

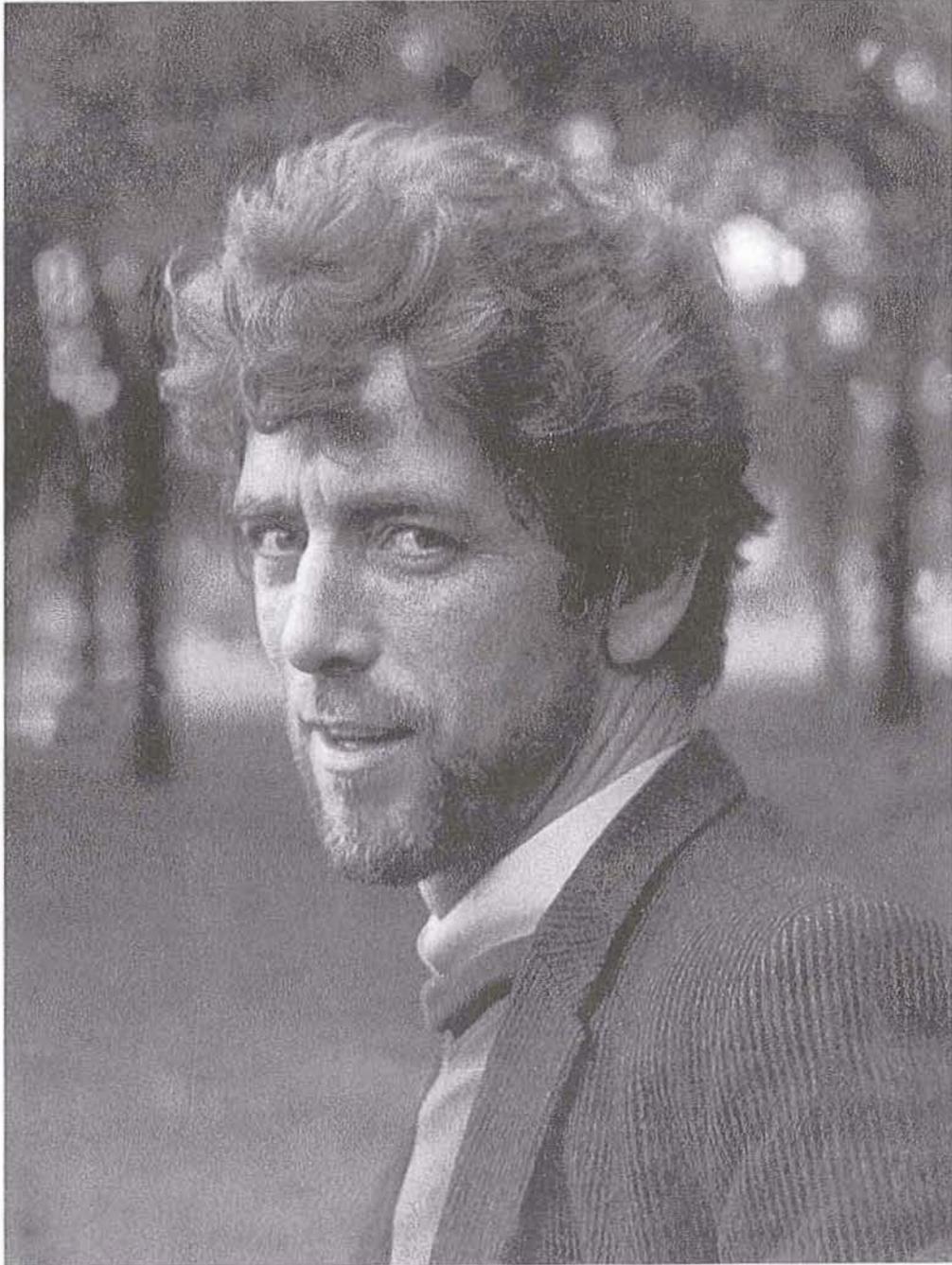
heaven and blood

painting and drawing by Alan Pearson 1959-1999



# Heaven and Blood

Painting and Drawing by  
Alan Pearson 1959 – 1999



Alan Pearson, 1966

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Alan Pearson 1959 – 1999



ROBERT  
McDOUGALL  
ART GALLERY  
AND ANNEX

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Front cover: *White Tribe* 1996  
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Collection of the Artist

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# Director's Foreword

**Heaven and Blood** was opened formally on 23 August, 1999 – both date and year are of particular significance to the artist: his seventieth birthday on the day, and the fortieth year of his graduation from the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts.

Equally significant is the exhibition – Alan Pearson has been a prominent expressionist artist for decades, but to date no major survey exhibition of his works has been mounted. To correct this long-standing sin of omission, discussions between artist and curator on a retrospective began more than a decade ago, but it was not until shortly after my arrival at the McDougall in 1995 that it could be scheduled.

The exhibition is large and comprehensive – 90 paintings and 36 drawings – and distilling the essence of the artist's creative spirit, acknowledging the many important themes, motifs or series in his oeuvre has been the difficult curatorial challenge, particularly with an artist so prolific and driven.

That this important retrospective has become a reality is due to the commitment of many people, but none more than Neil Roberts, our Senior Curator (and Manager of Collections) who has known the artist and respected his work for years, and collaborated closely with him on the exhibition since 1996. As Neil Roberts acknowledges in his Introduction – "Pearson is a supreme example of the truism that artists are born, not made."

Additionally, I wish to record my appreciation of the McDougall staff involved in both exhibition and publication, and regarding the latter, also our contributing writers Cassandra Fusco, Tim Garrity and Alison Pearson.

In closing, grateful thanks are extended to lenders from both private and public collections throughout New Zealand, and in particular the artist himself, who has contributed many major and rarely seen works – yet another reason for the unarguable significance of this exhibition.

P Anthony Preston  
Director

# Introduction

Neil Roberts

In New Zealand, to be an individual artist is one thing, but to be an immigrant as well is another. Even this century, New Zealand has continued to exhibit an attitude of post-colonialism in which the foreigner occupies second place. The striving for a national identity in art encouraged this attitude, to the detriment of those whose speech or social attitudes identified them as non-New Zealanders. One such was Petrus van der Velden, who arrived in 1890, an individual artist who quickly became a misfit, referred to as 'the Dutchman'. His approach to art and thinking was too 'bohemian' and out of step with the narrower thinking of middle-class artists of Canterbury. The British-born artist, Christopher Perkins, in Wellington in the early 1930s found it difficult, as did Rudolf Gopas – 'a Lithuanian' – who in the 1950s and 1960s struggled to reconcile his European thinking and individuality in a country and social order in art that did not really want him.

Alan Pearson – 'a Pom' – like the others was seen as a potential threat to the Arcadian dreamland if given too much credibility. Pearson felt that he and others were obliged to 'recant their fragile identity, keep quiet, teach or leave'.<sup>1</sup> Each of these artists struggled for recognition in New Zealand with only a modicum of success during their lifetime. A deliberate attempt earlier in the century to construct a national art identity had largely failed. However, the tactic to bolster the individual New Zealand artist within the collective did succeed, leading to the election and promotion of a hierarchy that has endured to the present.

Pearson, the most recent and the most demonstrably vocal about his plight, has striven for more than forty years to find his place. His individuality has mostly been met with gross intolerance. He has dared to be himself, unwilling to change.

He has never said, 'I am an artist – look at me' but rather, 'I am an individual who is also an artist – look at what I am doing'.

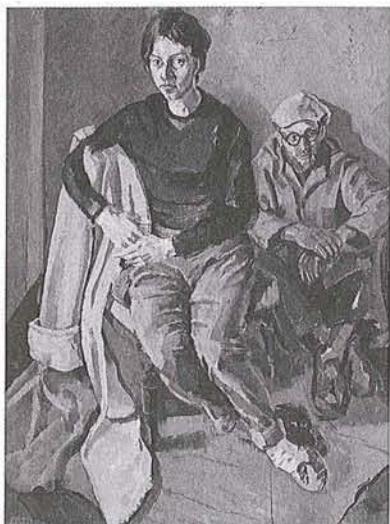
Pearson is a supreme example of the truism that artists are born, not made. Since arriving in New Zealand he has grown with each decade, bringing forth imagery in painting and drawing that has been a renewal of that which has gone before, to an extent that few of his contemporaries can claim to have achieved.

Pearson has been labelled an expressionist, but he is also an artist who must not only externalise his reaction to the real world but also tap other planes of reality, which encompass reality of the mind and senses. These can be exposed through words or imagery to reach and externalise the spirituality of being in time and space.

Often Pearson's painting appears abstract and a gestural maze of colour movements, but always there is an essential subject made up of figurative parts emerging in either human or animalistic form, or both. This imagery has a consciousness akin to music arising from the subconscious with which the viewer connects and shares on several levels.

Pearson's portraiture stands as a significant part of his work not only as an analysis of the artist's psyche within the real world but also of the psyche of others. Portraiture is just a more direct vehicle making connections with other planes of existence. It is also, however, very much an extension within the scope of figuration and one that Pearson has taken further than any other living New Zealand artist.

His quest to understand the nature of being started in



*Margaret Tyndall and Alan Oliver,  
22 Armagh Street 1958*  
Oil on board  
910 x 680mm  
Collection of the Artist

*Huia Couple Linda and Leo 1978/79*  
Oil on hardboard  
1810 x 1370mm  
Collection of Robert McDougall  
Art Gallery



childhood in his birthplace, Liverpool, where priorities in life were very basic. By the time he arrived in New Zealand in 1954, life experience had heightened his awareness not only of the world but also of himself. In New Zealand he saw freedom and freshness, he was alive with optimism for the future and people were good. It was a place where he could find himself. He was not convinced of the egalitarian dream that was espoused but accepted the country for what it was.

At the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts in the late 1950s he found generosity of spirit among tutors, especially John Oakley, Colin Lovell-Smith, Eric Doudney and William A Sutton. His ability was recognised immediately and he took prizes and scholarships with ease. Early student works, such as *Margaret Tyndall and Alan Oliver, 22 Armagh Street* (cat. no. 3), reveal elements of the foundations of his painting strengths. His individual spirit and self-assurance, however, were not always understood, often being misconstrued as symptomatic of an inflated ego. Following his honours year, Pearson embarked on a teaching career, which he maintained until his departure in 1963 for further study in Britain at the Royal Academy School, London. After his return to New Zealand in 1966 he realised that only contemporaries who had also studied abroad understood abstract figurative works and that acceptance of the genre would not be easily achieved.

The following year he held his first one-man exhibition. Living as he was in Auckland, the greens, mauves and blues of that environment were overwhelming and began to permeate his painting. His return to Christchurch in 1970 was not only a shift in location but also in direction for his painting. More abstract, figurative landscapes were inspired by the duality of the spirituality of the land with that of music. Pearson's fascination with music that interprets emotions and the spirit and soul of all the things of existence continued to have great currency in his work for decades.

The early 1970s structured an almost Baroque reaction to

the Canterbury environment. The paintings are not just landscapes or portraits, but paintings of the mind, works that have a New Zealand identity but also a universality in time and space. Works like *Canterbury Madonna* (cat. no. 7) exemplify this. The direction taken in 1970–71 gave way in 1972–73 to a rich exuberance and freedom of colour and gestural paintings that reach a crescendo in their resonance. Many of the subjects were back-to-nature, earth-bound portraits, still-lives, nudes and garden allegories but they have a quality of identity that is musical. Pearson also played out a parade of metaphorical imagery at this time in the King series. Based on King Lear, they also identify and mirror Pearson's own predicament in the early 1970s.

A travel grant in 1976 took Pearson out of New Zealand to Paris, Spain and Italy, where he became more aware of the weight of time and space. Pearson wrote a report on his trip, of which the first of two parts was published in *Art New Zealand*. However, the planned second part did not appear, following a letter from Colin McCahon to the assistant editor, Ross Fraser, requesting that it not be published. The full report was eventually published by *Pilgrim* magazine.<sup>2</sup>

Some of Pearson's most significant paintings of the late 1970s were those influenced by the environs of the Waitakere forest, which brought forth the Huia series, including portraits, such as *Huia Couple Linda and Leo* (cat. no. 16), and more allegorical works, such as *Huia Variations*.

In 1978, *Portrait of the Herne Bay Couple* (cat. no.18) was the winning work in the National Bank Portrait Award. Pearson took the prize for a second time the following year with *Portrait of Mrs Oliver* (cat. no. 23) – a unique achievement.

Pearson's ever-present questioning of stages of existence, mortality in time and space was intensified by a physical attack by Philip Clairmont in 1979 and gave rise to a degree of exploration of spirituality emerging in works such as *In Between Life and Death* (cat. no 25.) and the Requiem series.

In 1980 Pearson left Auckland again and travelled back to Italy. In the town of Matera in the south of Italy he sensed apprehension for the future in the midst of ghosts of the past. This made him intently aware of his own mortality, and even more so after an earthquake struck the town in November 1980. The sense of life as a stage, which Pearson had always acknowledged, was visible in Italy. Performance and the musicality of life were in the street, the houses and the churches. A return to England in 1981, to Middlesbrough and then London, brought about a heightened response and sense of pessimism and the 'stages of life' gained tangible reality in the metaphoric Covent Garden Opera and Theatre paintings of the early 1980s. The sense that western civilisation is crumbling emerges in those works where Anno Domini is no longer the Year of Our Lord but After Death, a prospect of doom.

Pearson's return to New Zealand again in February 1985 was for him a return also to optimism, which was intensified by the birth of his daughter, Nellie. Soon afterwards, Pearson journeyed back to the region of West Canterbury. In the valleys of the Bealey, Waimakariri and Otira, which he had first visited thirty years earlier, he, like Van der Velden, had discovered a real spirituality of nature and metaphysical being of the land in this area. The result was several paintings intended to evoke an awareness of the grandeur of the land, including *The Music Makers 1 Canterbury* (cat. no.51) and *Visitation and Arrival of Man over Waimakariri Valley* (cat. no.48), which are not only reflective of human identity in this region but also metaphoric of Pearson's return.

Plans for a grand series of works were interrupted in 1986 when Pearson took up residency as artist at Dunedin Public Art Gallery and Dunedin Polytechnic. The southern winter that year was testing and the tonality of Pearson's painting moved downwards. The greyness that he found in Otago heightened once more the awareness of his own mortality. Whilst there were positive factors in his Otago experience, in 1988 Pearson felt a need to 'find the sun' again and revisit

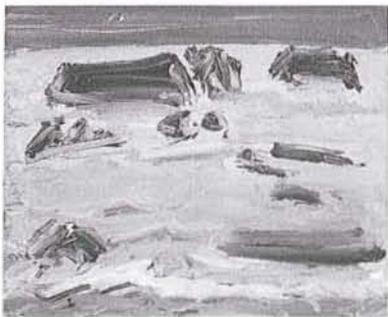


Above: *Portrait of Mrs Oliver* 1979  
Oil on canvas  
1012 x 1012mm  
Collection of Robert McDougall  
Art Gallery

Left: *Herne Bay Couple* 1978  
Oil on canvas  
1200 x 990mm  
Collection of the Artist

Europe, only to be disappointed by his conclusion that western art was declining rather than ascending. The work *The Last White Hero of the Western World* (cat. no. 43) reflects his disillusionment. Pearson's dissatisfaction with the direction of western art was compounded by what was happening in New Zealand. His need for recognition as an artist grew in the late 1980s. His sense of his English identity and the plight of the immigrant were placed in even greater relief against the drive for Maori land rights in 1992. Pearson responded with a series of paintings based on the Land Wars in the Waikato from an English rather than a Maori perspective, giving rise to some highly political works with titles such as *Go Home Pom* and *Punch a Pom Day*.

A residency on the West Coast at the Tai Poutini Polytechnic,



*Grey Variations 12 Mile* 1993  
Oil on canvas on board  
500 x 620mm  
Collection of the Artist

Greymouth, from May to July 1993 took Pearson back to a confrontation with nature and natural forces. It was back to source and an understanding of the nature of the land. He embarked on a series of works developed initially from *plein air* in the way that had brought forth the Mount Rolleston paintings of the 1960s, the Huia series of the 1970s and the Waimakariri works of the 1980s. Pearson made many intense *plein air* studies directly influenced by the sea, including *Grey Variation 12 Mile* (cat. no. 66). In the studio this stimulus gave rise to works such as *Black Tasman* (cat. no. 64) and *Tasman Presence* (cat. no. 63).

In July 1992 Pearson had visited Lightning Ridge, New South Wales, and travelled to places he had not seen since the 1950s. The following year he visited again and opened the door on a whole new direction for his work, born out of another environment. Pearson returned again to Australia in 1995, to Whitecliffs, New South Wales, at which time he changed his medium and began experimenting with enamels, which enabled him to introduce more powerful elements into his imagery. However, whilst the medium was effective, it was not good for his health and he returned to oil paint in 1997.

Early in 1998 Pearson's fears about mortality became a reality when he was diagnosed with a heart condition. The surgery that followed left him drained and uncertain of the future and whether he would paint again. A return to health later that year brought with it a new energy that resulted in major metaphoric works such as *Is There any Room for me?* (cat. no. 86) and *Embarkation to the Isle of the Dead* (cat. no. 82).

In July 1999 Pearson held his second major exhibition in Australia but he remains unable to understand why, after forty six years as an artist, only six of which he has spent out of New Zealand, and acknowledged by many for his works of drawing and painting, he has not found a place. His resolve to be recognised also turned into a rejection of New Zealand and its inhabitants of the art community. Pearson's optimism has become regret and a welling anger, leading him to ask repeatedly, 'Where am I in the art of this country?'

