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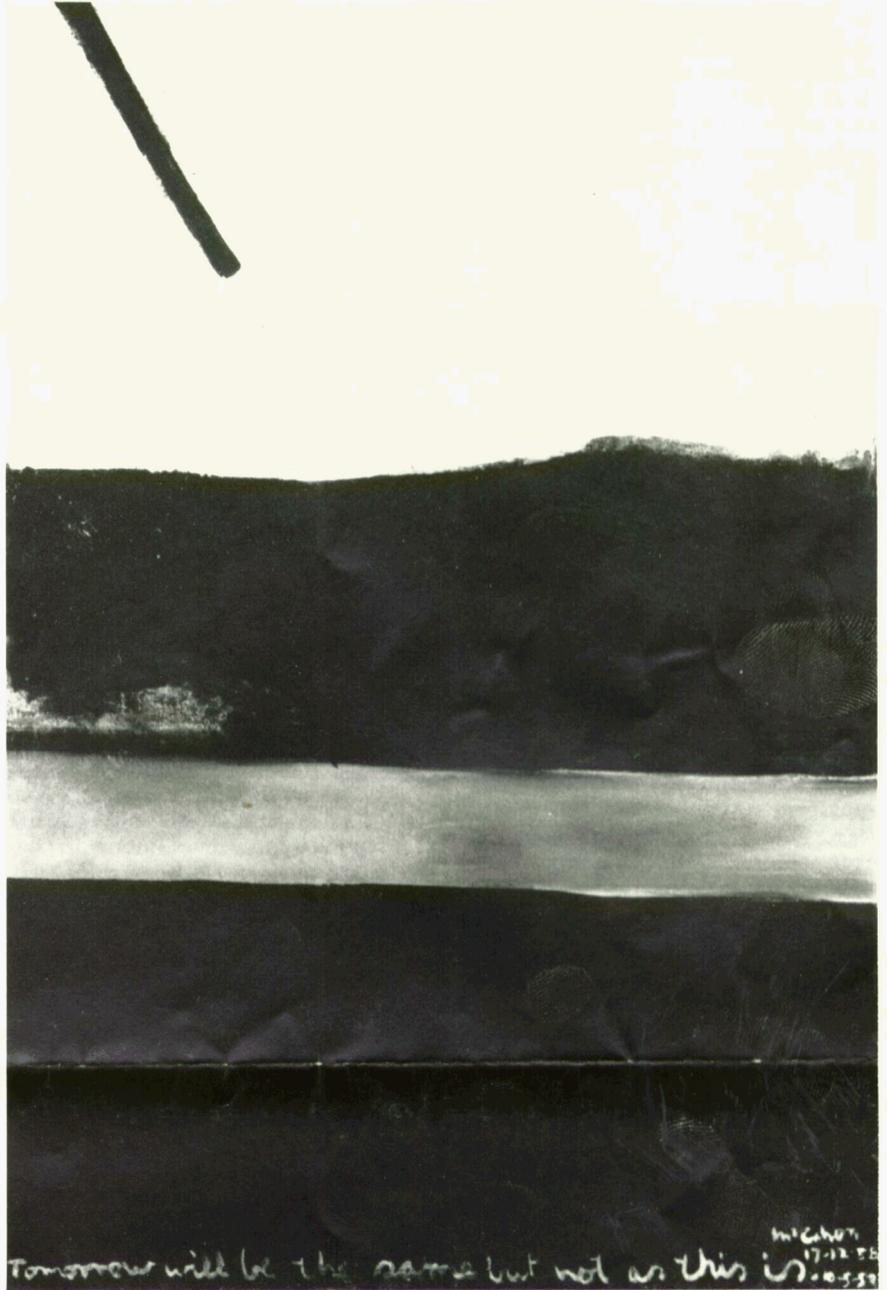
The Robert McDougall Art Gallery

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Robert McDougall Art Gallery
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bulletin



Tomorrow will be the same, but not as this is 1958-59

COLIN McCAHON

1919 — 1987

The artist Colin McCahon died in Auckland on May 27, in his 68th year, leaving a reputation as the most important painter born in New Zealand.

