

# Cattle Call

Scratch a born and bred Albertan, especially someone of Euro/American descent and born before 1980, and one is liable to get some dirt under their fingernails. While the actual 'victim' of this assault may not have been born on a farm or worked on the land themselves, it is safe to assume that someone among their close relations is or was intimately connected to the land and the agricultural industry in some way.

The importance of the agricultural industry to Alberta's economic, political and social history is readily apparent in the visual records of the province. A cursory perusal of the art collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, for example, results in the discovery of hundreds of art works which focus on 'the farm', or aspects thereof, as the primary subject matter considered. Most often artists have directed their vision to climate and the land itself, either recording the region's rich bounty or recounting the trials of farming in a northern environment. Alberta's artists have also frequently investigated the 'human' side of this economic endeavor; drawing, painting, photographing and sculpting everything from farm laborers to iconic grain elevators and tractor tires.

Agricultural practice in Alberta involves more than fields of grain or the human constituents of this activity, however, and a handful of artists in the province have paid homage to the 'silent players' in this pursuit. One of these subjects is the humble cow.

Since the dawn of human history animal imagery has been an aspect of humankind's cultural repertoire. In addition to wild animals cattle, because of their economic importance, have often been reflected in the visual arts since their domestication over 10,000 years ago.

The travelling exhibition **Cattle Call** focuses on cattle as they have been expressed by artists throughout Alberta. Presenting art works drawn from the collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and investigating a mix of media and artistic styles, the works in this exhibition portray 'the cow' both as an essential feature of Alberta's economy and way of life and also as a cherished companion.

*The exhibition **Cattle Call** was curated by Shane Golby and organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program. The AFA Travelling Exhibition program is supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.*

#### FRONT COVER IMAGES:

Top left image: Gary Olson, *Cow Signed*, n.d., Etching on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

Top right image: Randall Adams, *Hugh Lynch Staunton: Willow Creek Corner*, 1990, Silver gelatin, selenium toned on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

Bottom image: Leonard Gibbs, *Study for Cows*, 1990, Watercolour on paper  
Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts



## The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

The Art Gallery of Alberta is pleased to present this travelling exhibition to venues throughout Alberta. Currently the Art Gallery of Alberta serves over 60 venues in approximately 35 communities. Exhibitions on tour from the Art Gallery of Alberta easily adapt to space requirements of smaller venues: schools, libraries, museums, health care centres and other community facilities. The exhibitions are organized in such a manner as to make unpacking, packing, hanging and shipping as easy as possible. Along with the exhibition, each venue receives an Educational Interpretive Guide. These materials enable teachers to use the exhibition within the school curriculum.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Collection is the primary source of works featured in the travelling exhibitions. Other sources for exhibitions may include community partners, archives, private collections and loans from artists. Each year we welcome new venues to enrich their community art through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program.

### Our Thanks

The artists

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts

and to the many individuals, organizations and communities who contribute to the success of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program each year.

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# Cattle Call

*To country people Cows are mild,  
And flee from any stick they throw;  
But I'm a timid town bred child,  
And all the cattle seem to know.*  
T.S. Eliot, poet

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of Alberta

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Patrick Matheson  
*Sometimes on a hot day, Daisy liked to go for a cool dip*, 1986  
 Graphite, pencil on paper  
 Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

**Patrick Matheson** was born in Red Deer in 1954. While primarily known as a ceramic artist, Matheson has produced two dimensional works which draw upon his personal experiences and feelings. As expressed by the artist:

*My work attempts to reflect and communicate responses I have to various influences in my life. As complex as life itself, they are meant to portray the multiple layers of interests and experiences that form who I am.*

*A recurring theme in the work is the environment, and in particular, mankind's relationship to his surroundings. A grandson of Alberta pioneers, I am inspired by the cultural, socio-political, economic etc. factors that shaped the history of the region and impacted its physical landscape. The forces that have altered its surface have played a large role in defining its people as witnessed in the common attitudes and beliefs we share.*

