

There's a Cow in Our Museum

by Mike O'Hara

We have a very special cow in our Brighton-Allston Heritage Museum.

Her name is "Moo-rathon Runner."

She is not, of course, a real marathon runner, or even a real cow. She is a fiberglass cow.

Also, "Moo-rathon Runner" is only part of her name. Her full name is "Moo-rathon Runner on Cow-moo-nwealth Avenue," which is the title given to her by her design artist, Laura Brooks Meyer, a Boston-based interior designer and artist who entered her in Boston's Cow Parade back in 2006.

Such whimsical names were common among the 117 cows that, like "Moo," joined Boston's version of the Cow Parade. For instance, down in the Financial District there was "Cash Cow"; the Waterfront area hosted "Cowntucket"; and in the Back Bay "A Street Cow Named Desire" and "Moom with a View."

So, just what is a Cow Parade? Well, first of all, it is not a real parade. Rather, it is a collection of life size fiberglass cow sculptures designed and painted by local artists featuring artwork specific to local culture, city life and other relevant themes and situated in public places all over the city to provide an enjoyable, unique, family-friendly art-viewing experience. The event also serves to energize the retail and commercial areas in which the cows appear, and at the end of the viewing period, typically three or four months, raises money for worthy causes (usually local children's hospitals and other charitable organizations) through a public auction.

Since its inception in Zurich, Switzerland in 1998, the cow parade phenomenon has become a major international event, and the world's largest public art experience. In fact, since their commencement, cow parades have been held in nearly 90 major cities on six continents (see attached exhibit). It is estimated that over the course of these exhibits, more than 5000 fiberglass cows have been designed and painted by 10,000 artists worldwide, enjoyed by more than 250 million people, and have raised more than 30 million dollars for charity. And, no two cows are alike. The smallest parade was held in Auckland, New Zealand (2003) with 32 cows; the largest in New York City (2000) with 450 cows.

The original Zurich parade was the idea of a local Swiss artist named Walter Knapp and undertaken as part of a country-wide campaign to boost national morale in the midst of a public relations crisis caused by the failure of Swiss banks to return Holocaust victims' money to their families. Sponsored by the Zurich Retailers Association, it was not called "cow parade," but rather "Land in Sicht," which is roughly translated as "Countryside in View."

A Chicago retailer named Peter Hanig saw the exhibit while vacationing in Switzerland and realized its entertainment, artistic, commercial, and philanthropic potential. Working with Chicago city officials and the downtown merchants association, he brought the concept to Chicago, where the first US cow parade was held in 1999. It was followed shortly thereafter in New York City (2000), Kansas City (2001), Sydney (2001), London (2002), Tokyo (2003), and Brussels (2003).

Since coming to America, cow parades have enjoyed worldwide success under the leadership of CowParade Holdings Corporation based in West Hartford, Connecticut, which manages each event, from solicitation of artists and sponsors, selection of winning designs, supply of the fiberglass cows, coordination of location placements, and online and live auctions at each event's conclusion.

So, why a cow? Why not some other animal or object? As explained in the official Cow Parade Website, there are several factors that make the cow attractive, not the least of which is that the cow is a universally beloved animal, non-threatening, maternal, nurturing and friendly, and represents different things to different people around the world. She is sacred, historical and connects us to our past. The common feeling is one of affection. There is something magical about the cow that is transcendent throughout the world. She simply makes everyone smile.

The Website goes on to say that as an art canvas, there is no other animal that provides the form, flexibility, and contiguous breadth of a cow. The cowscape provides artists with subtle, yet interesting angles and curves to create unique works of art.

And, in the words of Peter Hanig, who brought the parade to America, cows "provide a lot of area for paint."

Ten years ago, Boston was treated to its own cow parade. The 2006 Boston event, called "Cows on Parade," was one of several held that year, the others happened in Denver, Paris, Florence, Lisbon, Athens, Edinburgh, Budapest, Guadalajara and Buenos Aires. Our event began in August 2005 with a call for artists and sponsors. (Artists typically receive a \$1,000 stipend per cow, and sponsorships range from \$3,500 for a shared "half cow," \$7,000 for a single cow, and \$20,000 for three cows – called a "herd.") By June of 2006, the finished cows were sent out to graze among Boston's downtown streets and inside some public buildings, with four brave bovines even straying across the river into Cambridge. The parade was enthusiastically received by Boston's families, neighbors, tourists, and the commercial retailers, who experienced a dramatic increase in activity due to the popularity of the herd.

One of the most popular cows, of course, was Brighton's own "Moo-rathon Runner," her name reflecting her singular role in the Cow Parade – that of a participant in the Boston Marathon, the world's oldest annual marathon. She was nattily attired in blue and white running togs with matching New Balance shoes (her sponsor), and a 2006 Boston Marathon bib, number 1906. And, in case any out-of-towners should miss the point, she had the marathon route painted on her back.

She was positioned, appropriately, at the marathon finish line in Copley Square, beside the Boston Public Library on Boylston Street. She apparently won her division, as she was proudly sporting both a winner's laurel wreath *and* a gold medal.