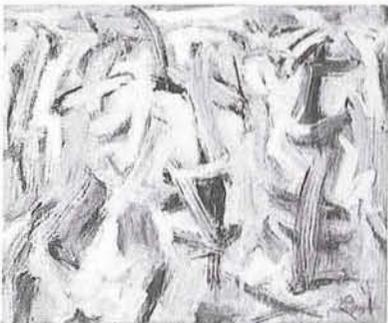
Pearson has witnessed during the past forty six years the lionising of artists such as Colin McCahon, Tony Fomison, Toss Woollaston, Ralph Hotere and Philip Clairmont and their election to the pantheon of gods on New Zealand's art Olympus by the collective body of artists, theorists and academics who admire individuality so much, as long as it is held within the collective mind.

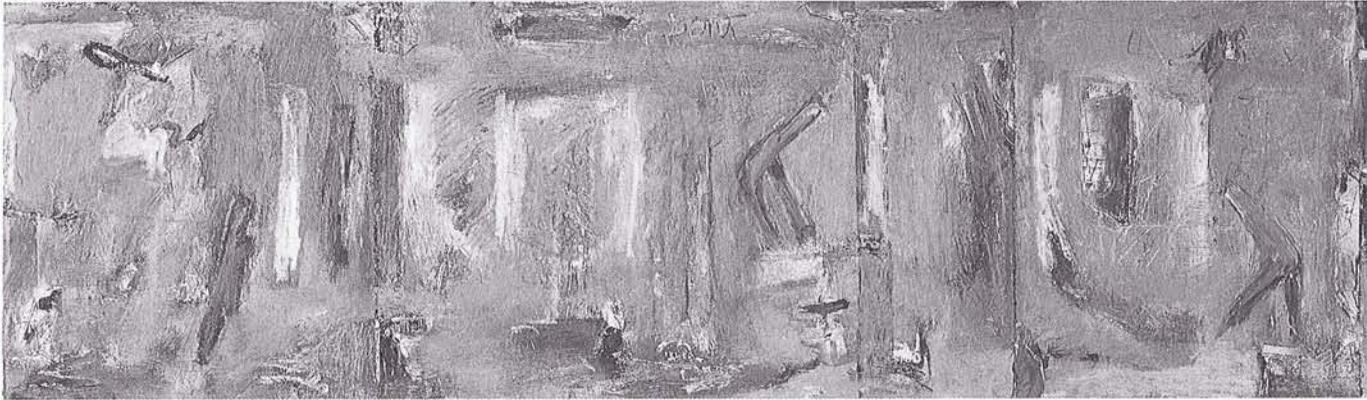
Where is Pearson in the hierarchy? Nowhere it seems. Yet he stands as the most significant painter within the bounds of figurative expressionism to have been active in New Zealand during the second half of the twentieth century.

"But wait," I hear them say, "he's British-born, North Country at that: a fellow with an exaggerated ego. He can never be a New Zealander. What's more," I also hear them say, "during the forty six years that you speak of, he has spent many years living out of New Zealand in England, Italy and Australia which lessens his place even further". This is usually an easy stock explanation for why Pearson has been overlooked for inclusion in the various anthologies of New Zealand artists published during the past three decades. In fact only six out of the forty-six years have been spent away. But would Philip Clairmont or Tony Fomison have been treated so? Clairmont, the *enfant terrible* of New Zealand art in the 1970s, was an artist of considerable ability in the realm of expressionism but also of limitation. In comparison with Pearson, he was a beginner. Clairmont never had the same perception of skills, relying on artificially induced stimuli for his imagery. As an artist he didn't mature partly because of his early death but it has to be questioned whether he would have.

Having largely been abandoned in the sea of New Zealand art, Pearson sits better with Fomison and McCahon but is closest to Fomison because for each of them their art is based on inner compulsion. For both artists, their painting is a theatrical stage metaphor for life. Fomison was more earth-bound than Pearson; his characters play out their roles in the light and dark of space. Pearson adds to this time and

*Is There Any Room For Me* 1999  
Oil on canvas  
1400 x 1690mm  
Collection of the Artist





*Embarkation to the Isle of the Dead*  
1998/99  
Oil and mixed media on canvas on  
board  
450 x 1520mm  
Collection of the Artist

spirituality beyond the earthly plane, lifted through the exuberance of colour to a realm closer to the dimensions of the mind.

Pearson has fought against his lack of recognition as a New Zealand artist, but not without cost. Over the decades since the 1970s, as optimism has turned to resentment and anger, he has embarked on a crusade for his cause with his painting as the banner. The imagery that has emerged has been amongst his best. In a strange way, by excluding him the collective has rendered him a service as it has enabled him to focus clearly on where he is in time and space.

It has resulted in regular self-analysis and the painting of self-portraits but in the end the result has been disillusionment. Both Van der Velden and Gopas also worked this out through their painting. Pearson's place during the past forty years may have been bearable in spite of the lack of recognition if he had not been made to feel that he must give and make ever greater sacrifices to accommodate those who wanted him to be the teacher.

Pearson's sense of having to make sacrifices has extended to his relationship over the years with many art-dealers. He has generally identified a meanness of spirit and failure to deliver, as agents, a satisfactory service to him as an artist. Contracts have been annulled when the dealer, the servant of the artist, suddenly wanted to become master. Pearson, who has strong values, unlike many other artists, will not tolerate this.

In the context of the end of the twentieth century, Alan Pearson is an artist who is both revered and reviled. But whatever attitudes may be held towards him as a person, he stands as one of the most significant artists working in Australasia today. For Pearson, his art over the past four decades has been a quest, a journey to understand himself and existence, to give, through his painting and drawing, definition to the essence of being in the universe.

- <sup>1</sup>. Conversation with Alan Pearson, 13 April 1999.
- <sup>2</sup>. Alan Pearson, *Pilgrims: The Double 5 and 6*, report for the Queen Elizabeth Arts Council, Dunedin, 1978, pp136–145.

# Poem I: 1977

## Morbid Green

God let me die!  
in a desert bare  
naked, bleached, taken up  
rather than die under a Waikato moon  
like a lamb, fleeced  
devoured by the all enveloping  
green of vegetation  
the pen of Man's mental limitations  
(coughed up green)  
Best to be forgotten not seen  
to survive  
under grey clouds  
the shroud over European endeavour  
(Hobson's choice)  
Man without voice  
listens to the bark of silent dogs.

Reflections of animated green  
(sap to mutton's thoughts,  
the emerald in-between  
juicy steaks from fornications  
on a bed of monestral green)  
the largest pen for Men  
is called Hamil...ten  
the centre in between two legs of  
viridian mixed with white  
and a touch of mutated spleen.  
Black singlets show the flag  
for the Daggs  
of Waikato green!

P.S.

Desire is the food for substance  
which is physical mass  
greed  
which equals consuming  
which equals survival.  
All lessening is physical death  
and spiritual departure,  
transition.  
Doctor, would you please attend?  
Death is starting up again.  
The shadow has turned to...  
Guess? You're right... GREEN!

# A Personal Reflection

Tim Garrity

Faced with so complex an output as Pearson's, there is need to limit the point of entry with respect to any concise response. The following views, therefore, derive from personal reflection on seven pivotal works: *Terremoto* 1980, *Baroque Theatre* 1980, *Theatre: Ascension of the Holy Spirit* 1984, *Crucifixion Triptych (Ascension)* 1985, *Crucifixion Triptych Dunedin* 1987, *Elements in Focus* 1988, and *Winter of the Mind* 1992. Since art does not exist in a vacuum it would be appropriate also to allude to the presence of new centralist infrastructures with agendas that are external to art, and covertly threatening to both the natural integrity and individuality of artists and to the public's birthright ex-

pectations and privacy of mind vis-à-vis the cultural heritage.

A nineteen year curatorship of a major South Island art research collection provides a ringside view, with all connotations of circus and combat, of the gradual slide of modernism into a state of postmodernism which, among other things, led to the institutional mothballing of the vocabularies of aesthetics and value, and to an uncritical adoption holus-bolus in tenured circles of a hegemonic Gaelic theory of literary origin totally at variance with the phenomenology of art. As a result there are the makings of an engineered climate dominated by an Orwellian standard-



Above: *Terremoto* 1980  
Oil on canvas  
1130 x 1130mm  
Collection of the Artist



Left: *Crucifixion Triptych* 1985  
Oil on board  
1230 x 2314mm  
Collection of the Artist

ising principle known as *current art practice* which is perversely hostile not only to the fine art of drawing and painting as exemplified in Pearson's work, but also to mainstays of intellect – wit, irony, metaphor, agon, originality, meaning etc, and just about all the imperatives of mind that made thought possible in the first place; nor logically can any of these qualities of mind which have informed art down the centuries exist in a milieu of total relativism. In short the muse is no longer the daughter of memory, and the notion, so obviously exemplified in Pearson's work, that the mind is potentially powerfully connected to a profound *elsewhere*, is deemed defunct. Ironically this flight from the aesthetic occurred as Pearson was producing some of his finest work. But five centuries or so of painting tradition simply do not vanish at the flick of a tenured wand. Tradition is simply a collective memory macrocosmically symmetric to the microcosms of personal reflection. We are just too good at remembering for it to be an accident of nature: as Heinrich Boll wrote "we are born to remember" and the indications

*The Last White Hero of the Western World* 1987  
Oil on canvas  
1010 x 1065mm  
Collection of the Artist



are that the aesthetic is an enduring historically entailed phenomenon which ultimately has to do with the mind's dialogue with itself in the context of one's mortality, and as such constitutes no socially manipulable reality. Still less can it be primarily a vehicle for the determinations of single-issue politics, though those seeking in Pearson's work allusions to major issues more overarching than those pertaining to race, class and gender will certainly find them in for instance *The Canterbury Woman on a Precipice* 1988 and *The Last White Hero of the Western World* 1987.

A major theme of our art's history is one of ceaseless comings and goings; a veritable demographic Brownian motion, which is the leitmotif of all cultures from the beginning of time. Our first artist with impeccable credentials, Isaac Gilsemans, failed even to step ashore in 1662 when the *Zeebaen* heaved-to in what is now known as Golden Bay. Cook's artists sojourning briefly bequeathed definitive canonic coastal views, and later in their turn those born here became the explorers of Europe, some, with ambition fulfilled, never to return, and yet like Frances Hodgkins, Raymond McIntyre, Owen Merton and many others they remain central to any legitimate history. And in these respects it is revealing that so indigenous an artist as Colin McCahon should have revealed in a letter to a Dunedin friend that without family ties he would have shifted to Fiji. So, within this context Pearson is without question the epitome of the New Zealand artist. Therefore it is strange that a well known centrally located dealer should have expressed the rather First Four Shipishly quaint reservation that any artist not born here or, if native, having left mid-career, would make it into the hall of fame.

Among art students of the 1950s two antithetical views of modernism were current: one that it was a complete break with the past and another, to which Pearson and others such as Hanly would have subscribed, that it was an historically inevitable extension of the great tradition enshrined in what could be ostensibly defined as the syllabus of art schools down

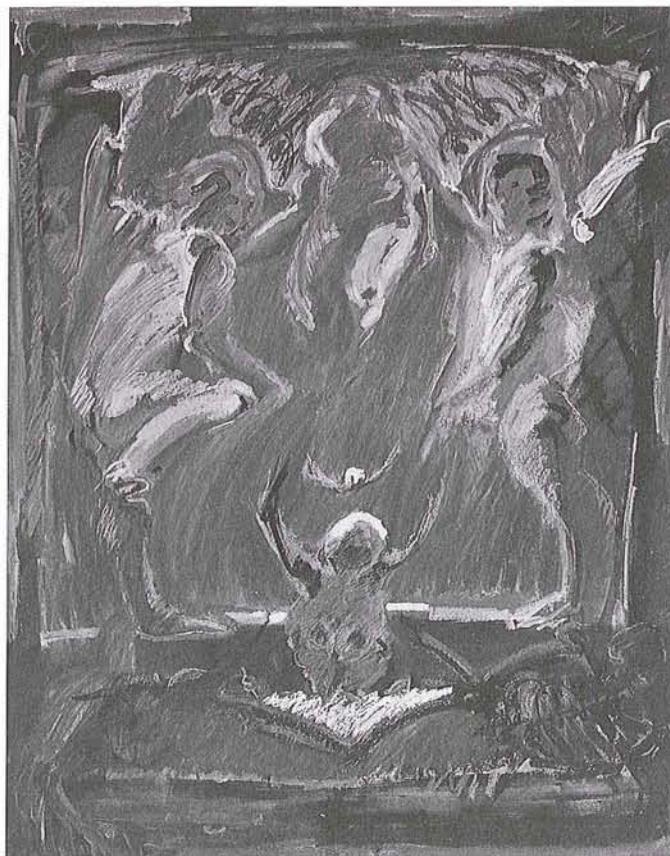
two-and-a-half centuries or so. Advocates of the former view were by and large those who, unable to distinguish themselves in the methodologies taught, were later only too eager to embrace one or other of the awaiting modernist genres possibly unmindful of the fact that though many of the originators such as Picasso, Braque and Matisse etc, were still living, their achievements had peaked some half-century earlier. However, it was thought that the lineaments of these styles were something that one could get the hang of with or without a diploma, but with the advent of the American post-war renaissance many finally settled for a sort of much reduced all-purpose eclectic abstract expressionism manqué. Others, possibly with war artists or Cotton's *Geomorphology* in mind, turned the landscape into a kind of deserted bush-shorn Gallipoli of the spirit – an Ezekiel valley of dry bones, as it were, from out of which arose two younger painters, Clairmont and Fomison, to excite voyeuristic audiences with depictions of the inner gothic horrors of the dysfunctional isolate's mind – the Gallipoli within, so to speak. But there was another more positive and balanced approach taken by those who like Pearson being technically flexible and free of both stylistic entrapment and personal dysfunction could project their art beyond the elegising of the alienated self to a rhapsodic celebration of the world. In Pearson we have something like a conflation of the chromatic exuberance of impressionism, the energy of expressionism, the intellect of a Max Beckmann, combined with a vision that is inimitably his own.

There is a reluctance on our part to discern universality in the work of our best artists, to make comparisons with the work of others worldwide. This is a case of cultural vertigo perhaps, or a regional levelist reflex to downsize everything the better to understand and therefore control it – the purpose of criticism being to extinguish any extravagantly burning bush and clear the site of all mystery in order that the calm procedural liturgy of the cultural year may pass undisturbed with all hierarchies intact.

In the work of painters, of which Pearson is a prime example,

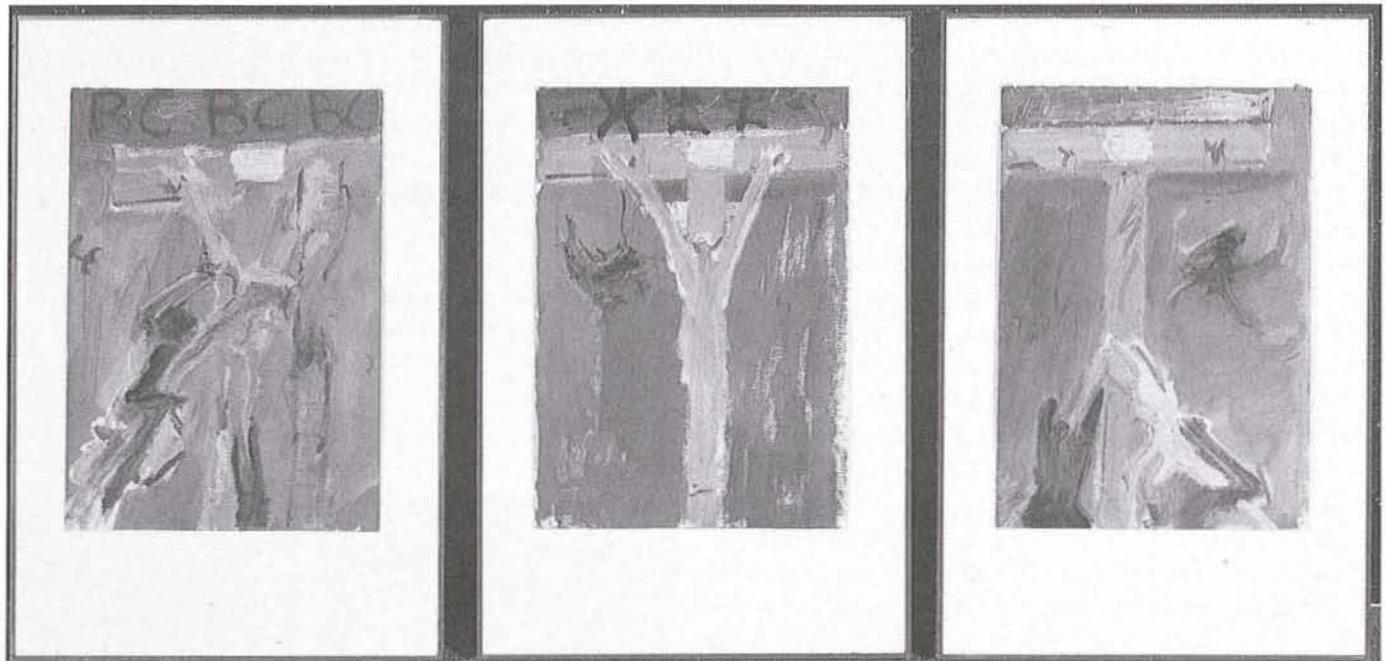
there is resonance with the art of other times and places – not a direct influence or anything approaching postmodern looting of motifs, but more a matter of roots tapping into the same ancestral streams. But how and for whom the resonances toll is entirely a personal matter. Arguably the greater part of any aesthetic experience is resonance – a kind of déjà vu with or without the amnesia.