Over a fifty year period, beginning as a young man in the late thirties, McCahon's stature grew, spreading to a broader following. As his challenging imagery became more familiar, with

controversy attending each prize, commission, exhibition and development, his reputation, in the end, reached mythic proportions.

His work, selling into his middle years for a few guineas, often the focus of jokes and philistinism, came to be competed for at auction by the larger corporations, institutions and wealthy

private buyers. Books were written about McCahon, lectures given, his influence on New Zealand painting pondered. Latterly he received recognition in major exhibitions organised in Australia and his own country to honour his achievement. His **'Victory Over Death'**, New Zealand's gift to Australia, has an honoured place in the Australian National Gallery in Canberra. He was a phenomenon which had not occurred before. He became such a dominant landmark in the cultural landscape that he overshadowed the excellence of the handful of his contemporaries who with him contributed so much to the development of the visual arts in twentieth century New Zealand.

The question is why this slightly built, courteous, quietly spoken but intense man should attract, through his work, the most violently vituperative reaction of those who found his images too difficult, and the adulation and totally loyal support of those who saw him as the country's greatest artist.

The answers lie in a number of extraordinary qualities McCahon possessed and the times and circumstances in which he exercised them.

Clearly he had a most acutely refined visual sense. He absorbed experience and the information of his surroundings; the curve of a hill, its structure, the particular quality of bush green, the white light created by a black silhouetted landform. McCahon could transform these observations into images which resembled no paintings made before in the country. Their seeming clumsiness and rawness clothing the rigorously thought through, constructed, method behind them.

In all his periods of development McCahon's works were never simply interpretations of the seen world. He addressed through his images the question of the New Zealander's uneasy relationship with the land. It seems he sought to make it familiar to us, not as a romantic, tamed landscape at which we gaze removed and uninvolved, but as a unique place of changing moods, elemental forces, in which man might build bridges, make roads, but where too vulnerable humans could be enveloped by the bush or destroyed on unforgiving mountains.

The landscape was also a place where, in McCahon's work, great dramas could be enacted. The crucifixion would take place in the folded hills of Otago, witnessed by figures which could have just come from driving tractors or making scones for the shearing gang.

Then to his paintings he added the word, using his cursive script as elements as a painter of still life might use objects. The forms of the letters would be

manipulated in a painterly calligraphy but beyond the visually graphic effect of the symbols was the power of the language they expressed. It was Colin McCahon's great achievement to wed to the visual evocations of painted images, the poetic resonances of language.

The powerful moral force of McCahon's painting springs from his strong inner convictions, derived perhaps from Quaker philosophy with which he felt sympathy. It was part of his belief system that the events of Christ's passion could occur anywhere on earth and it should not be seen as unusual if they were set in New Zealand. For this reason, he drew upon renaissance iconography for some of his themes. These works are nonetheless imbued with a sense of the majestic presence of God, of human frailty, sin and suffering rather than the more joyous expressions of religion.

In immense, commanding canvases, McCahon made his acts of faith and humanism, affirmations of existence, of the right to be, to act, to seek peace, painted and written, black upon white, white upon black, works in biblical cadences, moving, troubling, invested with an emotional charge that would halt the passer-by, rivetting them before the image. Those unused to the experience might then look away or take refuge from the embarrassing intensity with a joke or a loud protest. Whatever the reaction, they never forgot the image.

The emotional intensity of McCahon's work was what made it arresting and important. If you did not discern conventional academic finesse in his technique you sensed the strength and intellectual integrity of an artist who never made an easy painting. There were always more layers to his images than were apparent at first examination. After the austere restriction of colour, the simple directness of means, there was a morality which called you to account. You had to believe in them or reject them. You had to take a position.

