antique 1792 print collage on *Brahman*. By comparison, in the East, the zebu is the renowned sacred cow of India.

Whilst researching this project I heard many old country homilies mentioned casually in conversation. One of these stood out as being colourfully 'colloquial Queensland'. 'Keep Off the Barb Wire' is a gentle admonition to farm workers not to squander their mustering cheque in one grog session. At the time I had been looking at

early examples of barb wire. It was the magic bullet at the end of the nineteenth century that enabled fast, efficient stock proof fencing of vast tracts of Australia (the dingo fence, the rabbit proof fence). I was intrigued to find 'the barb' was a direct visual reference to the Fourex logo. Castlemaine Perkins has been around since 1878, growing in parallel with the state agricultural sector. Early labels were marked with three X's up to the mid 1920's. From then on, the dapper Mr Fourex and the famous XXXX logo became the ubiquitous standard for Queensland; and the mainstay, in colloquial slang, for grog. The 16 panel painted set and 4 digital works *Keep Off the Barb Wire* pay homage to this quaint rural homily. All these works utilise collaged XXXX labels to form a social comment.

Country folk live in rhythm with diurnal and seasonal changes as their livelihood depends on preparedness under all conditions. Their response to seasons is emotional; they can predict weather by the appearance of certain birds or the condition of the back roads. Their homesteads, if the farm has been worked by successive generations, can become shrines to a fondly remembered past, or a memorial to a much loved ancestor who has long since passed away. The assemblage *Queensland Country View, Sultry Sunday with Lantana Shoot* is a poetically whimsical interpretation of weather change seen through the casement window- hot wet weather breeds insect pests and weeds in manic proportions. Every farmer has a running battle with lantana and parthenium and knows the sinking feeling that the battle must be re-engaged with the coming of rain. A personal technique of 'thread drawing' is used in this work. *Queensland Country Night, Shrine to the Light* is a nostalgically philosophic piece, referencing the loss of iconic architectural features from the country house. Mesh security doors are fast overtaking the trellis fly screen door as aluminium cladding overcoats the weatherboards. But the insects are still there, as always in number, hankering after some illumination. And where, pray seek, is the old outhouse?

In the early Brand Registers I found many records of women holding brands in their own right. As horses were the prime means of early transport the brand was similar to car registration. The digital piece *The Brand Matriarchs* pays tribute to some strong historic female identities who carried personal brands, alongside their modern counterparts. For example Minnie Spencer Wills originated the M1N brand from 1895 still in use by the Creed Family today, and Jenni Acton carries HB3 originating from 1872 and still in continuous use. The 'dress' in this piece is constructed from vintage beef stickers scanned from my personal collection of ephemera.

For the work *1914 The Memory of the Pear* I began with an antique pioneer photo from my ephemera collection and built an 'environment' using photos of a large remnant opuntia scourged by cactoblastis on our block. From the late 19th century the Queensland Government had been offering a large reward for a solution to the prickly pear infestation. Many settlers were forced to abandon their holdings as the weed encroached and made life a wasteland misery. The star of Queensland agriculture is no doubt the cactoblastis moth, right from when it was introduced in the early 1930's. Single opuntia plants are still evident on farms as a salient reminder of a very prickly past; indeed we have a hill named after our own Cactus Tree.

Although I try at times to capture elusive emotion, I avoid the 'attractively decorative' or 'vacuously conceptual' approach. I trace down first hand documents like contemporary newspaper and court records for immediate insight into events to infuse real meaning into the works. The poems that accompany certain artworks reflect this technique. The picture files in my ephemera collection have a vibrational signature from prior existence that resonates through repurposing. This combined working method enables me to investigate aspects of Australian identity that are fast disappearing in a networked age; specifically the genuine Queensland country character.

Jan Ross-Manley

18 November 2015

Halo Hill, Raglan QLD 4697

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### LIST OF WORKS:

#### KEYNOTE PIECE

*Branding Board* Old wooden farm doors, painted and collaged then branded with local historic irons at a community Branding Party at Halo Hill, 16 August 2015

#### PAINTINGS

*Pastoral Portrait 1* Moncton Hills Local earth pigments and graphite on primed linen

*Pastoral Portrait 2* Moncton Hills Branded hardwood, local earth pigments

*Brahman* Pure pigment with gold leaf, antique print, collage on hardwood panel

*Marks of Fire Lightning* Encaustic on branded hardwood, graphite and collage

*Forest Vale Earmarks* Oil stick on masonite, graphite

*Keep Off the Barb Wire* Blowtorch marks, acrylic polymer, collage on 16 hardwood panels

#### ASSEMBLAGES

*Marks of Fire #1-7* Cut and compiled historic Qld brands, paint, collaged fire permits on 7 panels

*Marks of Fire #8* Jeppo's Cane Burn Vintage photos and postcards, paint, brand marks

*Queensland Country View, Sultry Sunday with Lantana Shoot* Thread drawing on cotton, set in found silky oak casements

*Queensland Country Night, Shrine to the Light* Wood frame, found trellis door, iron roof, low watt light globe, thread drawing on metal fly screen, paint, collage. Frame made by Cliff McGregor.

*Boundary Rider's Hat Rack* Found rack and hats, paint and collage

*The Real Australian Barb* Silky oak set in stainless steel, welding by Jamie Cleere.

*Dairy Bail* Found Queensland hardwood gate, brands, paint and collage, stainless steel

*Ekka Country* Vintage wool felt agricultural show ribbons, dye reduced, painted and printed on 3 hardwood panels

*The Good Neighbour Line* Antique ironwood fence posts, antique barb wire samples, top row Australian Abbotts 1946 single strand double kink patented barb wire



## **PHOTOGRAPHS AND DIGITAL WORKS**

*1870 Captain Starlight and the White Bull* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*1872 Cobb and Co* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*1902 Charleville Drought* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*1914 The Memory of the Pear* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*2015 The Brand Matriarchs* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*2015 The Cyclone Tree* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*JBO Dairy Door* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*Hourigan Park Bail* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*Parsons Gate* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*King's Cipher Door* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*Keep Off the Barb Wire 1* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*Keep Off the Barb Wire 2* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*Keep Off the Barb Wire 3* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*Keep Off the Barb Wire 4* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*Flowers on the Farmscape, He Sees.* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*Flowers on the Farmscape, She Sees.* archival pigment ink on matte archive paper

*\*Photographs and digital works are available in limited edition for sale. Enquire at Gallery & Museum front desk.*

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

*EP3 Every Pastoralists 3 Prayers* (rain, good feed, and the sire covering the herd). Silk cushion, free machine embroidered. Courtesy the Parsons Family Raglan

## **POEMS**

*A Queensland Farmer's Story* 27 June 2015

*Old Man Mountain* 10 July 2015

*At the Farm Gate* 22 July 2015

*Brand Muster* 16 August 2015

*Captain Starlight and the First Queensland Brands Act* 29 August 2015

*My Favorite Brand* 1 September 2015

*The Grand Experiment of 'Inclement' Wragge in the Federation Drought* 3 September 2015

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*Jan Ross-Manley is represented by Artbeat Pty Ltd*

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### OFFICIAL LAUNCH:

6pm, Friday 18 December 2015

### EXHIBITION ON DISPLAY:

17 December 2015 - 27 February 2016

Left: Exhibiting artist, Jan Ross-Manley working in her studio.  
Photographer: Di Paddick



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Gladstone Regional Council



The Regional Arts Development Fund is a Queensland Government through Arts Queensland and Gladstone Regional Council partnership to support local arts and culture