The quality of Pearson's work is such that any comparison is possible – Tiepolo and Goya come to mind, artists with whom Pearson could share exhibition space anywhere anytime. And perhaps it is less than coincidental that these two painters whose lives overlapped by a quarter of a century should have



*Theatre – The Ascension of the Holy Spirit* 1984  
Oil on paper  
1200 x 960mm  
Collection of the Artist

*Crucifixion Triptych (Dunedin)* 1987  
Oil on paper on card on particle  
board  
610 x 1260mm  
Collection of the Artist



straddled the great late 18<sup>th</sup> century divide between the aesthetics of the grand baroque exploitation of Newtonian space and light and that of the incipiently Dionysian romantic darkness of Goya, whom André Malraux claims to be the first modernist; for Pearson himself appears to be standing on a frontier as the last true painter of the tradition. It could almost be said that in his *Theatre Series* Pearson had managed to Goya-ize Tiepolonian space. In Goya we find a similar comingling, in both paint quality and imagery, of lyricism and ferocity. And often there is a similar raggedness of surface suppressing fluency in the interests of a tougher engagement with the eye, placing, thereby, the onus of understanding. But the fluency prevails, giving the aesthetic full scope in its ultimate purpose as the agent of an achieved anxiety. *Crucifixion Triptych Dunedin* 1987 is replete with the ambience of Goya's execution tableau *Third of May* 1814 as are the *Theatre* works with that of Tiepolo's utterly magnificent oil sketch *The Discovery of the True Cross* c.1740-5, or the oil

sketch for *The Triumph of Hercules* c.1761. And here I must give thanks to Pearson for a deeper understanding of Tiepolo and Goya.

Pearson appears to be one of the few painters to address or take account of the void as an extension of the artist's preliminary confrontation with blank canvas. Painters tend to polarise according to the degree of their awareness of the link between this blankness and the primal void of myths ancient and modern. In the *Theatre Series* conceivably there is a conflation of the idea of the raw ground with that of the theatrical "baseless fabric" of the painted vision: we are made aware of the canvas or paper just as in myth the Greeks accepted that Chaos, their version of the void from which the universe was created, remained active to fuel the continuance of things. In these works the paint forms up into a semblance of an overarching proscenium through and beyond which vortices in the firmament coalesce by means of a

unique supremely-drafted calligraphic shorthand into the lineaments of the spirit dramatis personae of humanity.

Interestingly in complete contrast to Pearson in every respect, McCahon is the arch-bricoleur for whom, through poverty of means, the void remains only partially reified in blackened canvas on which the Johannine Word is scribbled in white – a unique and equally triumphant realisation, but not so much painting as analogue. Between them Pearson and McCahon may well have exhausted the possibilities of the tradition for the time being.

Few if any of this country's artists have succeeded in painting on a grand scale. The effect of attempts so far is usually that of a mindless scaling-up of preliminary designs to no aesthetic advantage. But in Pearson's work there is a feeling of thwarted expansion, the freezing mid-flight of an explosive vision, and a sense that the artist is working at nowhere near full capacity. This is explainable in part by Pearson's magnificent looseness of manner with no sign of the tightening that plagues so many painters as they get older. Also there is a total lack of any distinction between drawing and painting, and his work resolves itself at any distance from the eye. In short he demonstrates the kind of flexibility and ease with which, say, Goya apparently without precedent in his life could adjust to what must have been a daunting prospect of undertaking a one-off mural commission in a never to be repeated style within the loftiness of the church of *San Antonio de la Florida*, Madrid. One wonders what course Pearson's career would have taken had he been born in what the Chinese call "interesting times", when, plagues wars and rebellions notwithstanding, there would at least have been enlightened patrons with walls, ceilings and domes to paint.

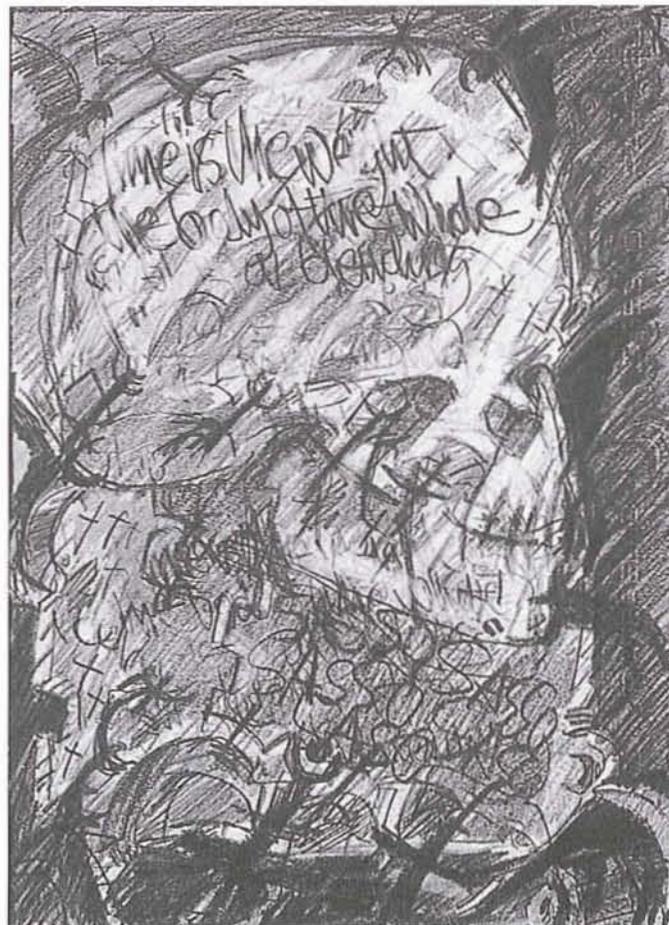
As yet there is no definitive history of New Zealand art – only time can precipitate a mainstream or canon, if in fact there needs to be one. The postmodernists, at least in theory, think not – the concepts "marginality" and "centrality" being claimed as inimicable to their grand narrative. For the moment it is a story which could be told many times over with a different set of names. Accounts so far are less history than journalistic commentary, annals and chronicles mostly written from faulty perspectives of a particular region and dealer ratings by those largely untrained in historiography and, as often as not, lacking in aesthetic sensibility. Contemporary histories are invariably overtaken by events and judged wrong-headed by posterity. The history of world art is strewn with the names of artists who in their day failed to penetrate the establishment carapace – one example will do: Turner, now acknowledged as the greatest European landscapist of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was considered by the cognoscenti, most notably Mathew Arnold and John Constable, to be on the brink of madness. For Roger Fry and the Pre-Raphaelites it was as if Turner had never existed, and even as late as the mid-1950s Herbert Read could write that Turner was "naïve" and "bore the stamp of insanity" and that there was no settled opinion about "Turner's greatness". In his 1955 Reith Lecture Nikolaus Pevsner had it that "Turner's position is indeed baffling from whatever point of view one considers it". But best of all is Clive Bell who in 1927 opined that "if his (Turner's) last period came first he would have been greeted by the hostility which *cultures keep pickled for disquieting originality*".

So with respect to Pearson's less than adequate representation in the annals so far, he is in very good company.

# Poem II

Matera: I Italy 1980

My destiny grows forthwith  
essence where is thy sting?  
In the Sasso  
or the Piazza della Nothing?  
Matera, an Italian thing  
ambiguous life have your say  
call it destiny if you may.  
Make this summer spring  
to flow in offerings creative.  
La Vita spread thy wings  
in Matera make doves fly  
whisper secrets of joy,  
make the light search  
for the future, amongst the darks  
heaven sent for contrast.  
Grace its object to  
primal body's spent  
Jesus Christ was for us all  
- well meant.



*Il Cranio di Matera* 1980  
Pencil  
320 x 245mm  
Collection of the Artist

# 'Ways of Seeing'<sup>1</sup> The Eighties

Cassandra Fusco

Every exhibition engages us with images which, in one form or another, offer fragments of information about the differing and changing values and ideas of the culture and period in which they were produced. In varying degrees, every piece of art reflects not only changes in the modes of visual perception but also aspects of socio-historic relations and artistic freedom. Investigation of these changes reveals that the relationship between society and the artist has not always been, and probably never will be, complementary or supportive. One positive consequence of the tension between society and the artist, however, is the realisation that no single truth, school or system of 'seeing' can profess to be superior to others, nor can analysis alone pose as all-encompassing in its explorations. For these and several other reasons, few ventures better serve our understanding of the effects of change across society than a retrospective exhibition of work by a major artist. Primarily the selected works reflect a sustained investigation and, coincidentally, they can also indicate the concerns and aims of the individual artist, which in turn assist our inquiry into the significance or substance of such work. In this sense, every exhibition becomes an act of experience and investigation, exploring both the perceptions of the artist and our response to these.

Bearing the somewhat portentous title *Heaven and Blood*, this retrospective and selective exhibition illustrates not only the diversity and complexity of the perceptions of one particular artist but also something of our own manifold condition. Irrespective of their various modes, all these works speak understandingly of human life and *show* the relentless questioning behind Alan Pearson's painterly synaesthesia. This essay, drawing upon an extended interview, seeks to examine aspects of this artist's vision (as represented in the works from the '80s) and how it might relate to us and our world.<sup>2</sup>

Alan Pearson has been described as "a committed artist who, with profundity and passion, can discern the lines of the poetic design of being,"<sup>3</sup> "a figurative expressionist, sentient of the lessons of the past and the conventions that gave rise to great art."<sup>4</sup> Pearson's passion for and ability to transform his perceptions of existence into painterly icons for us to contemplate is beyond question. However, our desire to make sense of our swiftly changing world can influence, sometimes even determine, what we see and tolerate. Not surprisingly, the transition from what Marshall McLuhan calls the Gutenberg Galaxy of the print media, to the contemporary Global Village of telecommunications, has been rapid and sometimes confusing.

So where do Alan Pearson's realizations of existence sit in relation to our mutable world? As the terse title *Heaven and Blood* suggests, and as the work by that name attests, Pearson's world is a synthesis of moments of great joy and struggle.

The works from the '80s, painted variously at Matera in southern Italy (1980/1), in England between 1982 and 1984 (where Pearson delighted in access to Covent Garden after the grey of Middlesbrough), and in New Zealand after his return in 1985, are shaped, to a surprising extent, by the same matrix – a re-evaluation of what he perceived as the 'theatre' of life *and* the necessary renewal of spiritual values. And while these various Italian, English and New Zealand works apparently exhibit dynamic shifts in the artist's painterly ways of 'seeing', they confirm that Pearson's vision of life is devoid of divisions. Consequently, considerations of life and death co-habit in paintings as stylistically different as *Still Life* (1958) (cat. no. 1) where time is conjured with shadows and softly settling dust, and *Hobson RN* (1979) (cat. no. 24) with its disfigured gravestone.

*Heaven and Blood* 1988  
Oil on canvas  
1155 x 1525mm  
Collection of the Artist





*Terremoto* 1980  
Oil on canvas  
1130 x 1130mm  
Collection of the Artist

Pearson has described his experience of simultaneous realities as “an intense sense of prevailing flux *and* inter-relationships, constantly observed from the position of an ‘outsider’ and, consequently, always from a perceptual distance. Fundamentally what we might call ‘literal reality’ is in fact a state of dynamics, reverberations and multiplicity both within life and beyond.”

These comments very aptly lead us into a consideration of the work from the ‘80s, which poetically and symphonically present us with forces rather than ‘flesh’. Earlier works had earned Pearson distinction among his contemporaries as a portraitist, yet the work of the ‘80s appears almost to abrogate representative forms. None the less, the twenty-seven representative works from this period are not uniform in any tangible sense *except* in a discernible intensification of the painter’s movement away from what he describes as “literal reality”, towards painterly correlatives of enquiries into the suprasensible. This movement, metaphysical in the sense of exploring beyond surface reality, Pearson summarises as “the continuing search for the greater reality, understanding, through imagination, of the intimate and terrifying immensity.”

Pearson’s words are instructive of his aims and circumstances. His “continuing search” is realised in the *plein-air Olive Grove Basilicata* (1980) (cat. no. 29) where aspects of “the greater reality” dance joyously. Here, the apparent focus is upon the gnarled physicality of the ancient trees. But equally these trees resonate like notes in a musical score, part of a vibrant, dynamic structure where coloured forms offer the idea of symphonic movement, one that is physical and intellectual.

These harmonics become darkly discordant in the black and indigo *Terremoto* (1980) (cat. no. 30) as circumstances change dramatically, intensified by the experience of an earthquake at Matera in November 1980. Alison Pearson’s comment that “We were just in the hands of nature,” finds ample reflection in the plate tectonics of *Terremoto* and the ‘exodus’ suggested

in *Flight from the Theatre of Time* (1980). The swirling sense of “fear and destiny” in this Italian work reoccurs in the English painting, *Teatro del Baroque* (1984) (cat. no. 35). It is encapsulated in the abstracted red crucifixion figure above the stage proscenium. Down into this theatre of extremes we are drawn, as both players and audience, by an intense aerial perspective. A sense of inevitable participation also engages us into *Italian Street Theatre* (1982) (cat. no. 32) and *Covent Garden from the Gods* (1982) (cat. no. 38) where our attention is summoned simultaneously by skeletal figures who fill the stage and auditorium areas, bathed in theatrical and mystical light. Some gaze out at us pensively, reminding us of our own mortality. Occasionally in the midst of this flux of form and colour, a glimmer of light occurs, as in *Covent Garden from the Gods* (1982). It is fragile but significant; a presignification of “the possibility of goodness” in the midst of a tonal theatre of cosmic and natural forces.

Pearson’s awareness of the “forces of change” finds intensified expression in *Animalistic Theatre* (1984/85) (cat. no. 33), a work that is animated by a pervasive sense of movement and a dark musicality and one which the artist describes as “the beast in society”. Yet all these paintings, and drawings such as *Il Cranio di Matera* (1980) (cat. no. 98) and *La Forza del Destino*, do not so much articulate a past style or mode of seeing as they visually orchestrate Pearson’s perceptions of change, of phenomenological reverberations and paradoxes: “the multiplicity and singularity of life; the strength and fragility of being; us as an aspect of matter and part of the immense grandeur.” These perceptions of humanity’s struggle between the states of chaos and order were present in the teeming, verdant Huia paintings and other New Zealand works. There the artist employed the crucifixion motif; a universal symbol of human’s inhumanity to one another. In 1978/79 Pearson introduced the idea of theatre in time with the Huia drawings, including *Huia Exit* (1978) (cat. no. 96). However, it was Pearson’s acquaintance with Italy’s antique and contemporary pulses that gave him the motif for Italian theatre so well suited to housing his

explorations of what he describes as “the ‘theatre’ of time.”

The essence of this ‘theatre’ dances through *La Forza del Destino* (1980), abstract glyphs, endlessly evocative. Another similar ballet of crucifixes and text advances across the ancient skull *Il Cranio di Matera* (1980). And, subsequently, this abstract sense of flux of phenomena and experience is found in the vital face of *Katie III Dumedin* (1987) (cat. no. 41) standing in front of the Heads of Otago. Both *Il Cranio* and *Katie* are ‘portraits’ – of time and beyond time. They contemplate our inherent frailty and our necessary capacity for hope and growth. But, once again, it is possible for us to find these same considerations of humanity and inhumanity, and nature in time, in the non-objective New Zealand works such as the struggle explored in *Requiem for the Crucifixion* (1979) (cat. no. 22) and the essay on maimed innocence, *In the Paddock of the Deep, Painted Poem* (1980) (cat. no. 26), as well as in the Middlesbrough ‘graveyards’ of the early ‘80s and, subsequently, the Australian Whitecliffs graveyards. In short, while Pearson’s consideration of ‘the theatre of time’ remains constant, his outward expression of this inner intensity changes as he offers us yet other ways of seeing, frequently encapsulated in a crucifixion motif within a theatre setting.

“In New Zealand I knew that we were part of time and that we all struggle to give reason to time and existence. But it was in Italy that I touched on the antique and humanist endeavour, and the overwhelming confirmation that the unifying of humanity comes from the conscious journey, a journey that necessarily includes struggle (crucifixion) and moments of reprieve, of repose (ascension) and, inevitably, reprise. This is the consciousness and the pain of time, and art only works if it explains time and our erosion or mortality since all of nature sits in time.”

Pearson loved Italy but felt that its cultural foundations, like its antiquities, were being eroded, transmuted by consumerism. Describing the dance of light among the dust and shadows in Matera’s baroque cathedral, he said that “the darks were really

representing the erosion of time, and that the life-force of what lived years ago was gradually disintegrating.”<sup>25</sup> This sense of erosion and flux shapes the Italian works of the early ‘80s where neither Matera’s ancient buildings nor the landscape are ‘captured’ but rather, they are rendered as dark and light matter and memory, struggling but exuberant and ever-emerging. These same cadences animate the New Zealand works such as *Heaven and Blood* (1988) (cat. no. 46), *Triptych, The Music Makers, Canterbury* (1989) (cat. no. 52), *Visitation and Arrival of Man over Waimakariri Valley* (1989) (cat. no. 48) and also *Pastorale* (1990) (cat. no. 54). Just as *Theatre – The Ascension of the Holy Spirit* (1984) (cat. no. 34) converts the terror of *Terremoto* and the gymnastics of *Teatro del Baroque* (1984) into expressions of joy, so the Canterbury works attest to Pearson’s capacity to apparently transmute form and yet convey its essence, particularly through colour, turning it into contemplations of the nature of time and existence.