McCahon's method of painting was almost entirely self constructed. It is difficult to think of a painter so free of imitative mannerism, although he acknowledged the structural lessons of Mondrian and Cezanne. As he formulated his methods and content, he met not only hostility from those who did not care for his work, but with disbelief and criticism, as he changed direction, from many who had accepted his innovations until that time.

To persevere in the building of a personal visual language with which to express singular ideas requires intellectual stamina; to persist in the face of continuing approbation and criticism takes qualities of character of an extraordinary order. McCahon was certainly sensitive to the waves of denigration to which he and his work

were often subjected. Although he preferred to let his paintings speak alone while he remained, for the most part, silent against attack, he was hurt by inferences of charlatanism and retired into seclusion.

His qualities of character, intelligence and innate painterly sensibility would have made him formidable in any society but the factor which made him pre-eminently important was that he worked at a time when New Zealand needed to establish its own cultural identity.

By the thirties, the received cultural values from England were smotheringly bland, genteel and secondhand. McCahon's generation of young artists included Toss Woolaston, Rita Angus, Bill Sutton, Doris Lusk, Leo Benemann, perhaps the first group of New Zealand artists to feel secure and confident in their home country rather than labour under the constraint of a sense of exile from the beckoning cultural enticements of London and Paris which had drawn many talented predecessors to Europe.

These young artists and others set the tone of vigorous, original, often controversial activity in the visual arts that was to characterise the next fifty years.



John Walker: In Truth II 1981-82

Colin McCahon's painting was at the cutting edge of his movement and it is undoubtedly his work which strikes most outside observers as somehow embodying a distinctly New Zealand style. His images are inimitable and whether loved or loathed, memorable.

It is worth noting that after the 1981 visit to New Zealand of the British artist John Walker, some of Walker's paintings exhibited in New York bore in familiar cursive script "In Truth, in very truth I tell you I am the door". If appropriation is the most sincere form of flattery, McCahon's work was honoured indeed by these references.

Similarly a recent issue of an Australian periodical shows a photograph of the respected artist Davida Allan with a work completed since her visit to New Zealand last year. The image is a gushing, written paen to the charms of the actor Sam Neil. The origin of the painted letter forms is obvious, if the content of the message is less gripping than the King James translation of scripture.

McCahon, then, cast a long shadow within and beyond his own country.

One of the strongest paintings in the McDougall's collection is the McCahon work **'Tomorrow will be the same, but not as this is'**. The phrase has echoes in respect the significance of the artist's contribution to our cultural life. New Zealand painting will be unchanged by McCahon's passing; his influence and achievement are manifest, but the absence of the artist leaves a void that cannot be filled.

John Coley

Doris Lusk remembers Colin McCahon

I always used to imagine that in Colin McCahon's striking early painting **'I PAUL'** (circa 1949) which I am fortunate enough to own, there was a quite haunting self portrait; a prophesy of the future, indeed the portrait of a prophet. And towards the end of his life, when illness slowly changed him physically and mentally this resemblance to his own creation, to my mind was revealed much more tangibly — Colin always had a particularly direct and arresting gaze, and this confronts one with forceful exaggeration in the eyes of **'I PAUL'**, set in the ascetic bearded face.

Many years ago, an elderly friend who visited me occasionally always turned this painting to the wall as she found the portrait's following gaze very discomforting. The study of Colin (1938) which I painted of Colin in Dunedin (Hocken Library) reveals of course nothing of the future, save perhaps in that same confident straight gaze.

Although I cannot claim to having clear or concise memories of Colin as a young painter, I can recall that in spite of the rigours and uncertainties of the post depression climate in Dunedin he had no doubts at all as to his purpose in life. Colin's confidence in himself as a painter was unwavering in spite of years of unsympathetic and often vituperative criticism.

This statement of confidence can, I think, be followed as a constant factor from early work in the 30's, throughout

his prolific painting life, and dimly echoing still in his final works shown, incidentally in the church at his funeral. It was this extraordinary self confidence, not in any way to be taken as arrogant or egotistical, that made Colin such a wonderful teacher. Any of his former students would confirm this, also his essential modesty and reserve.