Brighton's own "Moo-rathon Runner" finishes Boston Marathon in Copley Square at the Boston Public Library looking relaxed and taking it all in stride.

On September 5, 2006, after three months of free-range grazing, the cows were rounded up and readied for a gala public auction to benefit the Jimmy Fund – a division of the Dana Farber Institute – held on September 2, 2006 at the Marriott Copley Place. A total of 54 of the 117 cows were auctioned at the Marriott event. Others were sold online in a silent internet auction in October. Still more went to their original sponsors as part of their sponsorship arrangement. The live auction raised \$353,000 for the Jimmy Fund.

While most cows yielded between \$3,000 and \$6,000, a few were truly “cash cows.” For instance, “Make Way for Calflings” sold for \$50,000. “Calflings” is a bronzed cow accompanied by ten tiny calves displayed at the Prudential Center and designed by artist Gwendolyn Holbrow, a local sculptor whose works reflect humor and satire.

“COW!,” a pop art Lichtenstein-inspired design by Joanne Kaliontzis, a local graphic artist and displayed at the Faneuil Hall Marketplace, pulled in the second highest bid of the night, \$25,000. Two other popular cows raked in over \$10,000 each: “Cowtucket” by Rob Moore portrayed a cow in a boat, and “Bonnie Cow” by Rebecca P. Manos was covered in seashells and colorful sea glass.

Contributions of all the artists cannot be overstated. Veronika Loginova, a local artist with a keen interest in creating sports action paintings, created five cows, each with a sports theme. Four of these honor our Boston teams - “Patriots Cow,” “Bruins Cow,” “Celtics Cow,” and “Curse Reversed,” which celebrates the Red Sox 2004 World Series victory.

These sporty cows were staged in the Prudential Center courtyard. Veronika spent in excess of 50 hours designing and painting each cow. This artist focused on the enjoyment of the families viewing the results of her work but, most importantly, on its benefit to the Jimmy Fund.

Interestingly, these high Boston dollar amounts fall far short of some of the highest priced cows from other cities. In 2003, for instance, a Waterford Crystal cow named “Waga-moo-moo,” decorated with a mosaic of 15,000 pieces of hand-cut crystal, was sold at the Dublin, Ireland auction for \$146,000. She held the record until 2011. That was the year “Penny Bull” joined the Austin, Texas parade.

The Austin cow parade auction, hosted by Jay Leno, raised a whopping \$1.5 million for the Dell Children's Hospital in Austin. "Penny Bull," who had been converted by its artist, Tao LaBossiere of Hartford, Connecticut, from a cow to a Texas longhorn steer and coated with 10,000 newly minted pennies, was sold to Luci Baines Johnson for \$150,000, setting a new record.

But enough about Texas; back to Boston and our favorite, "Moo-rathon Runner."

Following the wrap-up of the 2006 Boston Cow Parade, Jim Davis, owner and chairman of New Balance Athletic Shoe, Inc, and the sponsor of "Moo-rathon Runner", donated her to Brighton Main Streets (a city sponsored neighborhood group that promotes the commercial district), which in turn gifted her to our Historical Society's Heritage Museum, where she has found the perfect home.

And all things considered, what more fitting place for this iconic symbol of Brighton to reside than in Brighton Center? After all, she symbolizes three notable features of Brighton's long and storied history – horticulture, cattle, and sport.

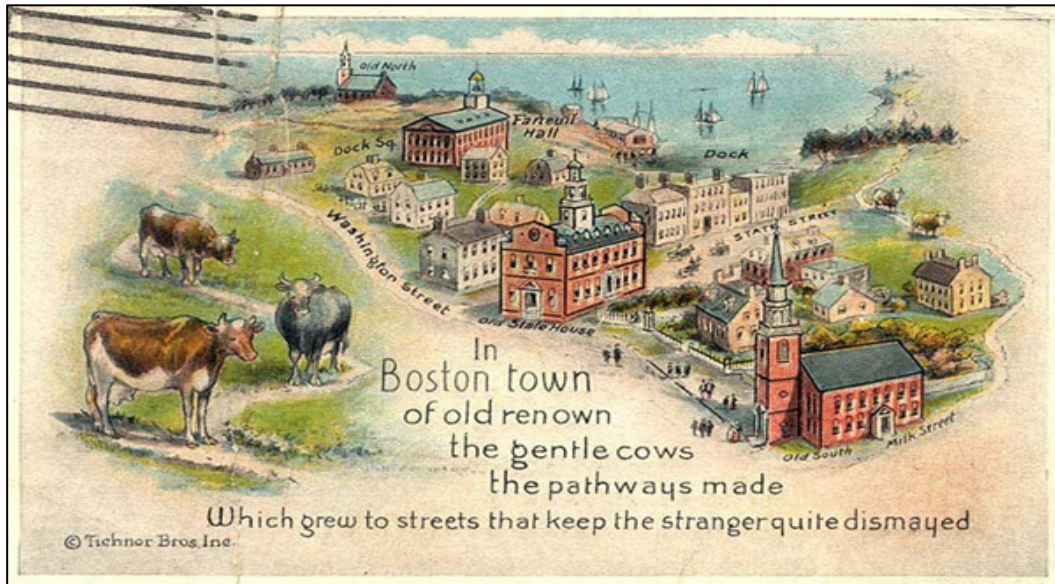
First, her floral headpiece represents Brighton's horticultural history that spanned two centuries; second, she reminds us that the American cattle industry began in Brighton (and continued until the closing of the Brighton abattoir and stockyards in 1957) and supplied George Washington's army with beef during America's Revolutionary War; and finally, what better location for a marathon-running cow than Brighton, through which the world famous Boston Marathon has run since 1897, extending from the Newton town line at Boston College through Cleveland Circle.