When the Pearsons left Matera in ‘81, something of Italy’s complex energy lingered, shaping the artist’s response to Middlesbrough and, subsequently, to London. The theatre motif remained, transforming the bleak habitat of Pearson’s youth into black dramas like *Middlesbrough* (1981) (cat. no. 100) where human and other energies are drawn in narrative bands of pollution and deprivation. London, despite its galleries, was to prove itself equally grey. But visits to Covent Garden resulted in major works such as *Covent Garden from the Gods* (1982) which, once again, together with later works like *Teatro del Baroque* (1984), confirm that Pearson perceives life and time, body and spirit as inextricably fused. Arguably this vision was already expressed in *Requiem for the Crucifixion*, painted in Auckland shortly before his 1979 departure, and this fusion of life and death was re-visited in *Crucifixion Triptych* (1985) (cat. no. 39) in England, shortly before his return to New Zealand. Both of these highly emotional paintings, figuratively expressionistic, explore the struggle inherent in the human condition. There is the suggestion that death is the victor but also the future, hence the motif of the crucifixion.



*Covent Garden from the Gods* 1982  
Oil on canvas  
945 x 870mm  
Collection of the Artist

Speaking about his northern sojourn of the '80s, Pearson says, "it re-acquainted me with the immensity, the life force, God's grandeur. And it reinforced my belief that art is not only a part of our lives but actually increases life and stimulates our consciousness. Art and life become manifest through its awareness and synthesis and vivacity."

Although not untroubled, Pearson's time in Italy brought him into contact with some of the greatest art of antiquity. And while this continued to fire his imagination in England, the residual effect was a sense of exhaustion and an awareness that western civilization was in a critical state. This is articulated in an unprecedented manner within the New Zealand works of the 1980s. In many of these, the creative struggle and the grace in the human condition is once again expressed in abstracted crucifixion imagery.

The crucifixion, the major (Western) paradigm of life's struggle, was presented in *Requiem for the Crucifixion* (1979), *In Between Life and Death* (1979) and in the intricate colour and construction of *In the Paddock of the Deep, Painted Poem* (1980). The literal and symbolic elements of this last work relate to *Requiem for the Crucifixion* and the earlier work, *Friday the 13th* (1979).<sup>6</sup> After Italy and London the crucifixion paradigm was re-visited in *Crucifixion Triptych (Dunedin)* (1987) (cat. no. 42). The distance however, between the 1987 *Dunedin Triptych*, and the earlier *Theatre – The Ascension of the Holy Spirit* (1984) and the *Crucifixion Triptych* (1985), is marked and intriguing. Whereas these last two works, in marvellous hues of blue, move between joy and sorrow, ultimately, as their titles indicate, they affirm 'ascension'. Their ethos and expression contrast dramatically with the primal, green struggle of the later *Dunedin Triptych*.

Even though the central earthly forms in *Crucifixion Triptych (Dunedin)* remain free, ironically, they are besieged by recurring black spirits. Darker again is the bloody imagery of *The Dunedin Mana Eaters* (1989) (cat. no. 47) so that these Dunedin works reflect a landscape of isolation and anti-

pathetic energies entirely different to the natural dynamics of *Terremoto*, and apparently light years away from the Italian *Ascension* works or even the earlier Auckland *Requiem for the Crucifixion* (1979). Both the Otago works of the 1980s and Westland works of the 1990s are characterised, even dominated, by a flux of physicality, shapes moving in and out of definition. These nascent energies contrast with the antique cultural edifices that animate the ancient trees, buildings and graveyards of the earlier Italian and English works. In this sense the Otago and Westland works (such as the raw *Black Tasman Series*) reflect the land and its energies as dynamic molecular masses. Pearson himself underlines this sense of emanation when, referring to the Dunedin works, he commented that, "What is here has not been born yet."

Viewed together, the Otago and Westland works from this period confirm Pearson's celebration *and* interrogation of the land and its energies. Struggles persist. There is the suggestion that Pearson, the revenant artist, felt that his decision to return to New Zealand was a mistake, despite his artist-in-residency in Dunedin.

It is not until the Canterbury works, *Heaven and Blood* (1988) and *The Music Makers, Canterbury Triptych* (1989) (cat. no. 52) and *Pastorale* (1990) that we again glimpse the painter's imagination enamoured of the wider unknown, "intent upon giving life reason while remaining receptive to becoming". All of these various Canterbury works investigate this same theme which could be paraphrased as dissolves of heaven and blood; "from the light of grace to the blood of existence."

This vision finds its most joyous expression in *Visitation and Arrival of Man over Waimakariri Valley* (1989). Here, each flickering accent becomes a sudden salience on the artist's surface. Undoubtedly these works echo the earlier Italian and Covent Garden series but they are passionately free of formal or social connections. Instead the imagination renders forces, being and becoming or, as Pearson puts it, "phenomenological reverberations, dancers around the world participating in the

flow of civilization.” He adds, “We have to become intimate with the immensity we are part of, mind, body and soul. We are both matter and memory, not just individuals, but part of space and time. Without imagination (our free spirit) and a critical consciousness, how can we evoke absent objects or non-existent material things? What but imagination gives us the freedom to experience faith and hope or even illusion?”

The New Zealand works of the '80s offer us imagery of agonised and eulogized space and time; differing ways of seeing. They also reflect Pearson's varied circumstances. Pearson believes that *Heaven and Blood* (1988), *Visitation and Arrival of Man over Waimakariri Valley* (1989), *Banners, Ghosts and Reality* (1988-89), as much as *The Waiting, Bella Figura* (1989) (cat. no. 49), *The Music Makers* (cat. nos. 52 and 53), and *The Onlookers* (1996) and *New Arrivals* (1996) are varied perceptions of the same *elan vital* – the dynamic origins of life – and that they propose and engage us in a sustained and gathering sense of metaphysical enquiry.

So if we wish to explore the works from the '80s (from very different physical geographies), we can perhaps best do so by visiting earlier works, such as *Musical Variations, Canterbury* (1972) (cat. no. 8), *Waikato Madonna* (1977) (cat. no. 14), and *In the Paddock of the Deep, Painted Poem* and beyond to images hosting faith, like *Nellie Aged 11 Steps Out* (1997) (cat. no. 75), and mortality, as in *Last Moment* (1998) (cat. no. 81). Such a comment appears to suggest an undaunted progression and certainly the same investigation of matter and spirit, faith and despair, sweeps through the 1990's *Black Tasman* series and the Australian Whitecliffs and Wilcannia works. But, just as the hand of the curator selects and highlights, so also the viewer can more fully comprehend this world of 'heaven and blood' by interrogating the perceptual fusion and stylistic shifts in Pearson's vision, the expression of which is invariably influenced by time and circumstances. In this exploration imagination is central. How else can we move from portraits as well-known as *The Huia* and *Herne Bay* couples straight into densely psychological works such

as *Elements in Focus* (1988) (cat. no. 45), to *Visitation and Arrival of Man over Waimakariri Valley* (1989), to *The Waiting, Bella Figura* (1989) and beyond unless we consider the role of imagination and the part it plays in relation to Pearson's and our own ways of seeing?

“Imagination,” Pearson comments, “from its mythological origins to its postmodern ‘demise’ is not some portmanteau luggage we can lift or leave. It is a faculty that is touched and changed by the pressures and alterations of our time and existence. Imagination is a determination of being. I believe we are supposed to exercise imagination and through it give life reason. That is our job. The reason imagination exists sits above or outside the norm or known.”

For Pearson, “the productive imagination is not a corrosive, singular menace but a faculty that operates on an axis capable of assuming a critical consciousness of the difference between what is real and what is imaginary. The imagination,” he says, “gives us sight. But fundamentally we must feel grace in order to see. By the act of feeling we see and paint or work in any other job. Consequently our consciousness or understanding, informed by feeling our existence, maps out the distance between reality and imagination. This is the recurring mark behind my paintings – the interplay between imagination and reality. We need a sense of the grandeur of existence otherwise it turns into chaos, the tragedy of Kosovo (1999). Fundamentally we must struggle against this to give life reason; and it is a struggle, a struggle to erase despair. In this sense the images which I paint, are not necessarily ‘logical’ or material forms, they are manifestations of that struggle, of that interplay between understanding and imagination. Even when the forms offer the image of something that is life-like but absent, for example, the young woman in *The Last White Hero of the Western World*, (1987) (cat. no. 43) the total picture warns against what is our own incompleteness. Nothing is complete or finished but is in a state of perpetual motion. We must never be simply *waiting* in an arrested sense but aware of our journeying. That's the knowledge in the

individual heads of the *Bella Figura* in *The Waiting* and the *Psyche on the Precipice* but this is also the energy that moves the forms striding through time in *Heaven and Blood* (1988), *Banners, Ghosts and Reality* (1988-89), as surely as they are in the more locally-named *Visitation and Arrival of Man over Waimakariri Valley*.”

“Imagination, if you like, is a form of knowing. It has been influenced by foundational writings like those of Plato and Aristotle and the theological heritage of the Bible and all the other sacred texts. And because imagination is pluralist, it makes each of us individual, each carrying distinctive cultural, psychological, emotional and linguistic frames of reference. To the Greeks it was *phantasia* and *eikasia*, to the Hebrew *yetser*, to the Latin world *imaginatio*, to the Germans *Einbildungskraft* and *Phantasie*, and to the English and French *imagination*. To acknowledge those differences is imperative, to appreciate them is an endless task, one which I think has not always been attended to in New Zealand and that is ironic since, as a young country and quite paradisiacal in some ways, it has tended to settle, mistakenly, for a form of nationalism rather than a sense of identity, a sense of the greater scheme of possibilities. If you imagine you are ‘original’, in the egotistical way, you miss the opportunity to recognise the larger, more pressing family of man, of humanity, a diverse theatre of individuals. In this sense I believe that all history is both collage and cycles. This is why my landscapes mark out not only the land as, for example, in *Olive Grove Bascilicata* or *Terremoto* or *Elements in Focus*, but also the point of existence in time which is stirring those forms, massing and dissolving them even as I try to express them.”

From the above comments it is clear that Alan Pearson’s vision is shaped by constant questioning and re-evaluation of what constitutes existence, and his recognition of differing

levels of reality and ways of seeing it. Works from both before and after the ’80s articulate a belief in the self-creating, self-critical consciousness and something akin to the romantic cult of the transcendental *Einbildungskraft*. Put more simply, Pearson believes not only in ‘heaven’ but also in human struggle. A belief in these two pulses stirs a desire to create images in perpetual translations of colour and form, such as *Heaven and Blood* and *Pastorale*, works which confront our condition and encourage spiritual renewal.

Postmodernism casts a cold eye on the modernist cult of creative originality. Dismissing the modernist belief in the image or text as an authentic expression, capable of representing some metaphysical profundity, post-modernism explodes the sacramental status of the humanist imagination, triumphantly declaring ‘the end of art’ and the omnipresence of an endless interplay of mirrors. Irrespective of the fiats of ‘isms and the elevation of pastiche, this selective retrospective exhibition offers us sight of works by an individual whose endeavours acknowledge the fragility of our condition but insist that it will endure.

- <sup>1.</sup> This title is borrowed from John Berger’s study *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972.
- <sup>2.</sup> Interview: A. Pearson-C. Fusco, Lyttelton, 28.3.99. All subsequent quotations originate from this interview.
- <sup>3.</sup> See Rhondda Grieg, review (of *Alan Pearson at the Manawatu Art Gallery*) in *Art New Zealand* No 60, Spring 1991.
- <sup>4.</sup> See Neil Roberts, review (of Denys Trussell’s 1992 study, *Alan Pearson: His Life and Art*) in *The Press*, 22.2.92.
- <sup>5.</sup> See: *Alan Pearson,; His Life and Art*. Denys Trussell. Hazard Press, Christchurch, 1991, especially pp 91-119.
- <sup>6.</sup> Collection of Auckland Art Gallery.

# Poem III

## Speak to me

Speak to me of mysteries  
Sweet

ere my flesh  
Falls

into life's layers  
Neat

a foothold somewhere in  
Death

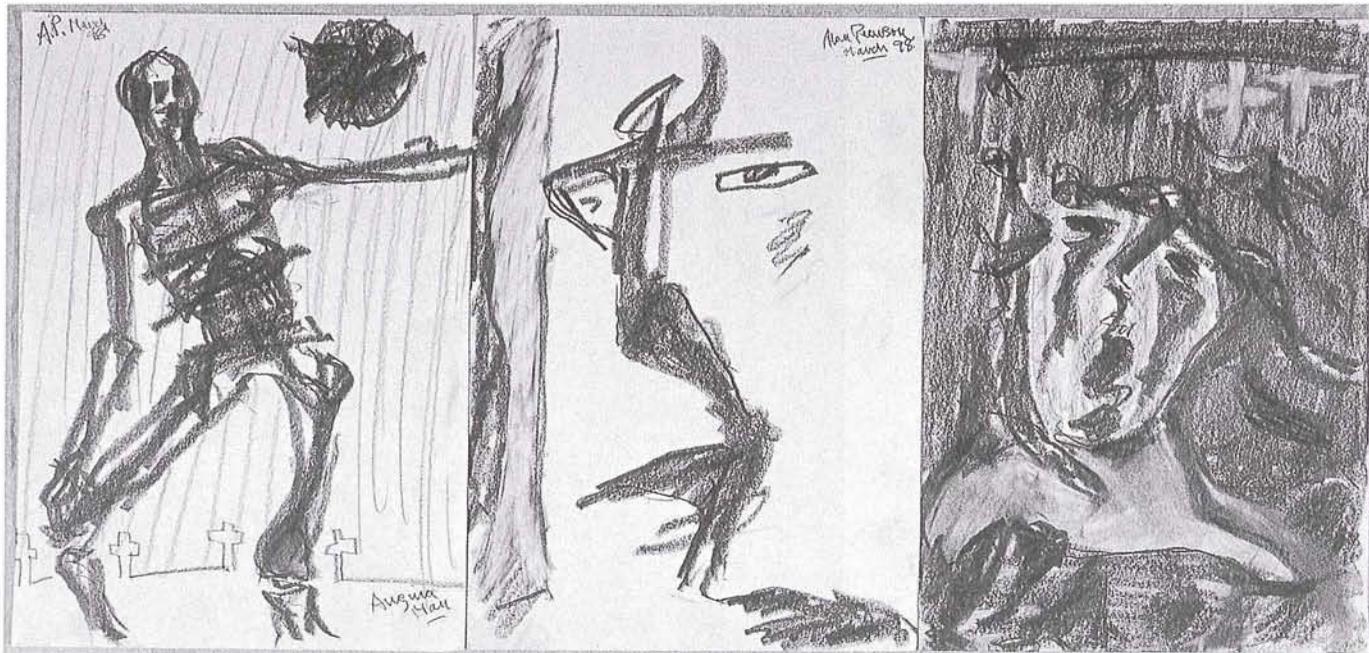
and its future  
Folds

gaseous states to  
Behold

Romanticism is the balm  
– of the Soul

lost! in the 20<sup>th</sup> century  
Hole

Alan Pearson,  
April 1999



*Angina Man* [a, b, & c] 1998  
Graphite  
270 x 630mm [combined]  
Collection of the Artist

# Alan Pearson in the 1990s: A one-man show

Alison Pearson

The 1990s, the last decade of the millennium and of the twentieth century – a century that in the arts has been dominated by the Modernist movement, which celebrated individuality and originality. This retrospective is the last for this century in Christchurch – and is a fitting valedictory to Modernism and to Alan Pearson. Pearson has been described by Denys Trussell as ‘a unique individual, on a rock of his own’<sup>1</sup> and by Tony Fomison as ‘a maverick artist whose problem here is nationalism’.<sup>2</sup> The 1990s see Alan Pearson visualising in paint both of those descriptions.

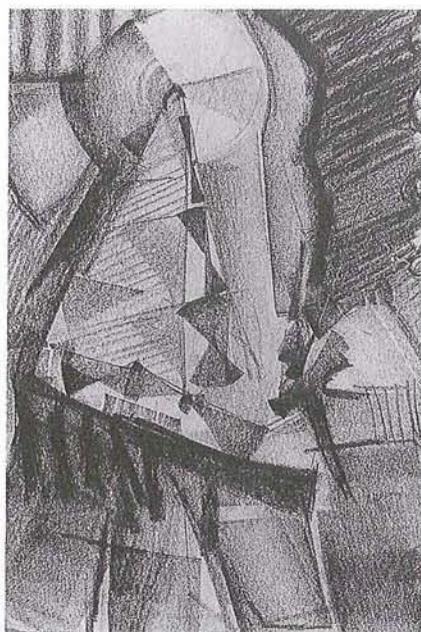
A vital, passionate man, Pearson, the ‘romantic hero’, has, in fact, a candid view of reality derived, no doubt, from childhood when the German Luftwaffe bombed his Liverpool home in 1941 and his family was dispersed. Life experience shaped

his personality and philosophy and both inform his art. His style is baroque expressionism – organised chaos – charged with abstract figurative shapes, light sources which frequently become chorus lines dancing on a universal stage depicting both his love of music and his spirituality.<sup>3</sup>

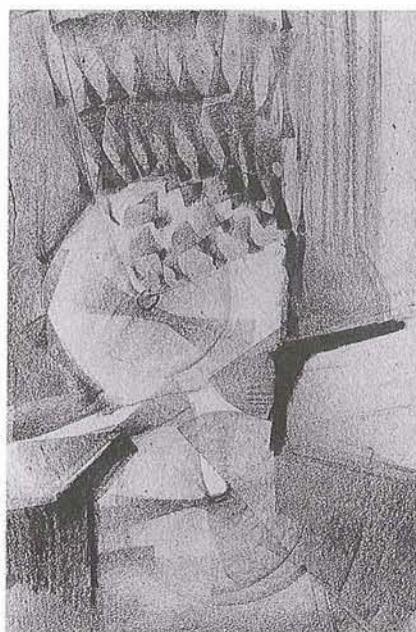
In this decade we see the continuation of genre and portrait painting and abstract figurative expressionism, which had its genesis in the interlocking forms of the Arthur’s Pass works in the 1960s (cat. nos 89a, b & c, *Mt Rolleston*) and which progressed through to the *Visitation* series completed in 1992. While working towards the *Visitation* exhibition, Pearson completed another sequence with a socio-political theme.