However his final retirement from teaching was absolutely essential to his survival as a painter, as the demands made upon his ever generous flow of creativity became too exhausting.

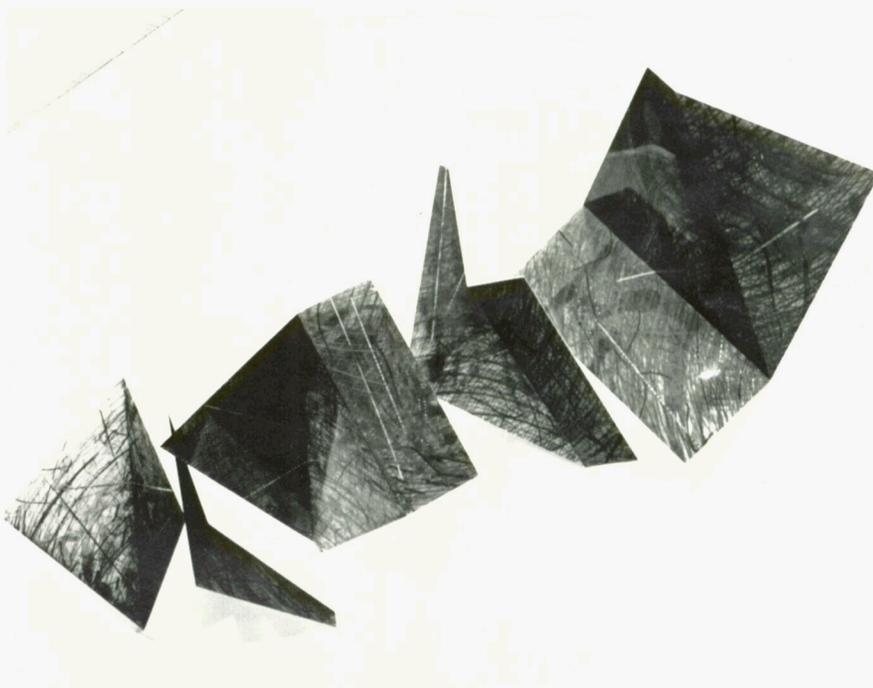
I always recognised Colin McCahon as a most dedicated and authoritative painter even though I could not pretend always to follow his intensely personal vision, religious and intellectual. And never did I ask, nor did he offer (and rightly so) to

"explain" the meaning or significance of certain works. Apart from his inimical writing and exhortations, one sought the message alone. The fact that Colin was always reticent in claiming publicity and fame (few personal photographs save television) now contributes to a future reliance on written documentation for recall of the painter's life.

However, as Colin himself would perhaps have said "By his works ye shall know him".

Olivia Spencer-Bower, Rosemary Johnson, Rudi Gopas, Ida Lough, Phil Clairmont, Leo Benemann, now Colin McCahon, wherever they are, maybe they will form a little GROUP.

Doris Lusk



Five Folded Rectangles 1986 (photograph Michael McArthur)

GRAHAM BENNETT

Parameters

July 2-August 26

Since Graham Bennett's return to Christchurch his work, and particularly his drawings have been attracting considerable attention. Using a range of mark-making techniques and materials he presents a synthesis of the time-layered scratches, smudges and marks with the mirrored reflective qualities characteristic of contemporary architecture.

'Parameters', a McDougall Art Gallery Artist's Project, continues the approach and content of his earlier works. He is interested in the recessed architectural plane and the way its illusory 3rd dimension combines with actual 3

dimensionality. Thus in the three very large works of **'Parameters'** we are given a personal exploration of the vertical, the horizontal and the diagonal as expressed in compositions of folded, fractured and counterposed surfaces. We are immediately confronted with boundaries and edges, with solid planes and the spaces between, with light and dark, and with networks of Miro-like squiggles or trails which tantalisingly seem to hover mid-way within the drawing space.

