



A bi-monthly publication containing news, views, and reviews of activities at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

Number 20

March/April 1982

ISSN 0111-1426

Opening of Conservation Laboratory

Ms Mary Wood Lee, Senior Paper Conservator at the Pacific Regional Conservation Centre, Honolulu, cut a red ribbon and declared open the recently completed paper conservation laboratory, at a function held on Monday February 1.

Ms Wood Lee described the laboratory as equipped to a basic international standard of capability and expressed the hope that it would soon be operational under the supervision of a professional conservator as an important link in the national network of conservation facilities. The need for such units was urgent as many of the country's cultural artifacts were under threat of serious deterioration through neglect.

The Gallery Director, John Coley, welcomed invited guests and thanked the many people who had been involved, for the interest and willing spirit of co-operation shown throughout the year long project. The opening of the laboratory was a very significant step in the history of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, one which emphasised its growing reputation as an institution of international standing.



Opening of the new Conservation Laboratory.

Mr Coley said the Gallery owed a particular debt of gratitude to Ms Wood Lee without whose expertise the laboratory would not have been completed to the high standard of functional design and finish. Her professional commitment to the

project was total and the Gallery was delighted she was able to be present at its completion. Ms Wood Lee completed her period as consultant to the Gallery on February 15 to return to Hawaii.

Value for Money

From time to time comments are heard concerning the cost of the Gallery to the ratepayer. We asked the Treasury recently to provide figures that would show what fraction of each dollar paid in rates goes towards the running and maintenance of the Gallery and what amount the average household contributes yearly towards the Gallery from their total rate payment. The answers show the excellent value for money the Christchurch ratepayer receives. 0.84 of one cent of every dollar paid in rates supports the Gallery, less than one percent of the city's budget. The sum contributed by the average household over 1981/82 was \$3.64, just on one cent per household for every day the Gallery was open or the cost of an adult attending a movie show.

The Gallery is available free to all visitors except at those times when a charge must be made to recover the considerable costs involved in bringing major exhibitions to the city.

But where else in today's world can \$3.64 per annum provide access on 363 days of the year to a Gallery offering frequently changing exhibitions, a fine collection of paintings and a programme of free Sunday concerts.

Value for money indeed!

Bruce Robinson to leave Staff

The Gallery is to lose its Exhibitions Officer Bruce Robinson, who is leaving to develop his association with the visual arts in another sphere.

In the five years Bruce has been with the Robert McDougall Art Gallery his contribution has been exceptional. Not only has he been responsible for the smoothly ordered flow of exhibitions through the Gallery's spaces, but he has installed them with an imaginative flair that has been the source of much favourable comment from visitors.

It was Bruce's master stroke to present Henry Moore's original water colour drawings on individual plinths situated paces away from the wall-hung West Dean Tapestries. This allowed viewers to compare the images at viewing distances appropriate to the scale of the works. An English visitor who has seen the Henry Moore West Dean Tapestries at the Victoria and Albert Museum where they had been hung one beside the other requiring a kind of awkward dance to see properly,

stated the works had been displayed to better advantage in Christchurch.

Bruce's excellent taste is evident in many aspects of the refurbishment which has been taking place throughout the Gallery in recent months.

His administrative skills, aesthetic judgement and good humour will be missed in the Gallery, but fortunately will not be lost to Christchurch.

To Be Or Not To Be

That was the question many citizens of Christchurch asked on October 21, 1925, the day prior to the Christchurch City Council holding a referendum on financing the building of a new Art Gallery. It was another three years before that question could be answered and yet a further three before the Robert McDougall Art Gallery as we know it today was a reality.

When on June 16, 1932, the Mayor of Christchurch, Mr D.G. Sullivan, unlocked the doors of the newly completed Robert McDougall Art Gallery, it meant that at last after eighty-two years, Christchurch finally had a Public Art Gallery.

Through the years various proposals to establish one had been put forward but these met with little success. The gap during that time was very ably filled by, at first the Canterbury Museum Gallery, and Statuary Hall, and from the mid 1890s by the Canterbury Society of Arts. The latter built a Gallery in 1893 for its growing permanent collection, and immediately assumed the role of the City's Public Art Gallery. By 1898 however, the Society was beginning to find some difficulty in continuing this role and could no longer assure the public that it could continue to maintain constant exhibitions of its growing permanent collection. Over the following two decades the problem merely increased until by 1924 it had become essential that a new and separate Gallery facility be established in Christchurch. The Society had carried the burden for the city for more years than was necessary, and whilst its council felt a definite need to be involved, they also considered the time had come for the Christchurch City Council to accept its responsibility in this matter. When approached, the then Mayor, the Reverend J.K. Archer, and the council were most receptive and quickly negotiated with the Domains Board for a site to be found in the Botanic Gardens. At that time alienation of any Public Domain was a contentious issue but it was found that a piece of land described in the Washing-Up Bill of 1920 attached to the site of Canterbury Museum could be made available after suitable

legislation was passed to approve this.