Reacting to the rewriting of New Zealand history, Pearson

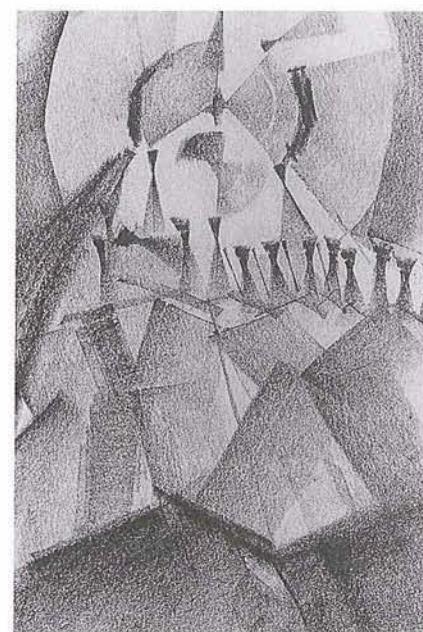
Right: *Variations on light and dark.*  
*Memories of Mt Rolleston 1.*  
1964/65  
Pencil  
185 x 123mm  
Collection of Hocken Library,  
Uare Taoka o Hakana,  
University of Otago, Dunedin



Centre: *Variations on light and dark.*  
*Memories of Mt Rolleston 2.* 1964/65  
Pencil  
185 x 123mm  
Collection of Hocken Library,  
Uare Taoka o Hakana,  
University of Otago, Dunedin



Far right: *Variations on light and dark.*  
*Memories of Mt Rolleston 3.* 1964/65  
Pencil  
185 x 123mm  
Collection of Hocken Library,  
Uare Taoka o Hakana,  
University of Otago, Dunedin



disdained political correctness and rampant nationalism in the art scene by embarking on the *Go Home Pom* paintings. Seeking a respite he returned to the familiar methods of exploration in a new environment – *plein air* painting and portraiture as a way into the psychological/spiritual background of a locale. The *West Coast* series began on a trip to Buller and continued during a residency at the Tai Poutini Polytechnic, Greymouth in 1993.

The grey tones and pounding surf did not assuage his sense of isolation and displacement and he fled into the sun of outback Australia. The jubilation and freedom expressed in the Australian paintings were interrupted by the death of a close friend in 1997, which, in conjunction with his own health problems, created a divergence in mood, bringing 'heaven and blood' closer in reality.

*Heaven and Blood* (cat. no. 46), the title of a painting from the *Visitation* series, defines the dichotomy of his art; the oscillation between joy and anguish, reality and idealism. (This mirrors the phenomenon of the crucified Christ, a concept which has haunted his paintings.) Echoes of this dichotomy remain visible in the juxtaposition of acid colours in *Pastorale* (cat. no. 54) and in the forces of light and dark in *Winter of the Mind* (cat. no. 60), which is a meditation on the destructive forces at war in the Gulf conflict in 1991.

Wartime newspapers and the histories of famous battles were meat and bread for Pearson as a child. Like countless others of his generation, he developed an admiration for the endeavour of the British people which supersedes politics. When the term 'Pommy' began to gain currency in New Zealand and the affectionate tone soured in the mid-1970s, as 'Punch a Pom a day' slogans appeared on T-shirts, Pearson was affected by the racism. When the ridicule reached into the 1990s, he reacted in paint.

Amongst the works exhibited in Christchurch in 1992 was *General Cameron 1863 Contemplates the Future of his Kind* (cat.

no. 56). Flamboyantly expressive, the emotion is conveyed through the application of paint and the distorted forms, which articulate the level of thinking and being in New Zealand during the land wars. In contrast, the literal renditions of the offending slogans in *Go Home Pommy Bastard* (cat. no. 55) are spontaneous outbursts of bitterness. Catharsis was the prompt for Pearson, finding form in several other small, colourful, mixed media works.

Earlier works, *Hobson R.N.* (cat. no. 24) and *A Shilling-a-day British Soldier*, show the artist considering the British soldier in a foreign land, dying on strange soil far from home. Thinking about the past prompted an examination of his historical antecedence. *The Calvinist* (cat. no. 58) and the two heads, *Ancestral Psyche male and female* (cat. nos 61a & b) were the result. Experimenting with loose canvas, Pearson delineates the heads as squares within which idiosyncratic psychodramas are played out. 'These paintings are concerned with the saga of western man in the Pacific – the continuity of my ancestral



*The Calvinist* 1992  
Oil on canvas on board  
610 x 610mm  
Collection of the Artist



*Tangata Whenua (The Challenge)*  
1991/92  
Oil on canvas on board  
610 x 615mm  
Collection of the Artist

past... I am not an apologist for my cultural antecedence... [I] believe in its future. I understand the need for this in other cultures as expressed in *Tangata Whenua (The Challenge)* (cat. no. 59)... Recognition of one's cultural past completes one's identity, without being nationalistic.... Irrespective of where one lives in the world.<sup>14</sup>

The subject matter received a frosty reception from the Christchurch art milieu. Nothing had changed since 1990 when Lindsay Bridget Shaw observed in an article titled 'Outside N.Z. art looking in' that 'artists are expected to say the right things about Maori, about women, about the land, about the art establishment. If they don't they get the thumbs down. Thus, an art object is taken as not only a statement of the artist's political stance but, even further, as a testament to their integrity as a person. But is it reasonable to ask for both great art and an unimpeachable personal witness? To do so seems to limit the possibilities of what an artistic statement can be.'<sup>15</sup>

Unconcerned about reaffirmation as the local *bête noire*,

Right: *Lightning Ridge (Plein-air)*  
1992  
Oil on canvas on board  
665 x 570mm  
Private collection

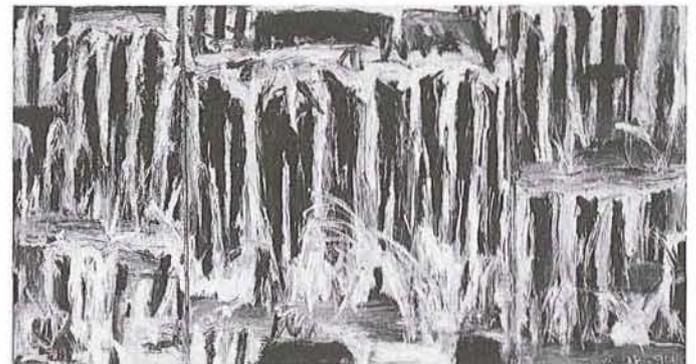


Far right: *Black Tasman* 1993/94  
Oil on canvas  
1075 x 1980mm  
Collection of Robert McDougall  
Art Gallery

Pearson went to Europe. On his return to New Zealand he painted *On Reflection, Siena, Italy* (cat. no. 57). It harks back to methods and techniques used in *Elements in Focus* (cat. no. 45) and the *Last Visitor* paintings in the use of collage and a horizontal, compartmentalised narrative. It is a memento of the influence down the centuries of medieval artistry and thought.

*Grey Variations 12 Mile* (cat. no. 66) heralded change. The sole representative in this show of several West Coast *plein air* paintings, it is tonally beautiful and, like *Lightning Ridge (Plein air)* (cat. no. 71), the lush, tachiste oils provide an interesting comparison with Willem de Kooning's late career landscapes; they are as gestural and painterly yet more descriptive of place. Back in the studio, the sea paintings metamorphosed into symphonic depictions of energy as in *Tasman Presence* (cat. no. 63).

Pearson had painted the sea at Otago where the ocean was a spatial doorway, at 12 Mile, the surf landlocked the artist between the waves and the forest as in *Black Tasman* (cat. no. 64) where he 'focused on the tidal energy, the pounding West Coast surf which is a relentless force of creation, a molecular construction of organized chaos.'<sup>16</sup> The same hierarchical, compositional structure visible in the Dunedin *March of Time* paintings (1986–87) appears again in *Black Tasman*. Like music, the bar structures and phantom shapes form a chorus line of elements. The same is true of *Sea Pictures* (cat. no.



67). Ethereal like *Heaven and Blood*, it contains a wistfulness and a yearning in the black, white and grey coloration... a whispered hope for survival.

Only in the background of *The West Coaster, Portrait of Joanne* (cat. no. 62) is there a whisper of romanticism. Her face is bludgeoned, hacked out of the paint in coalminer fashion, the illusions to which are not lost on the viewer. A modern pioneer, Pearson described her as 'living in a world on its own, a sap-green Brigadoon . . . where you can hear the doors closing of the houses you cannot see'.

Joanne's stoicism becomes an anguished wail in *Self Portrait, Transition New Zealand* (cat. no. 65). Turbulence lurks beneath its plastic surface while the crosses and the angels in the rear view the drama being played out. The interplay of the limited palette, the black, white and red in persuasion, is orchestrated by *duende*, that knowledge of the knife-edge between life and death. At sixty-five years, Pearson confronts his ego and immigrant status and comes up with a melodramatic image worthy of Joseph Conrad's Kurtz in *The Heart of Darkness*. Where Gopas opted out and into the galaxies, Pearson confronts reality.

Calm and warmth are restored in the *Portrait of Jennifer I* (cat. no. 68). Receptive and aware of her own physicality, a ballet dancer with an aesthetic sensibility, her personality is captured by Pearson. The whiteness of her flesh and her garment show the artist's ability to create tonal certainties as she sits at the front of the picture plane, forced forward by spiritual presences who observe her journey.

Two years later those evanescent presences flit through the Canterbury summer sky behind *Nellie Aged 11 Steps Out* (cat. no. 75), a portrait of the artist's daughter. She is serene yet enquiring, stepping into the future, leaving the safety of childhood behind her. Comparing this work with the *Katie III* 1987 (cat. no. 41) and *Portrait of Jennifer I* we see three different depictions of young women, each tender, respectful

and protective of their aspirations and femininity.

Whether Pearson is painting youth, as in these three works, or painting mature women as in *Portrait of Brunie Tosswill* (cat. no. 21) and *Portrait of Mrs Oliver* (cat. no. 23), whether the portrait is beautiful or ugly, powerful or fragile, he deserves a place in New Zealand art history for these few works alone. Moreover, his technical dexterity and penetrating eye for the psyche are easily detectable in the 'student' double portrait of *Margaret Tyndall (Hudson-Ware) and Alan Oliver, 22 Armagh Street* (cat. no. 3) way back in 1958.

Just as painting portraiture in New Zealand is regarded by the art establishment as being redundant so too are nude studies. Pearson, however, believes in the value of these methods for observation and thinking through subject matter. Robert Hughes records Frank Auerbach concurring: 'He [Auerbach] . . . still regards the posed human figure as the ultimate test and unweakening source of a painter's capabilities.'<sup>7</sup>

The *Huia Nymph* (cat. no. 15) and *The Waiting, Bella Figura* (cat. no. 49) performed the same functions in the 1970s and 1980s as *Flight from the Night* (cat. no. 69) and its pendant (cat. no. 70) in the 1990s. These last paintings are precursors of the work occupying the artist for the remainder of the decade.

In the early 1990s Pearson had visited northern New South Wales. Working outdoors he produced, among others, *Lightning Ridge (Plein air)* (cat. no. 71) Inspired by the aridity, untrammelled purity and isolation of this region, Pearson found a source of renewal in these travels so, during other visits he drove overland, observing and drawing (see *At the Quarry*, and *Australian Billabong* both 1995).

Returning to the studio in Lyttelton, he prepared for an exhibition in Sydney. Damage to his left foot and hip necessitated a change for the painting to continue and small works



*The West Coaster, Portrait of Joanne, 1993*  
Oil on canvas  
940 x 910mm  
Collection of the Artist

*Portrait of Jennifer I 1995*  
Oil on canvas  
730 x 840mm  
Collection of the Artist





*Flight from the Night* 1995  
Oil on canvas  
1265 x 1015mm  
Collection of the Artist

in a fast medium were the answer. Diptychs and triptychs in enamels were completed quickly, the spontaneous application suiting his subject and his temperament. Employing his idiosyncratic figurative rhythms, the spatial void is filled with the spirit of humanity, lyrically defining in a visitational sense the light of grace in *The New Arrivals* and *Australian Symphony (Triptych)* (cat. no. 79). The universal depiction gives way in *White Tribe* (cat. no. 74), and *Flight from the Graveyard, Whitecliffs, NSW* (cat. no. 73) to localised subject matter; Pearson was impressed by the struggles of the first explorers and pioneers who fought to survive in the dynamic of vast expanses which shimmer at the fiery edge of the sun.

The hot red and yellow in the ebullient *Blood Dance* (cat. no. 85) disappear completely in *Requiem for Marie Staples (Triptych)* (cat. no. 77). Pearson grieves for his friend of forty years enmeshing her in a monochromatic lattice, 'a web of death, grey, colourless death'. In consideration of Marie, and sensing his own mortality, Pearson then embarked on a large work, *Quartet: Within* (cat. no. 80) believing that his advancing age and limited energy might prevent any further large-scale works. Thinking it his endpiece, it is full of energy and purpose and dances in a dynamic, which Pearson has made his own, a

culmination of his expressionism, a stunning finale.

The physical finale almost came in April 1998 but lifesaving heart surgery restored him to health. Never one to waste a new experience, the artist made sketches from his sickbed, *April* and *Hospital*, and on return home a series of rough, raw, vehement drawings. (cat. nos 79, 84, 85). The charcoal, like enamels, was utilised for its quick result. Spontaneous definitions, these works focus on the skeletal head, questioning, challenging, demanding, complaining – an exorcism of Pearson, the patient.

Back in the studio, *Last Moment* (cat. no. 81) began to take shape. An extension of the *Ancestral Psyche* and *Self-Portrait, Transition New Zealand*, the formidable white head with its socketless eyes is both a reflection of Modernist architecture and the moment before oblivion. As the physical shock of the operation began to recede, poetical and lyrical forms resurface in the paintings. They are there, those evanescent whispers in *Last Moment*, transposing in *Embarkation to the Isle of the Dead* (cat. no. 82) to full corporeal form and represented also by tiny images of supporters, friends distinguished in individual compositions within the whole. Reflective, like Watteau's

*Australian Symphony (Triptych)*  
1997/98  
Enamel on board  
460 x 1200mm  
Collection of the Artist





*Quartet: Within* 1998/99  
Oil on canvas  
880 x 4880mm  
Collection of Robert McDougall  
Art Gallery

*Embarkation for the Isle of Cythera*, it can also be viewed as a pendant to *Sea Pictures* (cat. no. 67).

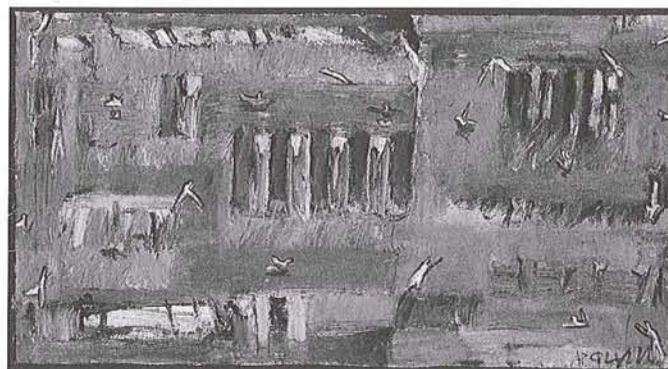
The question of belonging anywhere still persists in *Is There Any Room For Me?* (cat. no. 86). The sense of displacement and isolation is ever present, regenerated by ill health yet this work, with its vigorous amalgamation of light and dark figures, the swirling forces, the impasted paint, is a fitting conclusion, the apotheosis of the *Visitation* series. The undercurrents, forces of destruction and decay, give way to optimism in *Farewell*. Back to warmth, to Poussinesque classicism and to serenity – a way into new work and the new millennium.