Graham Bennett graduated from the Ilam School of Fine Arts in 1970 and travelled extensively in Europe, working

in Barcelona, Spain from 1978-79 and in Sydney in 1980. Since his return in 1980 he has lived in Christchurch and exhibited in Nelson, Dunedin, Wellington and Hamilton where his earlier works aroused considerable interest particularly for the imaginative handling of the fractured cut and folded form.

With **'Parameters'**, Graham Bennett is exploring the relationship between the solid and the light, the calculated and the spontaneous, the cone and the edge, the edge and the space. The work is read within a space before it is read within itself.

Sue Cooke Panorama

— A print based on the landscape at Lake Ohau

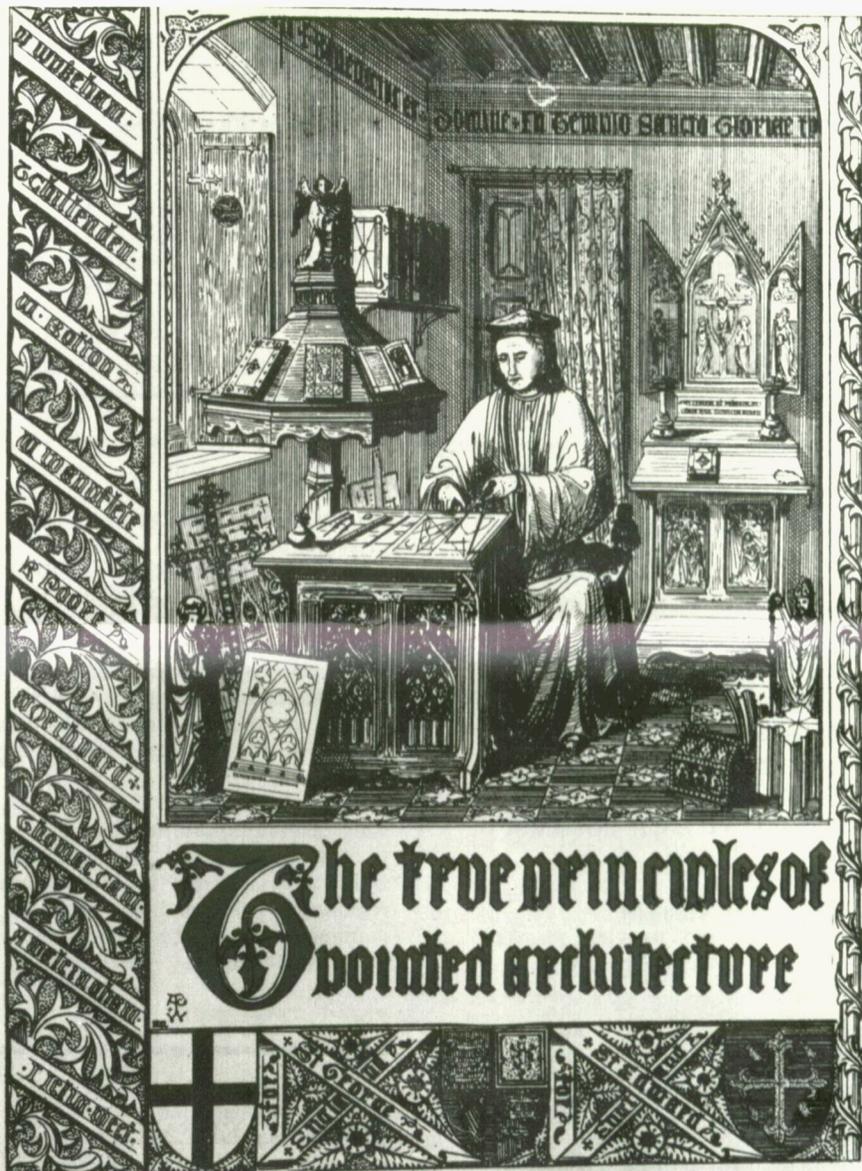
July 7-August 2

Sue Cooke was born in Sydney in 1960. She studied printmaking with Barry Cleavin and Denise Copland at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts and graduated with Honours in 1984. Her work tends to expand on traditional printing techniques as she strives to express her personal ideas and reactions to the landscape.

