



*Art @ Kogan - Hugh Sawrey Country Inc. Committee
Western Downs Regional Council
& Bodo Muche Studio*

present

“Bush Friendship – Hugh Sawrey & Darkie Dwyer”

life-size monument in bronze

by Bodo Muche

at

Kogan Village Western Queensland

unveiled by Gill Sawrey & Beryl Dwyer

Saturday 13th October 2012

Commissioned by Art@Kogan - Hugh Sawrey Country Inc., designed & created by Bodo Muche to stand in the Village of Kogan. This monument celebrates the life and talent of one of Queensland's most famous artists, Hugh Sawrey, as he was when he lived in Kogan, on the eve of his departure to Brisbane.

The bronze sculpture invites interaction and features two life sized figures representing well known former Kogan residents Hugh Sawrey and Nelson “Darkie” Dwyer seated diagonally opposite each other at a table and playing cards - as they so often did. On the table beside each of them are extra cards, to represent and remember absent friends. Additionally, there is a downturned copy of the book titled “Outback”, which was illustrated by Hugh Sawrey and written by his great mate Lawrie Kavanagh, during their bush adventures. A branch of eucalyptus next to “Darkie” echoes music played on gum leaves, while beside Hugh rests his hat and brushes.



BUSH CHARACTERS AND BIRTHPLACE OF HUGH SAWREY ART

The Village of Kogan, its people & its milieu, held an important place in Hugh Sawrey's heart & were a formative influence on Hugh's unique Bush Impressionist style. Kogan is the birthplace of Hugh Sawrey Art, for it was only at Bohemian Kogan where Hugh found friendship & encouragement for his nascent artistic gifts & inspiration in the people & characters of the District. Long before Hugh became a renowned artist, & before his venture to Brisbane in 1963, Hugh lived & worked in the Kogan District for some twenty years, first on his own property, which he lost in the drought of 1947, & then on his mother's property, Holdfast on Little Kogan Creek a few kilometres from the Kogan Pub.

The Kogan Pub was owned and operated for many years by the Alexander family. The Alexanders also operated the Kogan Post Office. At the time when Hughie lived in the Kogan District, the Kogan Village Pub was owned by Nelson "Darkie" Dwyer & his wife, Beryl. Darkie, who was a publican for 40 years, was himself descended from the Alexander family through his mother, Kate Alexander, who was publican for 22 years prior to Darkie. Before Kate, Darkie's grandmother, Ellen Alexander operated a pub from the old slab house in Kogan. Darkie and Beryl first operated their pub in the original building & then built the present building in 1957. By 1959, the bare walls of the new Pub were awash with Bush Impressionist Mural.

Hughie spent a fair bit of time propping up the bar at the Kogan Pub. It was when he visited the Pub that he met longtime Publican Darkie Dwyer. Darkie was very accepting of Hughie & became a very dear friend, encouraging Hugh to become an artist. Hugh's first significant portrait was of Darkie in his jockey colours – *The Jockey* (1957). There would be later portraits of greater renown & of more famous people, such as *Madam* (1963) & a portrait of Rugby League player, Wally Lewis (1988); but *The Jockey* portrait was the first portrait of which Hugh felt pride. *The Jockey* was hung in the Archibald Prize Competition. Hughie was a man of vision, & when he offered to paint a Mural on the Pub walls in homage to the then centenary celebrations of Queensland statehood, Darkie was willing. Years later, Darkie stated: "I just accepted it. You never knew what he'd do next. They live in a world of their own, these artists. They're real characters." Of the process of painting the Mural, Darkie remembers: "He'd come down now & then & do a bit on it when he felt like it. He always reckoned he'd become famous – that was his theme song. He said he'd put us on the map." Darkie and Beryl helped Hughie with the historical storylines for the Mural & with the sequence of Australian historical events so that the Mural read as one pictorial storyboard. The Kogan Pub Mural was special because it was the first that Hughie painted. Murals & artworks were painted in other pubs & other towns, such as the Commercial Hotel at Tara (1960) & in the long gone Royal Hotel in Brisbane (1963) but Kogan was the first.

Although Hugh often painted murals & canvases based on the ballads of Bush Poets, he also experimented in many mediums, including charcoal sketches of Queensland bush scenes when on his overland travels with his journalist friend, Lawrie Kavanah & his painting of the hall ceiling of Kogan's Old Post Office House is a chromatically outré scheme reminiscent of the beatnik ethos of the early 1960s. Hugh found inspiration in Kogan Village. Hugh's later paintings drew heavily on his love for Kogan & the Queensland bush, a fondness fashioned from his deep respect for the naked honesty of the bush environment. Hugh's tempering experiences working as a stockman, shearer & logger in the Kogan district & elsewhere in Queensland plus the emotiveness which these experiences yielded, are reflected in his works. Kogan Village was a tableau for Hugh Sawrey. Many of Hugh's paintings feature the Kogan Pub, the Pub Hostess in her black spotted dress, the bush characters playing cards & also his mother's homestead, Holdfast with its distinctive windmill.