*Last Moment* and *Farewell* exemplify the dichotomy that characterises much of Alan Pearson's work – that oscillation between joy and anguish, life and death. The classification 'Baroque-Expressionist' is applicable to him as it incorporates the emotional colour and technique of Expressionism and the depth of spirituality and imagery of the Baroque. At the same time it refers to his loyalty and respect for his cultural antecedence and for artistic tradition. 'The paint must live' has been his catch-cry and on the eve of his seventieth birthday we can see in *Farewell* that Pearson's intellectual and artistic freedom remains uninhibited.<sup>8</sup>

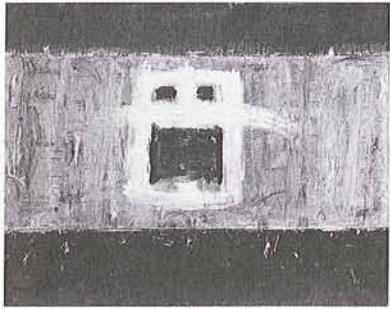
The years of painting have not been without struggle though, as Rick Killeen recently observed, 'Art is made here in spite of the culture, not because of it.'<sup>9</sup> For Pearson the struggle has been exacerbated because of his being an immigrant with an English accent – 'when someone calls me a Pommy after being here 45 years it is as though I have just stepped off the boat again'. Another immigrant to New Zealand, contemporary poet Kapka Kassabova, writes of that isolation and displacement thus:

The immigrant is not even dust in the hollow eyes  
of her country's bodiless statue.

The immigrant exists by definition as other.<sup>10</sup>



*Sea Pictures* 1994  
Oil on canvas on board  
680 x 1210mm  
Collection of the Artist

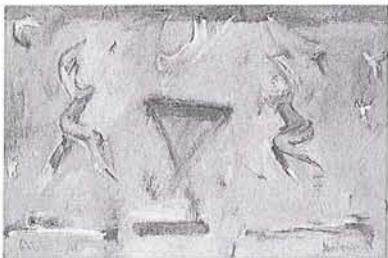


*Last Moment* 1998  
Oil on canvas  
1000 x 1260mm  
Collection of the Artist

That separateness is not just intellectual or emotional; it has had ramifications for Pearson in the exclusion from art histories, exhibitions and art gallery collections in New Zealand. As Tony Fomison said to Pearson in 1985, 'your trouble here is nationalism'.<sup>11</sup> Others have also observed peculiarities in the arts, for instance, Rachel Kent, writing in *Art Asia Pacific* commented on the lack of cultural diversity in the collecting policy of the Museum of New Zealand: 'its highly sophisticated and successful presentation of the Maori perspective stands in contrast to its shaky, unclear presentation of Pakeha culture.'<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Mark Amery reviewing the 'Exhibition of the Century – Modern Masterpieces from the collection of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam' at the Wellington City Gallery says: 'this exhibition celebrates the artist as outsider, rather than as some in-built component of an "ism".'<sup>13</sup>

In this retrospective, Alan Pearson, the 'outsider' is distinctly visible as the paintings directly address his view of the world, of art and of religion in a way which is uniquely his. The 'where do we place him?'<sup>14</sup> 'ism'-oriented question is irrelevant, because the paintings speak for themselves, as all paintings should. Events in Pearson's childhood shaped his personality and as a traveller he is not limited by parochialism and nationalism, so while he thinks and acts singularly it is with a universal consciousness, as he wrote in 1975:

God is  
Man is  
I am,  
you are,  
they are,  
we are,  
One!<sup>15</sup>



*Farewell* 1999  
Oil on canvas and board  
710 x 1040mm  
Collection of the Artist

1. Denys Trussell, in 'Alan Pearson: On a rock of his own' by Adrienne Rewi, *The Press*, Christchurch, 28 December 1990.
2. Tony Fomison in conversation with Alan Pearson at Auckland City Art Gallery, 1985.
3. Denys Trussell discusses this throughout his biography, *Alan Pearson: His Life and Art*, Hazard Press, Christchurch, 1991. Trussell's reason for writing was twofold: to address the omission of Alan from contemporary New Zealand art histories and to reveal to the public Pearson's singular contribution to New Zealand art.
4. Abridged from the *Go Home Pom* exhibition catalogue, Canterbury Gallery, Christchurch, November 1996. Contrast these works with those of artist Michael Shepherd e.g. *A corner of some foreign field that is forever New Zealand*, 1991, p.109. Gregory O'Brien, *Lands and Deeds*, Godwit Publishing, Auckland, 1996.
5. Lindsey Bridget Shaw, 'Outside New Zealand art looking in', *Listener*, 9 April 1988, pp.34–35.
6. Pearson in conversation with the author during April 1999. All subsequent, unnumbered quotes derive from this period.
7. Robert Hughes. *Frank Auerbach*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1990, p.9.
8. Pearson has been inhibited by the reception of portraiture in New Zealand, not in the paintings but in the number of works produced.
9. Keith Stewart quotes Rick Killeen in 'Same old vision' in the *Listener*, 27 June 1998, p.39.
10. Kapka Kassabova. *All roads lead to the sea*. Auckland University Press, 1997, p.14.
11. See Note 2.
12. Rachel Kent. 'Museum Report: Te Papa Tongarewa' in *Art Asia Pacific*, issue 20, 1998, pp.84–85.
13. Mark Amery. 'Minding the Modern' in the *Listener*, 16 May 1998, p.39.
14. This question was posed by Peter Entwisle to Tim Garrity on the eve of Pearson's exhibition at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 1987.
15. *Pearson: Portraits and Poetry*, exhibition catalogue, Brooke Gifford Gallery, 1976.

# Dialogue between Alan Pearson and Neil Roberts

April 1999

N.R.: *In my introduction to this catalogue I indicated that I thought that you had started out as an artist in New Zealand with some optimism but this had diminished through intolerance for your individuality. Is this true?*

A.P.: It diminished, yes. I did come with optimism. I felt, or hoped, that there was a place for me in this country and that I could be a part of its future. Coming from the class system and the old world and settling here there was a newness, where I thought the best of the old world could actually add some sort of benefit to this place. But there was a primal edge; there is no historical reference to anything but tribalism here. I was not aware at that time that New Zealand was a utopian dream, an Arcadian social experiment. The lack of identity here in the inhabitants created an urge for them to belong to a new culture and this need was intensified in the form of raving, raging nationalism in the 1960s. Colin McCahon, Hamish Keith and Gordon Brown, created the beginning of a national New Zealand art that has been continued into the 1990s by literalists in the visual institutions of this country. They were building an artisan palace, a social-educational construct with the indigenous culture as a back-up which gave the spiritual, totemic influence and gave them the Pacific qualifications. Everyone had to conform to what they deemed was New Zealand art. In other words it was social engineering. Thus, individuals became a threat...so they shut off the singers and dancers who were really needed here. It was gothic, fearful of lyricism and spontaneity.

I feel justified in saying these things because, in 1975, I was hit on the back of the head from behind by Leo Bensemman who had a dislike of the English. I know because he told me so. And when they had the 1977 retrospective of The Group, my portrait of Carl Sydow was listed as being by 'Alan Pearson

(not a Group member)' even though I had exhibited with it.

In 1977 Colin McCahon wrote to the editor of *Art New Zealand* demanding that the second part of a report I had initially written for the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council on an overseas trip not be published. I think it was because I had an alternative viewpoint to what McCahon wanted to prevail in New Zealand art. (The article was subsequently published by *Pilgrims* magazine). He was a kind of high priest of the middle class postcolonials' need for identity in the arts. McCahon opposing me was enough to scare art writers into never including me in any history – it was cultural thuggery, an ethnic cleansing of the arts in New Zealand if you like. Subsequently I heard that Michael Dunn said that I did not have a big enough body of work, this is in reference to his book *One Hundred Years of New Zealand Painting* – he should try storing it! Anyway how does he know what I've done, he's never contacted me – ever.

Furthermore, I was whacked in the kidneys from behind by Philip Clairmont in 1979. He had said to me "do you speak for all those Poms over there?" This happened the day before he went to dry out in Hanmer Springs. When I mentioned this incident to people, the response was "Oh poor Phil, how is he?" This was just in the 70s – I could go on... In the last few years I have been told that at Canterbury University Art History department and in the Art School that if any student wanted to write on me or use my methods then it would be detrimental for them in their marks. There is no room for outsiders here in the arts – especially if you have a Yorkshire accent! They need and want their own heroes. No doubt, in the future, someone from Kaiapoi or Kaitaia will paint portraits and other work like me and it will be classified as being purely New Zealand.

Many people who could have created an alternative to the new establishment to Colin McCahon and his followers left the country. I see that 33,000 people are expected to leave NZ in 1999!

Why do we have to have a collective viewpoint on the basis of the universe? They created a uniform PC art mentality. Basically its like a bloody police state as far as the arts are concerned and now, a sort of media identity who actually ends up as Minister of Culture congratulates some trendy magazine on the basis of putting nude women in it as purposeful. We have always had that! Look at the lavatories of the world!

The '60s started all this... and what ran parallel was the introduction of drugs into this country. The acceptance of marijuana and other drugs as part of the culture filled it with an artificial means. Overt nationalism combined with drugs gave it a new climate – as though sticking your finger in a pot of yellow paint was a revelation, they were saying, like, “hey man, can you feel this yellow” ...you can do that painting a house.

The nature of New Zealand post-colonial democracy is that in the process of giving everyone a right, it dumbs down and eliminates a lot of the historical goodness in European culture and it is rather tragic that sensationalism and pornography replaced those spiritual values.

My optimism diminished in the light of all that and because as an immigrant here it is impossible to have a place in the arts – I have been told, on separate occasions, by art dealers Peter McLeavey and Gregory Flint, “no Brit ever made it here in painting”. They confirmed what I already knew. I’m a different energy. They are right in the end, I shouldn’t be here, but I am, too bad. I am a guest worker in the arts, if I don’t like it “go home.”

N.R. *Do you think that your work has become more metaphoric and introspective as the years have gone on? If this is so why do you think this is?*

A.P. There is nothing more metaphoric or introspective than my first painting in 1957 *Saturn in conjunction with Mars at 22 Armagh Street* – humanity is the centre of balance describing the universe from a central position. The figure stands alone in the South Pacific on a southern continent in front of some old colonial buildings (22 Armagh Street) with Saturn and the Sun and the ethereal light of creation coming through. There is a sense of grandeur to it and at the same time, isolation. It describes myself and humanity. This painting is more realistic, with objects, than say what *Heaven and Blood* is in 1988. The difference is that one has gone further on the journey towards comprehending the mystery.

The only time that I questioned the certainty of that was when I hit the death thing down in Dunedin in 1998 – the total blackness of it all. There appeared to be no other state. In being we are made to create life, this is where *Heaven and Blood* is; this is where we are alive. Maybe being on earth and being in this time is the heavenly place where you see it all. It’s that process – a true painting, I hope.

If you get the sun directly then you grow quickly. If you’re in shadow with the weeds then you live off reflected light. A lot people are like that, in masses. I think that’s why individuals are attacked here as all our intellectual processes are supposed to be towards collectivism. Individuals show the peripheries while the rest grow. The education process is trying to drag everyone out of the mire, to reach a middle class level, which is the highest point on the earthly plane for the masses. But the system is creating an atmosphere of intellectual materialism, material barbarism, for social not metaphysical reasons – which they disbelieve anyway. What I know is for everybody but who I am is not everybody.

N.R. *Why has the figure featured so prominently in your work?*

A.P. Figurative work symbolizes my sense of the human condition, the human energy. We answer for what we are as energy. The subject matter suits me; it's more poetic; it's the dance. I see great grace in the figure and its place as an energy in existence. It articulates in its physicality, like in *Giselle* for instance. Integrated as movement it glows, it indicates all aspects of being from the unknown to the known, from no form to form.

N.R. *Would you say the 1960s were largely a period of experimentation?*

A.P. Yes, in portraiture and abstract landscape. I did do a lot of experiments when I was at the Royal Academy in London, in portraiture and the telephone series, for example. They were space and time compositions with interlocking figures. When I returned to New Zealand I began working as a designer for television, AKTV2, and then used the sets of *C'mon!* I did big abstract pieces – mostly it was the state of my marital relationship at the time which was depicted, in totemic abstraction on national telly!

I had my first solo exhibition during this period, at Barry Lett's Gallery in Auckland, 1968 I think it was – the green portraits, in the chlorophyll air of Northland. The Pop-orientated, design-focussed "Bed" series came from this time too.

N.R. *You have been drawn to portraiture, what was the reason for this?*

A.P. I was drawing heads when I was a teenager – George Bernard Shaw, El Greco and Einstein; I was interested in their strengths. As a child, the family was always predominant; our social world was full of conversations, extended family

and personalities, singers and dancers. Wartime cartoons of personalities from the Second World War fascinated me too. I drew people in bars and at work throughout Australia in the early '50s, mostly linear representations. I was interested in psyches.

I went into portraiture in the '60s to see if I measured up with the historical process of art. I found out later that I was just as good as what had been done. The more certain I became, the more expressionistic I became. Portraiture was a forté in the '60s and '70s, although I think my other works are just as strong – the nude and metaphysical, figurative compositions.

With portraiture you astonish yourself with what you arrive at. At times what appears is not what you're looking at – the sitter is suspended at the level of their energy process, which is the limit of their consciousness. A portrait is not just the head in somebody young – it could be their legs which define their state (the portrait of Coral in 1968 for example).

I do love the translucency of the flesh articulating with the bone and the persona. I used to love ginger-haired women with white skin (still do); I was rapt because they always had a green tinge in their colouring. Standing back, it is like what the Greeks knew – the nobility, the grandeur and poetry, the presence of the creator.

The opposite to this was the English painters of the 1970s – Lucian Freud and later who were forever painting their people in cold rooms, on toilets with cold bloody taps and stuff and dying where the body was always presented as an abject failure, either waiting for the needle or death to relieve them. They were victims of the social conditions of the twentieth century and swinging London.

I never wanted to do that. I like to transcend, place it on a higher plane and see a bigger reason for existence than just the bathroom of the local family or old people in homes with

their genitals hanging down looking at you with a bone sticking through the last of their remnants. That's nihilism to me. You get the splendour then you die... those painters represented the social mores of the period, they needed victims for subject matter, (just like television). They give no hope. They may be good draughtsmen but they painted the heights of social degradation.

In 1976 Rodney Wilson curated a show of my portraits at the Brooke Gifford Gallery. In the catalogue he said, "His position today as about the only middle/younger generation portraitist, is partly by default, but more importantly, as a result of his unnerving eye for the essential character of his subject." (Expressionism.) In 1978 I won the National Bank Portrait award for *The Herne Bay Couple* and in 1979 repeated the feat with the *Portrait of Mrs Oliver*. If this had been done in Australia my reputation would have been secured for life. The McDougall has *Huia Couple* (1978-79). Although it is known locally in Canterbury, it has been said to me by the artist Peter Tennant in 1994, "do you know why nothing was ever mentioned of the *Huia Couple*? It's because you're a Pom!" That's partly it. Hamish Keith and Gordon Brown did not regard portraiture as an art form either – probably because it was European and therefore did not fit in with their new order of being a true kiwi.

In this kind of climate my output of portraiture has diminished, I only paint portraits now if the subject is empathetic.

N.R. *Are you a twentieth century artist?*

A.P. Yes, also a twenty-first, nineteenth, seventeenth, sixteenth and twenty-fifth.

N.R. *What do you think that you have contributed to New Zealand art?*

A.P. A different type of consciousness to what they have had here. I paint another kind of spirituality. It's more universal.

I've used the figure more than anyone else has, and that applies to portraiture also. I am a bravura painter, with a strong musicality, a rhythmic interpretation and I'm also a good colourist. The paint has to live!

I have been fortunate in that collectors, individuals who are very nice people, have bought my work. I get along with a lot of people but most are not in the arts... and because I never took drugs in the 60s that excluded me quite a lot. They all used to smoke, I never got asked back to the parties... Their heroes were Clairmont and Fomison. Fomison was a gothic person who fitted the bill for them graphically and sub-graphically in a metaphysical way, where I expect he literally integrated the white colonial with tribalism, and that gave them a sense of culture. He always felt he was a victim with tribal affiliations. They love victims here. Fomison was someone who needed help. He did the job even though he didn't like the bourgeoisie, and he did the job for them. I don't mind some of his work but that last one, you know the copy of the Holbein study of the dead body of Christ, 1973 – they treat it as an icon and the Auckland Art Gallery bought it for \$200,000 – it is a copy for goodness sake. Makes you realise they don't want Holbein, they want their own Holbeins. That goes for Van der Velden, Christopher Perkins – and me, I guess. Don't forget that all these people are regarded as teachers not the heroes of the art world. That goes for Gopas too. Basically they don't cater for strengths outside of who they are. In my opinion, Hamish Keith and the Armagh Street mob filed into the art institutions, their mateship developed later into feminism and then gender concerns. Art historical graduates pervade the fine arts. They are literal sinecurists who use nationalism to evade their lack of visual awareness for paid, hidden sexual and social agendas. They eat the intellect here and they're all copyists...

N.R. *Recently you have been visiting Australia more regularly. Do you think that country will offer new horizons for your work in the future?*

A.P. I love the large expanses, the freedom of the countryside and the optimism of the people. I would say that going there for six months of the year would give me a freedom because I won't be fighting the social problem. I have done my battle here with nationalism; I don't rate so I don't want to worry about it anymore. I am seventy. All I want to do is work and see how it comes about. If I belong, then I do. If I don't, then I don't. There's enough freedom there for me to get lost. It all depends on my health. It doesn't matter to me anymore about having a place in New Zealand. It's over, and I'm free

and can live where I want. How can you have a place when after 46 years here the public galleries in the country, in unison, within a week or two refused this retrospective – the last expressionist exhibition of the twentieth century in the land of the lost white crowd? Why do you honestly think it happened?