But the end of September 1925 the necessary legislation had been passed and the city then had a site on which to build its new Gallery, to be under construction by May 1, 1930. There was, unfortunately, one major problem, there was no finance available to do this.

The only alternative was that the Christchurch City Council would have to raise a loan, but to do that it needed considerable Public support. The problem was compounded by the offer made by Mr James Jamieson early in 1925 to bequeath his entire private collection to the City.

Faced with this situation the Christchurch City Council decided to take a poll of its ratepayers and on October 22 a Referendum was held on the Art Gallery question. The Public response was not supportive to the City Council raising finance for such a venture. Only thirty percent of eligible voters attended the polling booths with the result that the poll failed.

During 1926 no further action was taken by the Civic fathers on the Art Gallery question, though it was widely discussed and the architect, Mr Cecil Wood, had already prepared sketch designs for a building to house Mr Jamieson's collection. At this time Mr Samuel Hurst Seager also interested himself in advancing ideas on the form a Gallery should take.

By early 1927 no decisions had been made although Mr Robert McDougall had offered five hundred pounds to start off a building fund, but there was no response. At this time another

issue started to emerge and be more widely discussed; this was the suitability of the proposed site behind Canterbury Museum. It was felt that this should be exchanged for one of the lawn facing Rolleston Avenue. Then on March 30 Mr Jamieson died leaving his collection to the City. Under the terms of his will his bequeath only came into effect if a suitable building was under construction by May 1, 1929.

The City's Diamond Jubilee was also a little more than a year off and the Jubilee Celebration Committee had not decided on a suitable memorial to mark that event. The building of a Public Art Gallery seemed to many prominent citizens the answer to that problem. It would also mean that the city would secure a valuable collection of paintings from the Jamieson bequest.

Over the following months the correspondence columns of the Lyttelton Times and Christchurch Press were overloaded with letters concerning the Art Gallery and its site until on March 10 1928. Mr Robert Euing McDougall, the then proprietor of Aulsebrook and Company announced his decision to place twenty-five thousand pounds at the disposal of the Christchurch City Council towards building costs of a new Gallery. Mr McDougall had in view a design not too unlike that of the Sarjeant Gallery in Wanganui, opened in 1919 but he felt that 'perhaps Christchurch could go one better'.

On April 17, 1928 despite the constant public outcry opposing it, it was finally decided to build an Art Gallery on the original site at the rear of Canterbury Museum which had been ves-



Photograph taken 1930. Photograph shows from left to right, Mr J.S. Neville (Town Clerk 1924-40), Mr R.E. McDougall, Mr E.W. Armstrong (Gallery Architect), Reverend J.K. Archer (Mayor 1925-31).

ted to the city in 1925. This location, it was felt, would provide an apt setting and also have minimal effect on interrupting the vistas of the Botanic Gardens. On May 28 Mr McDougall laid the foundation stone on this site but even this did not mean that the site wrangle was settled. It was still very much an open issue and continued into 1930. By that time all kinds of locations had been considered.

During July 1928 the Christchurch City Council called for designs on a competitive basis to be submitted by architects both in New Zealand and overseas. The conditions of the competition were prepared by Samuel Hurst Seager who also acted as adjudicator. It was also decided that each design must incorporate Hurst Seager's then unique system of natural lighting.

In all forty entries were received before the competition closed on Feb-

ruary 29, 1929. After a slight delay in deciding, first place was given to the Gisborne born Architect (Mr E.W. Armstrong) then practicing in Burma.

Throughout 1929 the wrangle concerning the site continued until the Domains Board decided to formally exchange the present site for that fronting Rolleston Avenue but this offer received too much of a reaction from the Public and was soon withdrawn. Early in 1930 other alternative sites were looked at and the matter was still being discussed while tenders were being called during August of 1930.

