



*best
in show*

ART MAY BE LEADING CELEBRATED PAINTER
ANGUS MCDONALD DOWN A DIFFERENT PATH BUT
HIS PRIZED BULLS STILL HAVE A PART TO PLAY.

WORDS AMY RICHARDSON PHOTOGRAPHY MIKKEL VANG

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT A large piece, *Tethered by Fears*, for Angus's upcoming show; Angus in his studio; a board of images and planning notes that Angus wants "to keep in mind" while he's working; a glass of charcoal pieces. FACING PAGE Photographing cattle for reference in a paddock near Berry, on the NSW South Coast.





CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT A detail of the painting, *Bovine Dreaming*; Chinese ink brushes used for quick studies; Angus loves living and working near the ocean. FACING PAGE Sketching a landscape.



COWS CAN BE temperamental ‘talent’, according to artist Angus McDonald.

“I once photographed a bull on a property in the [NSW] Central West as a reference for a drawing,” he says. “It was a huge black Angus but I was assured he was incredibly tame and even enjoyed being petted.

“I was sceptical, but I slowly approached while he gave me an indifferent stare. As I got closer, he grunted ominously, turned and charged me at full pelt. I bolted and managed to just get over the fence while the owner was doubled over in laughter!”

Despite the odd brush with injury, Angus still enjoys picking up a drawing board or camera and heading into the field to capture his bovine subjects. “I just really like them!” the Lennox Heads-based artist says. “Cows aren’t like other animals... I think they seem really wise.”

While Angus’s paintings of animals are instantly recognisable — and so realistically rendered it seems as if at any moment there could be a snort, a stomp of the foot, or a toss of a mane from the canvas — he’s certainly no one-trick pony.

A portrait of his partner, Zoë MacDonell, *Beyond*, was a finalist in last year’s Archibald Prize, and he has also won awards for furniture design.

Considering he was already 31 when he first picked up a paintbrush, Angus’s rise to become one of Australia’s most collected contemporary artists is all the more impressive.

Fifteen years ago, he was working as a stockbroker in Sydney, bogged down in the machinations of corporate finance. Angus feared he’d be trapped there forever.

“I always drew as a kid and I loved it, but I never had any exposure to anyone who thought that being an artist was a viable path,” he says. “When I left school, I fell into finance, but after a while I found it a grind.”

With a hazy notion that his future lay in art, Angus enrolled at Sydney’s Julian Ashton Art School. “I just took to it straight away and I couldn’t do it enough,” he says. “I spent a year being ridiculously euphoric — it was pathetic! And I’ve never really looked back.” >

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His fascination with cows and horses began in these early years after reading Ernest Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon* — a book about bullfighting. "At art school, I read a lot — I was desperately trying to find a way to express myself in paint," Angus explains. "I really liked the way Hemingway wrote — a very clipped, no-nonsense style. I decided then that's how I wanted to paint."

"Through this, I became fascinated by bullfighting. It's all about rhythms and contrasts. The bull and the matador have the same attributes — they're both brave and athletic — but the matador has this massive ego. So I was more attracted to the bull and it slowly went from there."

After completing his studies, Angus moved to Europe and lived in a village on the Greek island of Leros. In 2000, he was accepted by the Florence Academy of Art. While he studied, home was a partly restored villa on an olive farm. "My studio was a cavernous room with 15th-century chandeliers hanging from the roof.">



SEVEN MILE BEACH NSW | people

CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT When capturing a landscape, Angus is "only interested in the light"; *Bovine Dreaming*; a box of drawing materials; Angus enjoys working outdoors. FACING PAGE The unfinished painting on the easel is for a series titled *Fears and Dreams*.



BELOW Angus is often commissioned to paint people's favourite bulls and horses. RIGHT Work from his Antarctica trips. BOTTOM Tools of the trade.



When he returned to Australia Angus made a beeline for the country. "I'd really liked living in those small communities and I've always loved the beach and the ocean. So I ended up the coast, in Lennox Head."

Home is a large weatherboard house near the shores of Seven Mile Beach. Angus has his studio there too.

"I love having the space, and I really get geed up by living by the ocean and the surf," he says. "It's a good place to work because it's a small town – it's a nice community of people. So it's easy to work a lot and live a pretty relaxing kind of life."

While he may have settled in country NSW, Angus is often travelling to far-flung shores. In 2007 he visited Antarctica at the invitation of the Mawson's Huts Foundation, where he "took thousands of photographs" and sketched studies ("quickly, because it was so cold!"), that were exhibited later that year in London. The region made such an impact that he returned with Zoë last year.

For an artist who's fascinated with "expressing how light falls across a space", the barren, sculptural landscape was a revelation.

"In summer, the sun dips beneath the horizon for about an hour, so the light and the colour are just incredible," he says. "It's so overpowering — you almost don't know where to start. It's a big, powerful place and you're just a microscopic visitor."

Along with the "slow burn" of these Antarctica paintings, Angus has been completing new work for an exhibition titled *Love Death & Cowhide*. It marks a departure for him, both in content and method.

"I've had about 25 exhibitions but this really feels like it's my first, in a strange way," he says. "It's really different work, so I don't know what anyone's going to think. That uncertainty about how it's going to go is actually pretty exhilarating."

While he may have changed his style, Angus says his beloved bulls won't be left behind. "They'll always be around, I think. They're just beautiful animals and I like their natures — it sounds a bit sappy, doesn't it!" * *Love, Death & Cowhide* will be at the Tim Olsen Gallery in Woollahra NSW, April 14–May 2. For more information, visit www.timolsengallery.com or angusmcdonald.com.au