*The views and opinions expressed in this interview are those of the artist and are not necessarily those of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery.*

# Catalogue

- 1 *Still Life* 1958  
Oil on board  
905 x 690mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 2 *Man Picking his Nose while the Atom Bomb Falls* 1961  
Oil on board  
915 x 860mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 3 *Margaret Tyndall and Alan Oliver, 22 Armagh Street* 1958  
Oil on board  
910 x 680mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 4 *Winter Waimakariri* 1960  
Oil on board  
610 x 509mm  
Private Collection
- 5 *Two on a Bed* 1966/67  
Oil on board  
490 x 490mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 6 *Portrait of Coral* 1969  
Oil on board  
1395 x 1104mm  
Collection: Electro Corp. Wellington
- 7 *Canterbury Madonna* 1970  
Oil on board  
605 x 605mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 8 *Musical Variations Canterbury* 1972  
Oil on canvas  
840 x 830mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 9 *Deirdre* 1973  
Oil on board  
609 x 605mm  
Private Collection
- 10 *Portrait of Yvonne Jones* 1973  
Oil on board  
1288 x 988mm  
Collection of Hocken Library, Dunedin
- 11a *My Head after the Bensemann Blow* 1975  
Oil on board  
300 x 295mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 11b *Resurrection* 1975  
Oil on board  
300 x 297mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 11c *Bereft King* 1975  
Oil on board  
322 x 400mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 11d *Lyttelton Garden* 1976  
Oil on board  
300 x 310mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 12 *Wolf Lady* 1975  
Oil on board  
1220 x 940mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 13 *Portrait of Tony Fomison* 1978  
Oil on hardboard  
665 x 600mm  
Collection of Hocken Library Uare Taoka o Hakena, Dunedin
- 14 *Waikato Madonna* 1977  
Oil on hardboard  
600 x 600mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 15 *Huia Nymph* 1978  
Oil on canvas  
983 x 750mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 16 *Huia Couple Linda and Leo* 1978/79  
Oil on hardboard  
1810 x 1370mm  
Collection of Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 17 *Portrait of the Poet, Denys Trussell* 1978  
Oil on canvas  
1200 x 940mm  
Collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
- 18 *Herne Bay Couple* 1978  
Oil on canvas  
1200 x 990mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 19 *Self Portrait at Huia* 1978  
Oil on canvas  
423 x 360mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 20 *Huia Dances* 1978  
Oil on canvas  
890 x 890mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 21 *Portrait of Brunie Tosswill* 1979  
Oil on hardboard  
1010 x 890mm  
Private collection
- 22 *Requiem for the Crucifixion* 1979  
Oil on canvas  
1012 x 1012mm  
Collection of Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 23 *Portrait of Mrs Oliver* 1979  
Oil on canvas  
1012 x 1012mm  
Collection of Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 24 *Hobson RN* 1979  
Oil on Paper  
590 x 415mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 25 *In Between Life and Death* 1979  
Oil on canvas  
1210 x 1215mm  
Collection Dunedin Public Art Gallery
- 26 *In the Paddock of the Deep, Painted Poem* 1980  
Oil on canvas  
1090 x 1100mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 27 *Alison in Italy* 1980  
Oil on board  
595 x 505mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 28 *Portrait of Gregorio, Italy* 1980  
Oil on board  
510 x 500mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 29 *Olive Grove Basilicata* 1980  
Oil on board  
490 x 590mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 30 *Terremoto* 1980  
Oil on canvas  
1130 x 1130mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 31 *Tuscany Self Portrait, Italy* 1981  
Oil on canvas  
455 x 455mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 32 *Italian Street Opera* 1982  
Oil on canvas  
1125 x 1121mm  
Dunedin Public Art Gallery
- 33 *Animalistic Theatre* 1984/85  
Oil on paper  
1210 x 1510mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 34 *Theatre – The Ascension of the Holy Spirit* 1984  
Oil on paper  
1200 x 960mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 35 *Teatro del Baroque* 1984  
Oil on canvas  
1510 x 1426mm  
Collection Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 36 *The Tomb of Western Civilisation AD* 1984  
Mixed media on paper  
820 x 620mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 37 *Last Love* 1984  
Oil on canvas  
1125 x 820mm  
Collection of the Artist

- 38 *Covent Garden from the Gods* 1982  
Oil on canvas  
945 x 870mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 39 *Crucifixion Triptych* 1985  
Oil on board  
1230 x 2314mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 40 *Alison England* 1983  
Oil on board  
795 x 680mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 41 *Katie III Dunedin* 1987  
Oil on canvas  
700 x 600mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 42 *Crucifixion Triptych (Dunedin)* 1987  
Oil on paper on card on particle board  
610 x 1260mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 43 *The Last White Hero of the Western World* 1987  
Oil on canvas  
1010 x 1065mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 44 *A Fatal Attraction at Taylors Mistake* 1987  
Oil on paper  
440 x 610mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 45 *Elements in Focus* 1988  
Collage, mixed media on paper  
600 x 450mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 46 *Heaven and Blood* 1988  
Oil on canvas  
1155 x 1525mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 47 *The Dunedin Mana Eaters* 1989  
Oil on canvas  
1220 x 1620mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 48 *Visitation and Arrival of Man over Waimakariri Valley* 1989  
Oil on canvas  
1500 x 1610mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 49 *The Waiting, Bella Figura* 1989  
Oil on watercolour paper  
1020 x 800mm  
Private collection
- 50 *Sentence of Death* 1987  
Oil on watercolour paper  
680 x 590mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 51 *The Music Makers I Canterbury* 1989  
Oil on canvas  
2820 x 1600mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 52 *Triptych, The Music Makers Canterbury* 1989  
Oil on canvas  
1677 x 1920mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 53 *The Canterbury Woman on a Precipice* 1988  
Oil on paper  
875 x 600mm  
Collection of Hoeken Library Uare Taoka o Hakena, Dunedin
- 54 *Pastorale* 1990  
Oil on canvas  
1140 x 1538mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 55 *Go Home Pommy Bastard 1 and 2* 1991  
Oil on canvas  
940 x 1880mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 56 *General Cameron 1863 Contemplates the Future of his Kind* 1991  
Oil on canvas on board  
618 x 1312mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 57 *On Reflection, Siena, Italy* 1992  
Mixed media on paper  
1030 x 375mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 58 *The Calvinist* 1992  
Oil on canvas on board  
610 x 610mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 59 *Tangata Whenua (The Challenge)* 1991/92  
Oil on canvas on board  
610 x 615mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 60 *Winter of the Mind* 1992  
Oil on canvas  
1260 x 997mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 61a *Ancestral Psyche (male)* 1992  
Oil on canvas on board  
610 x 610mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 61b *Ancestral Psyche (female)* 1992  
Oil on canvas on board  
610 x 610mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 62 *The West Coaster, Portrait of Joanne*, 1993  
Oil on canvas  
940 x 910mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 63 *Tasman Presence* 1993/94  
Oil on canvas  
990 x 1935mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 64 *Black Tasman* 1993/94  
Oil on canvas  
1075 x 1980mm  
Collection of Robert McDougall Art Gallery
- 65 *Self Portrait, Transition New Zealand* 1994/95  
Oil on canvas  
860 x 1000mm  
Private collection
- 66 *Grey Variations 12 Mile* 1993  
Oil on canvas on board  
500 x 620mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 67 *Sea Pictures* 1994  
Oil on canvas on board  
680 x 1210mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 68 *Portrait of Jennifer I* 1995  
Oil on canvas  
730 x 840mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 69 *Flight from the Night* 1995  
Oil on canvas  
1265 x 1015mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 70 *The Messenger* 1994  
Oil on canvas  
1340 x 1040mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 71 *Lightning Ridge (Plein-air)* 1992  
Oil on canvas on board  
665 x 570mm  
Private collection
- 72 *Visitation and Coming of Man, Whitecliffs, NSW* 1996  
Enamel on board  
635 x 1025mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 73 *Flight from the Graveyard, Whitecliffs, NSW* 1996  
Enamel on canvas  
1260 x 1010mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 74 *White Tribe* 1996  
Enamel on board  
1200 x 1800mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 75 *Nellie Aged 11 Steps Out* 1997  
Oil on canvas  
1280 x 1075mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 76 *The Northern Territory Mates* 1997  
Enamel on oil on board  
600 x 1110mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 77 *Requiem for Marie Staples (Triptych)* 1997  
Enamel on canvas  
600 x 1610mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 78 *Six Heads Waiting for Mortality* 1997  
Charcoal on paper  
1700 x 1200mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 79 *Australian Symphony (Triptych)* 1997/98  
Enamel on board  
460 x 1200mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 80 *Quartet: Within* 1998/99  
Oil on canvas  
1220 x 3560mm  
Collection of Robert McDougall Art Gallery

- 81 *Last Moment* 1998  
Oil on canvas  
1000 x 1260mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 82 *Embarkation to the Isle of the Dead* 1998/99  
Oil on canvas on board  
450 x 1520mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 83 *Lock your Door* 1998  
Charcoal on paper  
420 x 1620mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 84 *Don't forget me when I depart this state* 1998  
Charcoal on paper  
420 x 1190mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 85 *Blood Dance* 1997  
Oil on canvas  
1200 x 1930mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 86 *Is There Any Room For Me* 1999  
Oil on canvas  
1400 x 1690mm  
Collection of the Artist
- DRAWINGS
- 87 *Pregnant Nude* 1962  
Ink/wash  
390 x 300mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 88a *Variations on light and dark. Memories of Mt Rolleston* 1.1964/65  
Pencil  
185 x 123mm  
Collection of Hocken Library, Uare Taoka o Hakana, University of Otago, Dunedin
- 88b *Variations on light and dark. Memories of Mt Rolleston* 2 1964/65  
Pencil  
185 x 123mm  
Collection of Hocken Library Uare Taoka o Hakana, University of Otago, Dunedin
- 88c *Variations on light and dark. Memories of Mt Rolleston* 3 1964/65  
Pencil  
185 x 123mm  
Collection of Hocken Library, Uare Taoka o Hakana, University of Otago, Dunedin
- 89 *Telephone Series (U.K.)* 1966  
Pencil  
495 x 500mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 90 *The Elitist* 1973  
Pencil  
300 x 230mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 91 *Self Portrait* 1973  
Pencil  
550 x 340mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 92 *Alison at Huia* 1977  
Pencil  
250 x 220mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 93 *Justin No 3* 1977  
Pencil  
203 x 145mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 94 *Tim Garrity* 1977  
Pencil  
200 x 195mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 95 *Spirits of the Land Huia* 1978  
Pencil  
370 x 435mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 96 *Huia Exit* 1978  
Pencil  
295 x 245mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 97 *In Between Life and Death* 1979  
Pencil  
220 x 240mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 98 *Il Cranio di Matera* 1980  
Pencil  
320 x 245mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 99 *Ideas for the Stage* 1980/81  
Crayon  
210 x 460mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 100 *Middlesbrough* 1981  
Pencil  
360 x 385mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 101 *Male Nude Fulham* 1982  
Crayon  
595 x 420mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 102 *La Dance* 1982  
Crayon  
420 x 295mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 103 *Nude* 1982  
Pencil  
420 x 295mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 104 *Edward Lucie Smith, London* 1983  
Pencil  
420 x 295mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 105 *Portrait of Alison* 1985  
Pencil  
295 x 207mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 106 *Henrietta* 1989  
Crayon  
470 x 420mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 107 *Naked Reality* 1982  
Crayon  
420 x 295mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 108 *Judge MS Eclectic* 1990  
Mixed Media  
215 x 330mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 109 *Should we go should we stay* 1990  
Graphite/Pastel  
420 x 565mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 110 *West Coast New Zealand Apparitions* 1993  
Pencil  
212 x 295mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 111 *Portrait* 1993  
Crayon  
280 x 410mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 112 *Self Portrait as a Dog* 1993  
Pastel  
580 x 410mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 113 *Nude Stretching* 1995  
Crayon  
600 x 450mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 114 *Michael Smither* 1995  
Crayon  
590 x 470mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 115 *Australian Billabong* 1995  
Pencil  
475 x 590mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 116 *The Quarry* 1995  
Pencil  
270 x 345mm (sketch book)  
Collection of the Artist
- 117 *Nude* 1998  
Pencil  
270 x 345mm (sketch book)  
Collection of the Artist
- 118a *Angina Man* 1998  
Graphite  
270 x 210mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 118b *Angina Man* 1998  
Graphite  
270 x 210mm  
Collection of the Artist
- 118c *Angina Man* 1998  
Graphite  
270 x 210mm  
Collection of the Artist

# Chronology

- 1929: Born 23 August Liverpool
- 1941: Pearson family moves to Middlesbrough. Attends Ayresome North Elementary School.
- 1942: Leaves School to work on the Railways as cleaner, locomotive fireman.
- 1947-48: National service in Airforce.
- 1949: Returns to work on the Railways.
- 1951: Emigrates to Australia (Tasmania) on the 'Ten Pound Scheme' as a steam locomotive fireman.
- 1952-53: Works on the Snowy Mountain Scheme as bulldozer driver and barman.
- 1953: Returns to England for 3 months, goes to Canada and works in Toronto and Edmonton.
- 1953/54: Returns to Australia on the old *Orion*. Works as seaman on Australian Coastal inter state liners. Visits New Zealand on M.V. Wanganella.
- 1954: November, arrives in New Zealand to work on New Zealand vessels.
- 1956: Attends classes at Wellington Technical College, Wellington, for Fine Arts Preliminary examinations.
- 1957: Moves to Christchurch and Commences studies at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts .
- 1958: Lives with other students at 22 Armagh Street. Rosa Sawtell Prize for Life Drawing.
- 1959: Awarded the Bickerton-Widdowson Scholarship. Graduates with a Diploma in Fine Arts.
- 1960: Attends Auckland Teachers Training College. Marries Coral Holster. Son Alan born.
- 1961: Completes a Diploma in Fine Arts with Honours (First Class) at University of Canterbury.
- 1962: Begins a full-time teaching appointment at Cashmere High School, Christchurch. Lives at Sumner. Invited to exhibit with 'The Group'. Son Justin born.
- 1964: Awarded a Queen Elizabeth II Council Scholarship to Study at the Royal Academy School, London, 1965-66.
- 1966: Returns to New Zealand overland through Europe, India and Asia.
- 1967: Living in Parnell, Auckland working as a designer for Television AKTV2.
- 1969: First solo exhibition held at Vulcan Gallery House at Parnell destroyed by fire. Resigns from Television and moves to Christchurch.
- 1970: Takes a part-time teaching position at Kingsley Girls' School.
- 1971: First solo exhibition in Canterbury at Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery.
- 1972: Moves to live at 15 Selwyn Road, Lyttelton. Marriage with Coral ends. Begins a relationship with Dierdre Tupper.
- 1976: Meets Alison Foley. Awarded Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of NZ Travelling grant. Takes a four month tour that includes USA, France, Spain, Italy and Britain. Moves to Auckland with Alison and Children.
- 1977: Living at Northcote. Begins painting works inspired by Huia in the forests of the Waitakeres.
- 1978: Awarded National Bank Portrait Prize for '*Herne Bay Couple*'.
- 1979: Awarded National Bank Portrait Prize for '*Portrait of Mrs Oliver*'. Recipient of a Queen Elizabeth II Grant.
- 1980: Travels to Italy town of Matera.
- 1981: Moves to Middlesbrough in the North East of England then to London. Marries Alison.
- 1982-85: London.
- 1985: Returns to New Zealand in June. Tutors life classes. Birth of his daughter Eleanora Alexandra Alice (Nellie).
- 1986/87: Artist in residence at Otago Polytechnic and Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Part-time life drawing tutoring.
- 1987: Moves back to Christchurch, rents a studio in the Christchurch Arts Centre.
- 1988: August-September travels in Italy.
- 1989: Visits Australia with a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council assistance grant.
- 1991: Visiting artist at International Art Workshop Teschmakers Oamaru. Biography *Alan Pearson: His Life and Art* by Denys Trussell published.
- 1992: April visits Australia (working) and spends time at Lightning Ridge. Moves to live at 29 Oxford St Lyttelton.
- 1993: May-June Artist in Residence at Tai Poutini Polytechnic Greymouth. Guest artist Nelson Polytechnic.
- 1995: June July travel to France Italy and Germany. Working visit to Australia Whitecliffs, NSW.
- 1996: Begins renting old Lyttelton Borough Chambers as a Studio.
- 1998: Diagnosed with a heart condition, undergoes surgery.
- 1999: July travels to Australia. Retrospective exhibition **Heaven and Blood, Painting and Drawing by Alan Pearson**. Robert McDougall Art Gallery, August - October.