'Panorama' stretches the print format to an extremely large work measuring 23m x 1.6m. With a print this length our vision can be completely encircled by a panoramic span of 180°. On the continuous surface a variety of mark-making techniques signal Sue's responses to the solidity, rhythm and forms of the encircling mountains and the wide open spaces of the high country lake. Areas of rich black ink contrast with the raw canvas and interact with the freedom of line and tone.

Part of the immediacy in the rhythms and forms of **'Panorama'** lies in the fact that the plates were drawn on the site, on the tussock covered foreshore of the lake. After a series of full-scale preliminary drawings, Sue Cooke worked at Ohau, directly onto the large cardboard plates. Later they were cut at the studio in Christchurch and printed, using the intaglio technique, onto the continuous length of canvas.

Large scale works expressing a personal response to the land have their predecessor in the 1958 **'Northland Panels'** of McCahon and photographic panoramic views have been with us for some time. However **'Panorama'** — a print based on the landscape of Lake Ohau is surely the first print where a New Zealand print-maker has tackled such a large and challenging project. This project was assisted by a grant from the Queen Elizabeth Arts Council.



Frontispiece to A. W. N. Pugin's *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*. 1841.

From Palladianism to the Gothic Revival:

Two Centuries of British Architectural Books

August 14-September 27

At a time when architects are once again looking to the past for inspiration it is especially appropriate to re-examine a selection of the most influential publications which transmitted architectural ideas between the beginning of the eighteenth century and the end of the nineteenth century. Commencing with the new taste for building in the style of the sixteenth-century Italian architect, Andrea Palladio, which emerged in England in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the exhibition follows the changing phases of British architecture through the publications which both inspired and responded to changes in taste. The rise of Neo-Classicism and the emerging knowledge of Gothic architecture and its eventual triumph in the mid-nineteenth century are traced

through contemporary publications. Many of the books to be exhibited are lavishly illustrated with engravings, etchings or lithographs, while one dating from the latter part of the nineteenth century, contains photographic prints.

Among the most significant works included in the exhibition are Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1714), Palladio's *Four Books on Architecture* in an edition of 1721, Stuart and Revett's *Antiquities of Athens* (1762), J. S. Cotman's *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy* (1822) and A. W. N. Pugin's *A Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament* (1844).

The majority of the books are on loan from the University of Canterbury Library, although a small number have been borrowed from other libraries and private collections. Most of the books exhibited were at one time owned and used by architects working in New Zealand and thus provide a valuable record of the kind of sources New Zealand architects had available to them

during the nineteenth century and early decades of this century when an accurate knowledge of the historical styles was an essential part of every architect's training.

The exhibition is being curated by Dr Ian Lochhead, Senior Lecturer in Art History at the University of Canterbury.

ACQUISITIONS

The following works have been recently purchased with assistance from the Stirrat Bequest

Olivia Spencer Bower

HARBOUR BOATS AND JETTY

c 1965

Watercolour

ROME 1931

Pen/ink/watercolour

SHEARING TIME c 1937

Watercolour

HOP FIELDS KENT 1929

Watercolour

FISHING VILLAGE SOMERSET

ENGLAND 1930

Watercolour

Margaret O. Stoddart

CANTERBURY PLAINS FROM

DYERS PASS ROAD 1888

Watercolour

Joseph Mallord William Turner

LIBER STUDIORUM — Frontispiece

Etching/Engraving

MARTELLO TOWERS NEAR

BEXHILL SUSSEX 1811

Etching (First state) Pre-engraving

(from Liber Studiorum)

MARTELLO TOWERS NEAR

BEXHILL SUSSEX 1811

Etching. Engraving (from Liber

Studiorum)