By November, however, the firm of J. & W. Jamieson had secured the contract, and construction to Edward Armstrong's perimetrical neo-classical design was well under way. Over the following twelve months the Gallery gradually rose as did costs. In response to a new financial problem faced by the City Council Mr

McDougall generously supplemented the amount of his original gift so that it was able to take over the Gallery on completion without liability.

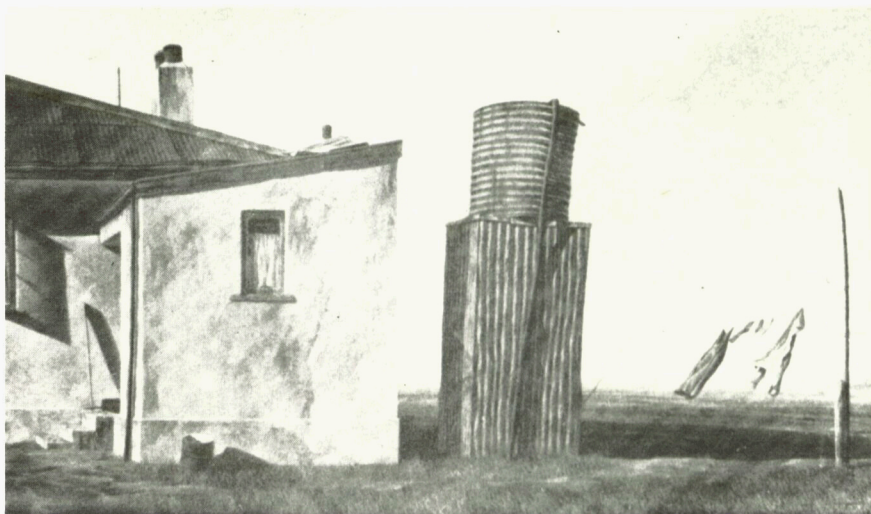
On opening day, Thursday June 16, 1932, the Christchurch City Council took over a facility at that time second to none in the southern hemisphere. Over six hundred persons gathered in the wintry weather to hear addresses by the Mayor, Mr R. E. McDougall, Dr Lester, Mr E. Murray Fuller, Samuel Hurst Seager and others, and to witness the formal unlocking of the Gallery doors. On the weekend of June 18th and 19th over two thousand citizens of Christchurch visited the Gallery. Crowds were so large that the works on exhibition were seen with some difficulty. Such public interest in the McDougall Art Gallery did not wane and the attendances for the first twelve months of its history is still a record.

**Graham Sydney
Drawing into Painting.
March 13 — May 2**

Graham Sydney's tempera paintings generate thought and wonder as they raise disturbing questions about truth and reality. It is a particular temptation with realist painting to mistake the manifest and meticulous work for the art. Also with non-realist painting, particularly painting in a highly expressive manner, the temptation occurs, the other way round, to mistake the art for the work. It is this latter mistake, one suspects, which underlies too vigorous and exclusive a preference for realism over other styles of art.

There is the suspicion that with the realist painter, we tend to ignore the possible influences of personality in the images we contemplate because we are too accustomed to a common kind of image to which a realist painting may seem to bear a superficial resemblance: namely, a photographic image. Our culture and consciousness is such that in palpable error, we trust in the impersonal evidence of a photograph, and so too in the reality of what appears to resemble a photograph.

This exhibition of selected paintings with working drawings & photographs of original subjects will pose these questions and provide visitors with the opportunity to examine the true nature of one artist's approach to "realist painting".



Behind Stan's by Graham Sydney.



Drawing for Behind Stan's by Graham Sydney.

**Body Building
Photographs by Fiona Clark
March 31 — May 2**

As a photographer, Fiona Clark has been drawn to photograph groups of people not usually seen during our

day to day activities. Often they are controversial groups, pursuing their interests or life style often frowned upon by people subjected to preconditioned responses. All of these groups are important parts of our social structure reflecting the

diverse range of behavioural patterns which make up our society.

In 1980 Fiona was awarded a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council grant to photograph the "Mr Olympia" body building contest in Sydney. This

contest for the competitive Bodybuilder is held in the highest esteem. Merely to compete in the "Mr Olympia" is an achievement in itself. Preparation for competition in the contest can commence up to a year before the event. Twice daily workouts in the gymnasium using weights, machines and pulleys increase in intensity as the contest draws closer. Strict attention to diet excludes fatty "junk foods", super sweet soft drinks, white flour and sugar products.