*I endeavour to incorporate into my work components of other interests that also affect my sense of self and place. As an artist I am drawn to art's rich history, especially how other artists have responded to their surroundings. As a ceramics arts educator, I am always engaged in the principles and elements of visual art. References to these and other interests are embodied in the forms, shapes and surface treatments of the works. Their blended physical properties and associative meanings represent reactions and feelings I have to real and temporal stimuli. As expressions of personal thoughts and feelings, it is my hope that the viewer may respond to them in kind or even form personal impressions of their own based on the insights and experiences they may bring to the work.*

*I find challenge and enjoyment in creating art that brings together the diverse factors that motivate and define me while also inviting understanding in the viewer or interpretation of the work from their own perspective. Art is a form of communication and if my work can initiate dialogue with the viewer that is informative, questioning, or thought provoking then it is succeeding in its intent.*



Helen Flaig  
*I'm the Boss*, 1996  
 Oil on masonite  
 Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

**Helen Flaig** was born in 1929 in Nokomis, Saskatchewan. She lived on a mixed farm and attended school in Lockwood, Saskatchewan. Flaig trained as a teacher at Saskatoon Normal School and taught in country schools for two years. In 1955 she moved to Lethbridge with her husband and children and joined the Lethbridge sketch club and took art classes at Lethbridge University. She also joined the Senior Centre Painters and belonged to this group for two years.

Flaig's expressive and 'naive' paintings belong to the genre of Outsider Art. Such art is often characterized by childlike simplicity in subject matter and technique and is often described as 'naive' or 'folk art'. Naive art is that created by untrained artists who aspire to 'normal' artistic status. As such they have a much more conscious interaction to the mainstream art world. Generally speaking the characteristics of naive art are an awkward relationship to the formal qualities of painting. Such artists especially ignore the three rules of perspective which are:  
 1/ a decrease of the size of objects proportionally at the distance  
 2/ a decrease in the vividness of colours with the distance and an unrefined use of colour on all the planes of the composition and  
 3/ a decrease of the precision of details with the distance

While technically 'incorrect', however, such a style often provides a work with expressiveness, 'charm' and a sense of immediacy which compliment the subject matter in ways a more formal style may fail to do. This is perfectly expressed by Flaig herself:

*My naive paintings represent a time that exists in my memory and sometimes from stories from friends of my same age. There were the years in the 1930s when everyone seemed to be struggling hard to survive on the Canadian prairies. Our parents came from physically easier environments. As children we sometimes felt their pain but usually lived a happy existence. This is what I'd hope to catch in my paintings.*



Duncan Lindsay  
*Herding them Home*, 1971  
 Silver gelatin on paper  
 Collection of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts

**Duncan Lindsay** was born in Calgary in 1926. Photography became a creative outlet for Lindsay over the course of decades. For him photographs have a moving quality, one that invokes feelings of nostalgia, warmth, longing and sometimes loneliness.

Since its invention photography has been seen as a popular means of reproducing the material world and it was photography's capacity for recording fact, giving evidence, and presenting a document that practitioners and their public have most consistently valued. This aim of photographers to create a 'real' document, which derived from the genre of realism in painting, resulted in the genre of Documentary Photography.

The actual term 'documentary photography' was coined in the 1930s to describe a category of photography which comments on reality and documentary photography has been defined as *...a depiction of the real world by a photographer whose intent is to communicate something of importance - to make a comment - that will be understood by the viewer.* (Time Life Library of Photography, pg. 12) In such photography the photographer attempts to produce truthful, objective, and usually candid photography of a particular subject.

As a genre of photography, documentary photography developed in three general stages. The third stage, clearly expressed in the work of Duncan Lindsay, is related to photojournalism which developed during the Second World War and postwar eras. At this time an attitude developed among documentary photographers in the 1950s where photographers did not feel bound by any mission except to see life clearly. As expressed by the photographer Gary Winogrand:

*The true business of photography is to capture a bit of reality (whatever that is) on film.* (Time Life Library of Photography, pg. 164)

According to photographers in this group, their work made no effort to judge but instead to express, and they were committed not to social change but to formal and iconographical investigation of the social experience of modernity.