MIDMAY SEA PIECE 1811

Etching (First State) Pre-engraving

(from Liber Studiorum)

MIDMAY SEA PIECE 1811

Etching/Engraving/Mezzotint (from

Liber Studiorum)

The following works have been presented by Evelyn Page:

Evelyn Page

RECLINING NUDE 1967

Charcoal

NUDE — TIME STUDY 1967

Watercolour

SEATED NUDE — TIME STUDY

Watercolour

DOUBLE NUDE STUDY

Watercolour

A. Elizabeth Kelly

PORTRAIT OF MRS MARGARET

HIGHT

Pastel

Presented by Mrs E. O'Malley,

Wellington

Jenny Wimperis

ON THE BANKS OF THE AVON AT

ARMAGH STREET 1890

Watercolour

Presented by Mrs M. Rylatt,

Christchurch

Dora Meeson

PORTRAIT OF MRS E. MARSH

1894

Oil on Canvas

Presented by Mr A. H. Seager,

Christchurch

Jeffrey Harris

DEPOSITION 1971

Pencil

Peter Wolden

'I LOVE SOMEBODY — YOU

DON'T KNOW' 1978

Acrylic on Board

Bill Culbert

August 6-August 30

This is an exhibition of photographs by Bill Culbert who studied at the Canterbury University School of Fine Arts. In 1957 he won a Travelling Fellowship to the Royal College of Art in London and continues to work in Britain where he has established a strong reputation for his works utilising light sources.

This exhibition is in the form of photographs in this theme and made by Bill Culbert largely in the Provence region of France and was arranged in conjunction with Bill Main of Exposures Gallery, Wellington.



Bill Culbert
Car Sculpture II 1982

COMING EVENTS

- July**
- 1 Exhibitions from the Gallery's collection** including works by Elizabeth Kelly, Archibald Nicoll, Raymond McIntyre, early Dutch & French landscapes, Colin McCahon, Ralph Hotere, & Fomison lithographs.
 - 2 Tokyo Syndrome** photographs by Tadanori Saito. Opening preview 7.30 p.m. Exhibition closes 2 August.
 - 2 Graeme Bennett, Parameters** Opening preview 7.30 p.m. Exhibition closes 26 July.
 - 4 Saturday Club — 10.30 a.m.**
 - 7 Sue Cooke, Panorama.** A print based on the landscape of Lake Ohau. Opening preview 5.30 p.m. Exhibition closes 2 August.
 - 8 A Closer Acquaintance with Art.** The Wednesday course begins 1.30 p.m.
 - 11 A Closer Acquaintance with Art.** The Saturday course begins 10.30 a.m.
 - 15 Friends Coffee Morning 10.30 a.m. \$1.50.** John Tullett will speak on Craft Design Courses in New Zealand.
 - 16 Kilmarnock Club 10.30 a.m.**
- August**
- 1 Exhibitions from Gallery's collection**
 - 1 Saturday Club 10.30 a.m.**
 - 6 Bill Culbert Photographic Works** Opening preview 5.30 p.m. Exhibition closes August 30.
 - 15 From Palladianism to the Gothic Revival** Exhibition closes 27 September.
 - 13 Kilmarnock Club 10.30 a.m.**
 - 19 Friends Coffee Morning 10.30 a.m. \$1.50.** Peter Beaven will speak on New Zealand contemporary architecture.
 - 26 Wednesday Club 1.30 p.m.**

Exhibition dates and programmes could vary slightly.

Friends of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery Inc.