His prolific output of paintings & drawings of the Australian landscape & its people contributed in a profound way to the preserving of the memory of times & places in Australian history that were in danger of being overlooked & lost to posterity. Throughout his long career, he experienced firsthand events that shaped Australian identity in the 20th century & documented through his work many of the characters that lived in this period. In 1979 he was selected as one of two Australian artists to represent Australia in "The Horses of the World" exhibition at the prestigious Tryon Gallery in London. Hugh Sawrey was also the founder & a former chairman of the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame at Longreach Queensland. A Gallery now exists there in his honor. In his long career Hugh was awarded several art prizes including the Queensland Industries Fair Gold Medal and in 1989 he was awarded a CBE for services to the arts. His work is represented in important public & private Australian collections including the Queensland Art Gallery, the Robert Holmes a'Court Collection, the Sir Rupert & Lady Clarke Collection, the Lady Fairfax Collection & the Robert Nesen Collection. International collections include the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, New Zealand; the Australian Embassy in Paris; the Rothschild Collection; the Lord T. Remnant Collection in Britain; King Ranch, Texas, USA.

The virtuous toil, vigor & requisite beautifully described by Hugh farrago of Bloodwood, Box, & Ironbark woodlands, & the of the soil which Hugh alone saw in engendered his remarkable Bush Sawrey left the Village of Kogan for studio & continue his career as a



repose of Queensland bush life is Sawrey art. The cerulean skies, the Brigalow, Chinchilla Gum, Currajong protean reds, browns & sandy tints the milieu of the Kogan District Impressionist style. In 1963 Hugh the city of Brisbane to establish a professional artist.

***BUSH FRIENDSHIP* comments by sculptor Bodo Muche**

I met artist Hugh Sawrey and author Laurie Kavanagh in Buderim, Queensland in the nineties at the launching of their book "Outback". I enjoyed talking with Hugh and we seemed to have an empathy with common ground, such as the pleasures of sitting by a campfire, observing and pondering the bush, its creatures, culture and heritage and as an artist passionately wanting to preserve and share this with others. I admired his work as a painter, his depiction of horses and the impressionistic flair he gave his paintings.

In the circle of time and events, the book "Outback" now lies cast in bronze on the table with Hugh Sawrey and his great mate, Nelson Darkie Dwyer, also cast in bronze. It has been a great pleasure retrospectively "getting to know" these two gentlemen, as well as some of their family members and friends, over the past three years during the researching and modelling of *BUSH FRIENDSHIP*. It was very pleasing to have had the sculpture well received by them.

In 2009 I was asked by ART @ KOGAN – the Hugh Sawrey Country Inc. Committee to design and produce a sculpture of Hugh and Darkie" Dwyer, the *BUSH FRIENDSHIP* monument. I mulled over this for a little bit, but not for too long. The concept appealed to me. Hugh Sawrey was such a talented impressionist, depicting his visions of the bush and rural life in Australia, and his time in Kogan was the time before he became famous. Darkie Dwyer, the Kogan publican and jockey was friend & confidant, and one would assume, gave Hugh the encouragement needed to accept & launch himself as an artist into full time painting and as we all know, success followed. Theirs was a true bush friendship.

The brief was to have these two gentlemen playing cards, the game of Euch. Darkie as the publican of old Kogan stock is the dominant figure. Hugh was a talented painter unsure of himself and before success came knocking. He still earned his living by shearing, mustering and fencing and Darkie would have given him every support and encouragement to make it as a painter. I modelled Darkie in smart town attire, which he usually seemed to wear whilst behind the pub counter, thanks to his wife, Beryl. Hugh is in smart stockman's gear, leather pouch for the watch and as they both were smokers, there are tobacco tins and cigarette paper in their shirt pockets. A branch of gum leaves rests by Darkie as he would often have played a gum leaf tune. Hugh's hat and brushes are at his side. While in some ways the antithesis of each other, these two complex, colourful characters sparked inspiration together!

This is how I imagine they did look, as mates of easy and familiar rapport. They look at each other, trying to keep a straight face. The dealt out cards represent absent friends and the Outback book down turned represents transition and success for Hugh, his adventures and travels as well as the spirit of enduring bush friendships.

I used walnut timber for the table and benches with stainless steel legs for a contemporary edge. I tried to create a sculpture which would feel good to touch and invite interaction.

To sculpt is a great passion for me and to create sculptures to which people may physically, mentally and emotionally relate to. They have to fit into an anatomically correct frame and in the case of animals I prefer to have observed them within the context of the sculpture. Not only does the sculpture have to have a balance which makes it just right from any angle but it has to be right too for the blind person who feels them and the observer who wants to touch them. Both people and animal compositions fall within this guide for me; body language and facial expressions have to conform but leaving the viewer room to have his or her own interpretation; ideally the *BUSH FRIENDSHIP* monument has all this imbued. Technically it has been a very challenging sculpture.



BODO MUCHE STUDIO preview for friends & supporters of *BUSH FRIENDSHIP*
Sunday 23rd September 2012

Darkie Dwyer, publican - Bodo Muche, sculptor - Hugh Sawrey, artist - Wally Lewis, rugby player



photograph by Tim Marsden



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