Brighton-Allston's Bicentennial Seal adorns the 2007 Jubilee Gala Program, recognizing our historic cattle and horticultural industries.

And in addition to her several nods to Brighton's history, "Moo" has added a light-hearted and whimsical touch to our museum. Our guests are pleasantly surprised to see her and she is, of course, a big favorite with the children's groups. We are indeed fortunate to have her with us.

And further, let's not forget the generous tribute paid to "Moo-rathon's" ancestors by Ralph Waldo Emerson, no stranger to Brighton, who when contemplating the irregular and curving configurations of Boston's streets, said "We say the cows laid out Boston. Well, there are worse surveyors." Many decades later, Emerson might also agree that with their unique characteristics, charm and personalities, there were no better symbols of our wonderful town than the cow sculptures of the Boston 2006 Cow Parade.



A vintage postcard preserves the myth that the winding streets of Boston were established by cows wandering aimlessly about the town.

September 2016

Additional Information

Laura Brooks Meyer

Laura Brooks Meyer of Newton, Massachusetts and the principal interior designer and co-founder of Meyer & Meyer, Inc. (Boston), is the designer and artist of “Moo-rathon Runner.” Laura has more than 30 years of interior design and space-planning experience and works closely with her clients to ensure smooth collaboration between architectural and interior objectives. Her expertise includes interior design and management for a wide range of residential, institutional, and corporate projects.

Tao LaBossiere

During my research for this essay I had the opportunity to speak by telephone with Tao LaBossiere, the designer, builder and artist of “Penny Bull.” Tao is a thoroughly engaging and generous individual. A visit to his Website “Art of Tao LaBossiere, LLC” (www.artoftaolabossiere.com) will demonstrate his immense talent. The Website features examples of his diverse range of artistic endeavors, including magnificent large-scale interior and exterior murals, public art, illustration and sculptures.

Tao told me that he actually constructed two separate sculptures of “Penny Bull.” The original was built for a restaurant (the Vince Young Steakhouse) in Austin, Texas. The restaurant is associated with Vince Young, a former University of Texas quarterback who later played in the National Football League. This edition, called the Texas Longhorn Steer, was donated by Vince Young to the Austin Cow Parade auction with the provision that a replacement (Penny Longhorn II) be constructed by Tao, who readily agreed. Each steer took more than three months to complete; complicating factors included transforming each fiberglass cow sculpture to a longhorn steer, and shaping and gluing over 10,000 pennies to each, a painstaking task.

Besides having created more than 40 individual cows for various cow parades, Tao has served as unofficial “cow doctor” for the past several years, restoring, repairing, and “touching up” more than 400 cows being readied for auction.

Art of Tao LaBossiere, LLC is located in Hartford Connecticut and managed by the husband and wife team of Tao and Amy LaBossiere.

List of 87 Cow Parade Locations

1998

Zurich

1999

Chicago

2000

New York City
Stamford
West Orange, NJ

2001

Kansas City
Houston
Sydney
Bilboa (Spain)

2002

London
Ventspils (Latvia)
Portland
Las Vegas

2003

Isle of Man
Atlanta
San Antonio
West Hartford
Tokyo
Brussels
Dublin
Auckland (New Zealand)

2004

Prague
Stockholm
Manchester (England)
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

2005

Johannesburg
Barcelona
Bratislava (Slovakia)
Geneva
Mexico City
Monte Carlo

Bucharest

Sao Paulo

Moscow

2006

Boston
Paris
Florence
Lisbon
Denver
Athens
Edinburgh
Buenos Aires
Budapest
Madison, Wisconsin
Belo Horizonte (Brazil)
Curitiba (Brazil)
Guadalajara

2007

Copenhagen
Milan
Vigo (Spain)
Marseille
Istanbul

2008

Tijuana
Isle of Capri
Leon (Mexico)

2009

Madrid
La Jolla, California
Hong Kong
Taipei
San Diego
Flushing, New York

2010

Lima
Margaret River (Australia)
Bordeaux
Rome
Sao Paulo
Izmir (Turkey)
Porto Alegre (Brazil)

2011

Austin
Santa Catarina (Brazil)
Rio de Janeiro

2012

Durham, North Carolina)
Goiania (Brazil)
Toulouse
Belfast

2013

Valenciennes (France)
Hong Kong

2014

Hartford
Detroit
Shanghai

2015

Cartagena (Columbia)
Niseko (Japan)
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

2016

San Luis Obispo
Belem (Brazil)
Surrey Hills (England)
Perth