President — Peter Simpson 842-506
Secretary — Judith Hamilton 515-288
Treasurer — Chris Brocket 557-133



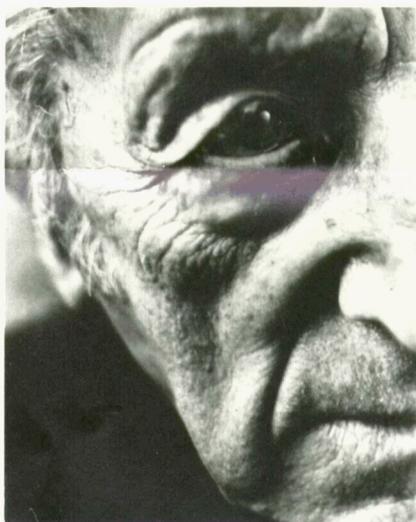
KEVIN CAPON

Photographs for the Gallery

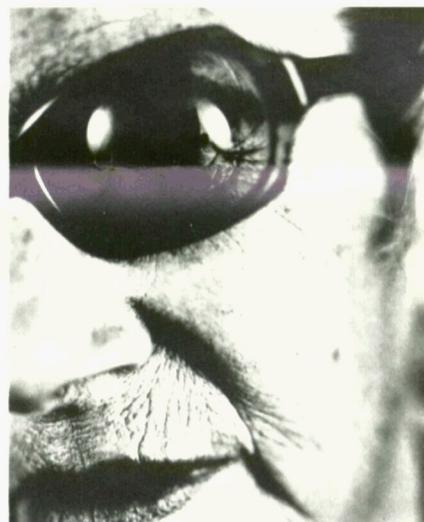
The Friends' latest gift to the McDougall Art Gallery is a group of photographs by Kevin Capon. Photography is undoubtedly one of the most immediate and accessible visual arts and in terms of the gallery's acquisitions policy it offers an important collecting area.

The choice of subject matter, New Zealanders who are prominent in the arts is entirely appropriate. However the manner in which Capon has decided to depict these individuals is certainly far from mundane. He has chosen to create close-up concentrated images that explore the face in aspects that can be quite uncomfortable, but Capon claims he will "investigate the face as a landscape".

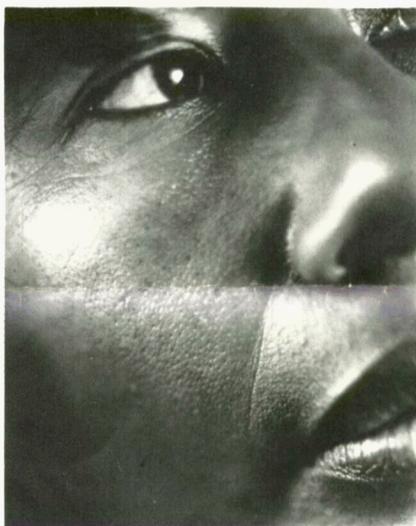
We are sure you will agree that these works represent yet another fine gift by the Friends to the gallery and that these donations of artworks fulfil the major purpose of the Friends association which is to support the gallery in the most effective ways we possibly can.



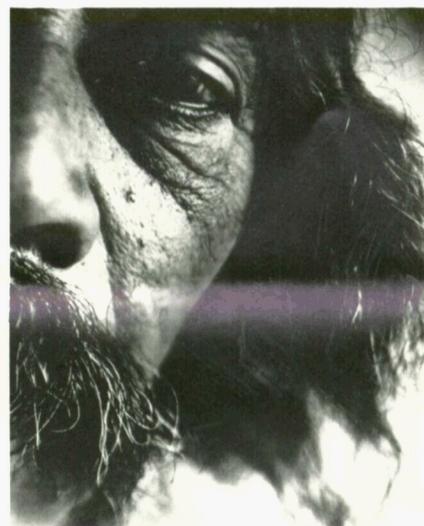
Kevin Capon — Eric McCormack 1984



Kevin Capon — Doris Lusk 1985



Kevin Capon — Merata 1984/85



Kevin Capon — Ralph Hotere 1985

NEW MEMBERS

Mr & Mrs J. Armstrong
N. Barrett
V. G. Bossley
Jule Einhorn
A. M. Grieve
C. R. & J. E. Harman
Josie & Peter Laing
Chris Taylor
Mrs S. A. Taylor
John Tullett
Mrs S. A. Wilson