For Fiona Clark the contest provided the opportunity to deal with the photography of reality. Talking of her approach to photography she states "it deals with 'what is', the immediate. Photography for me is not pre-conceived or arranged. With the subject the concept becomes decided through the lens to the print and finally the audience."

The exhibition consists of 40 colour photographs with a catalogue.



Johnny Terrilli — Mr Best Australia 1980, photograph by Fiona Clark.

Kyrie Eleison by Ralph Hotere

The Gallery was most fortunate recently to have presented to it by Mrs C.S. Hamilton of Christchurch, *Kyrie Eleison*, a painting by Ralph Hotere which is number three in his Requiem series of 1974.

As with most of this artist's work the guarded power of the minimal imagery is invested with a quiet spirituality, akin to church music. *Kyrie Eleison* (Lord have mercy) is visually a hymn of prayer. The gentle sonority of the work emerges, and is carried through a void of timeless space, to honour the lost souls of the dead. In such a painting as this the artist's ever present conscious concern with the passing of earthly

life seems its most poignant, but words alone can do little to reveal the artist's intent only the experience of the work itself can disclose its true message.

This powerful work fills a gap in the present contemporary New Zealand painting collection and we are most grateful to Mrs Hamilton. It also boosts the Gallery's holdings of this important New Zealand artist's work to a total of six. This small but not insignificant collection includes a major work of seven panels from the Malady series of 1970-72, acquired in 1979 and Sangro Litany, from the Sangro series, purchased last year.

Gallery Concerts during March and April:

March 7, 3.30pm.

Programme of Classical Indian Dance presented by Ambika Prasad.

April 4, 3.00pm.

Joe Charles presents a programme of New Zealand ballads.

April 18, 3.00pm.

Ilam Wind Ensemble present a programme of classical wind music.

Acquisitions

The following works have been recently purchased:

Ross Ritchie

River Horse

Oil on canvas with rubber hose and plastic buckets.

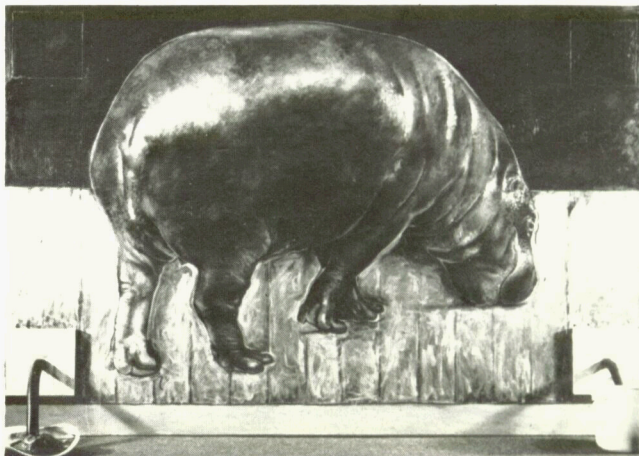
David Turner

Potted V

Ceramic

W.A. Sutton

St Michael's Mount, Cornwall 1981
Watercolour



River Horse by Ross Ritchie.

Artists on Tape

A project to record the ideas, reminiscences and opinions of Canterbury artists is underway with the series of in-depth interviews summer research student Deborah Shepard has been conducting with the eminent painter W.A. Sutton.

The aim of the interviews is to have on record the artist's own account of his work, progress, ideas about art, biographical information expressed with the spontaneity of language that is hard to capture in written memoirs.

The project was prompted by the realisation that there has been little attempt to preserve the "oral history" of those who have been important figures in the development of the arts in New Zealand, although the technology of tape recording has been available for many years.

W.A. Sutton's tapes, recorded in his lively language, have proved a mine of illuminating information about the visual arts in Canterbury and the artist's own career since the thirties.

Realising that the memory can be selective and play tricks with time, those taking part in the programme have been asked to prepare themselves by checking dates and other information as closely as possible before interviewing. The interviews may last many hours, recorded over a period of weeks. It is intended that younger artists be asked to agree to interviews conducted at two to five yearly intervals, building a record of their maturing views and ideas. The hope is that galleries in other centres will also join this project, interviewing eminent practitioners in their localities, providing in time a New Zealand wide catalogue of recorded voices for the benefit of art history scholars and writers.

The Robert McDougall Art Gallery
P.O. Box 237 Christchurch,
Botanic Gardens, Rolleston Avenue,
Christchurch 1.
791-660 Extension 484