## Solo Exhibitions

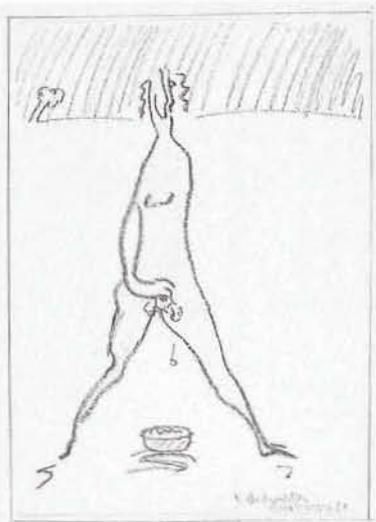
- 1969 Vulcan Gallery, Auckland.  
1970 Barry Lett Gallery, Auckland.  
1971 CSA Gallery, Christchurch.  
1974 Solo exhibition at the CSA Gallery, Christchurch; Bett Duncan Gallery, Wellington; New Vision, Auckland.  
1975 New Vision, Auckland; Brook Gifford Gallery, Christchurch.  
1976 *Portraits and Poetry*, Retrospective Exhibition, Brook Gifford, Christchurch.  
1977 Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland; Brook Gifford, Christchurch.  
1978 Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington  
1979 Barry Lett Gallery, Auckland; Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington; Brook Gifford, Christchurch  
1981 Middlesbrough Public Art Gallery, Cleveland, England.  
1984 New Zealand House Gallery, London.  
1985 Brook Gifford Gallery, Christchurch; New Vision, Auckland.  
1986 Louise Beale Gallery, Wellington; James/Paul Gallery, Christchurch; Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch; Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru.  
1987 Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Moray Gallery and Carnegie Centre Gallery, Dunedin.  
1988 Janne Land Gallery, Wellington; CSA Gallery, Christchurch (1970s drawings and paintings); Gingko Gallery, Christchurch; Charlotte H. Galleries, Auckland.  
1989 Charlotte H. Galleries, Auckland (Italian drawings).  
1990 Salamander Gallery, Christchurch; CSA Gallery, Christchurch; Christopher Moore Gallery, Wellington (1960s works).  
1991 *Visitations* (touring exhibition) Manawatu Public Art Gallery, Palmerston North; & to, Hawkes Bay Cultural Centre, Napier; Suter Art Gallery, Nelson; Christopher Moore Gallery, Wellington; Canterbury Gallery, Christchurch.  
1992 Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin; Aigantighe Timaru; Canterbury Gallery, Christchurch.  
1993 Milford Galleries, Dunedin; Left Bank Gallery, Greymouth; Canterbury Gallery, Christchurch.  
1994 RKS Gallery, Auckland; Milford House Galleries, Dunedin; Artscape Gallery, Palmerston North.  
1995 Canterbury Gallery, Christchurch; Milford House Galleries, Dunedin; Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North. Exhibition at Bottland Gallery, Sydney.  
1996 *Five Decades – Five Portraits*, Canterbury Gallery, Christchurch; *Whitecliffs Visitations*, NSW Bottland Gallery, Sydney, Australia.  
1997 *Australian Paintings*, Milford Gallery, Dunedin; *No Compromises*, Grove Mill Winery, Blenheim.  
1999 Exhibition at Gallery 482, Brisbane.

## Group Exhibitions

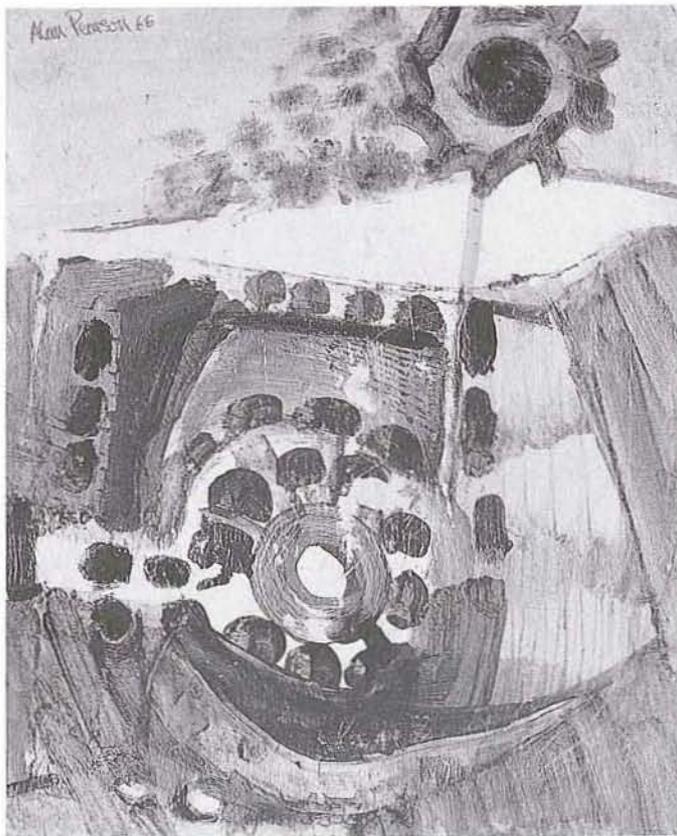
- Fine Arts Diploma Graduate Exhibition, Canterbury Society of Arts (CSA), Christchurch  
The Group, CSA, Christchurch  
Annual Autumn Exhibition, Canterbury Society of Arts, Christchurch  
Hays Prize Exhibitors, CSA, Christchurch  
Annual Autumn Exhibition, CSA, Christchurch  
New Zealand Artists in London, New Zealand House Gallery.  
Qantas Gallery, London.  
Camberwell Gallery, London.  
Thirty Plus, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.  
Contemporary Artists, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.  
Portrait Exhibition, New Vision Gallery, Auckland.  
Artists' Gardens, New Vision Gallery, Auckland.  
Land, CSA Gallery, Christchurch,  
Pan Pacific Arts Festival, Noumea;  
NZ Drawing, National touring exhibition.  
Summer '77, New Vision Gallery, Auckland.  
New Year, New Works, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland.  
Small Works, Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland.  
New Vision Auckland; Denis Cohn Galleries, Auckland; CSA Gallery, Christchurch.  
Centenary Exhibition, Edward Lucie-Smith, Leinster Gallery, London.  
Paperchase, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch;  
Anxious Images (national touring exhibition), Auckland City Art Gallery.  
Acquisitions, Auckland City Art Gallery.  
Piece of Art for Peace (national touring exhibition), Robert McDougall Art Gallery Christchurch.  
The Self (national touring exhibition), Suter Art Gallery Nelson.  
President's exhibition, Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru.  
Dunedin Painters, Hocken Library, Dunedin;  
Patricia Bosshard Gallery, Dunedin.  
Canterbury Painters, Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Acquisitions, Auckland City Art Gallery;  
August Exhibition, Peter Small Galleries, Christchurch, Wellington, Auckland  
Cityscape, CSA Gallery, Christchurch;  
Artists' Self Portraits, Moray Gallery, Dunedin;  
President's Exhibition, CSA Gallery, Christchurch.  
Drawing Exhibition, Hocken Library Gallery, University of Otago, Dunedin.  
Goodman Suter Biennale, Suter Art Gallery, Nelson.  
Canterbury Perspective, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.  
Self Environment, CSA Gallery, Christchurch.  
New Zealand Self Portraits, CSA; Christchurch.  
Roads to Rome, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.  
Treasures of the Hocken, Hocken Library Gallery, University of Otago, Dunedin.  
Treasures, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin  
Recent and Contemporary, Hocken Library Gallery, Dunedin  
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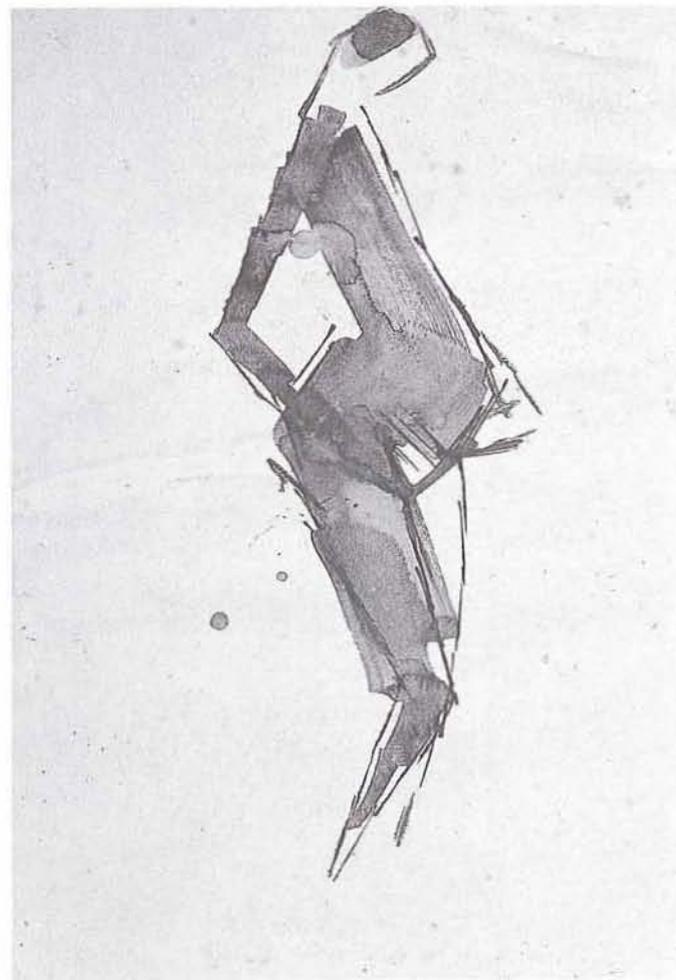
- CSA Gallery, Christchurch;  
Additions to the Collection, Hocken Library Gallery, University of Otago,  
Dunedin.
- Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch  
Women Portrayed, Hocken Library Gallery, University of Otago, Dunedin  
Sight Unseen, Dunedin Public Art Gallery.  
We're Still Here, Milford Galleries, Dunedin;  
Paintings and Drawings from our Century, Hocken Library Gallery, University of  
Otago, Dunedin  
Self Portraits, Governor General's Art Auction, Warwick Henderson Gallery,  
Auckland,  
Exhibitions from the Collections; Auckland City Art Gallery & Robert McDougall  
Art Gallery, Christchurch
- CSA Drawing Exhibition, Christchurch. 1996  
New Zealand Real, Milford Galleries, Dunedin  
Nature through the Frames of Culture CoCA, Christchurch  
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*Landfall* magazine Vol. No. 164, p.443 (Raymond Ward)  
*Islands* magazine Vol. No. 7, 1977 p.169 (illus)  
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Elva Bett Newsletter, No. 8, 1979.  
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*Art New Zealand*, Issue 6 (Alan Pearson – travels).  
*Art New Zealand*, Issue 39, (Susan Foster)  
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*Anxious Images* Catalogue, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1984 (Alexa Johnston).  
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*The New Zealand Collection*, Kevin Ireland (ed) Random House, Auckland, 1989,  
p.46.  
*Art New Zealand*, Issue 54, Cassandra Fusco.  
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*The Press*, Christchurch, 28 December, 1990, (Adrienne Rewi)  
*Visitations*, Manawatu Public Art Gallery catalogue, 1991 (Alison Pearson).  
*Art New Zealand*, Issue 60 (Rhonda Grieg review) 1991.  
NZ *Listener*, March 16, 1992 (Kevin Ireland) p.52.  
*Art New Zealand*, Issue 69, Summer 1993-94 (Anna Crichton article on  
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Pearson, Alison. *Who are you looking at?* Alan Pearson's self portrait exhibition  
1967-1995 exhibition catalogue, Manawatu Art Gallery, August 1995.  
Bourke, Chris. NZ *Listener* (*We're Still Here*) July 1994.  
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*Art New Zealand*, No 84, Spring 1997, 'Alan Pearson Australian Paintings',  
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Above: *Naked Reality* 1982  
Crayon  
420 x 295mm  
Collection of the Artist



Right: *Telephone Series (U.K.)* 1966  
Pencil  
495 x 500mm  
Collection of the Artist



Far right: *Pregnant Nude* 1962  
Ink/wash  
390 x 300mm  
Collection of the Artist



Alison in Huia  
Alison Robertson

Left: *Justin No 3* 1977  
Pencil  
203 x 145mm  
Collection of the Artist

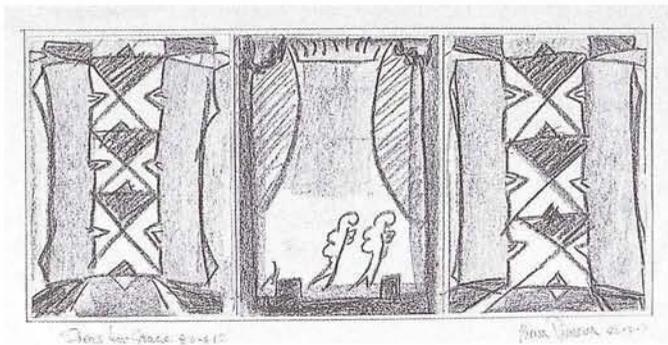


Far left: *Alison at Huia* 1977  
Pencil  
250 x 220mm  
Collection of the Artist



Huia Exit  
Alison Robertson  
78

Far Left: *Huia Exit* 1978  
Pencil  
295 x 245mm  
Collection of the Artist



Ideas for the Stage 80-81  
Alison Robertson

Left: *Ideas for the Stage* 1980/81  
Crayon  
210 x 460mm  
Collection of the Artist



Above: *The Elitist* 1973  
Pencil  
300 x 230mm  
Collection of the Artist



Right: *Nude* 1982  
Crayon  
420 x 295mm  
Collection of the Artist



Far right: *La Dance* 1982  
Crayon  
420 x 295mm  
Collection of the Artist

Right: *Judge MS Eclectic* 1990  
Mixed Media  
215 x 330mm  
Collection of the Artist

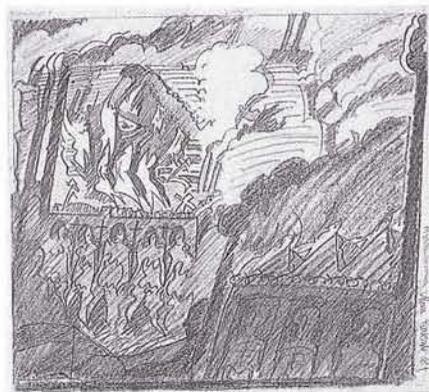




Above: *Henrietta* 1989  
Crayon  
470 x 420mm  
Collection of the Artist

Left: *Edward Lucie Smith, London* 1983  
Pencil  
420 x 295mm  
Collection of the Artist

Far left: *Portrait of Alison* 1985  
Pencil  
295 x 207mm  
Collection of the Artist

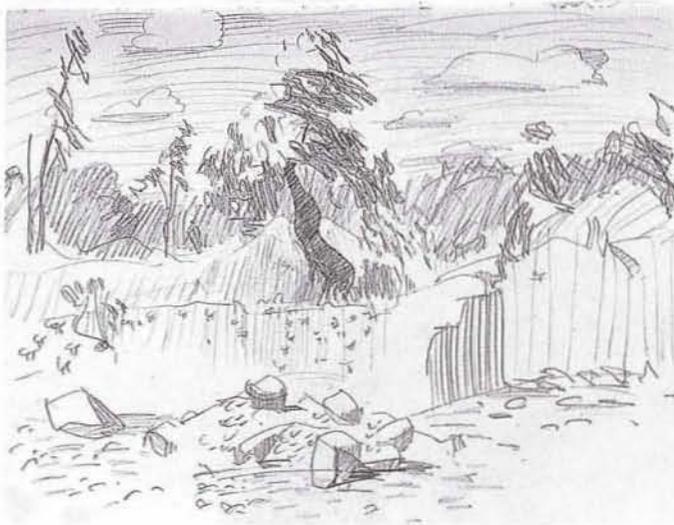


Left: *Middlesbrough* 1981  
Pencil  
360 x 385mm  
Collection of the Artist



Above: *Nude* 1998

Pencil  
270 x 345mm (sketch book)  
Collection of the Artist



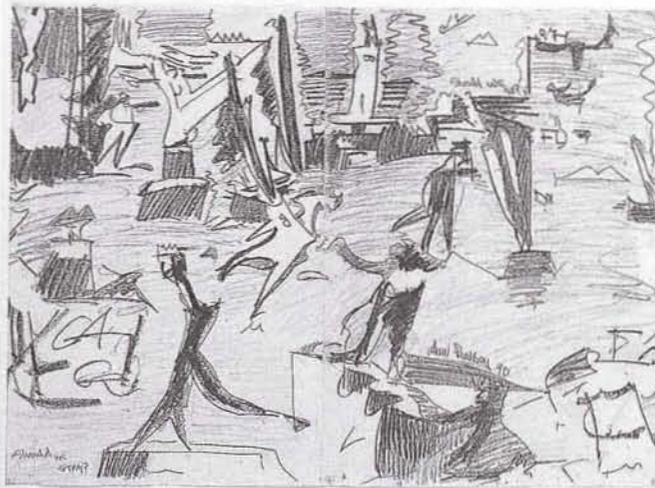
Above centre: *The Quarry* 1995

Pencil  
270 x 345mm (sketch book)  
Collection of the Artist



Above far right: *Michael Smith* 1995

Crayon  
590 x 470mm  
Collection of the Artist

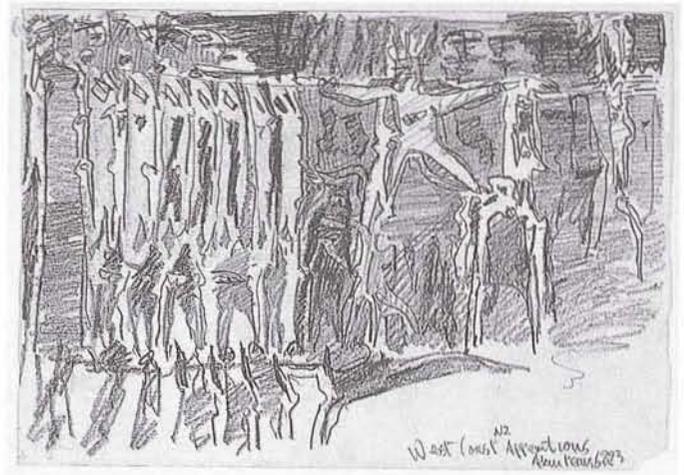


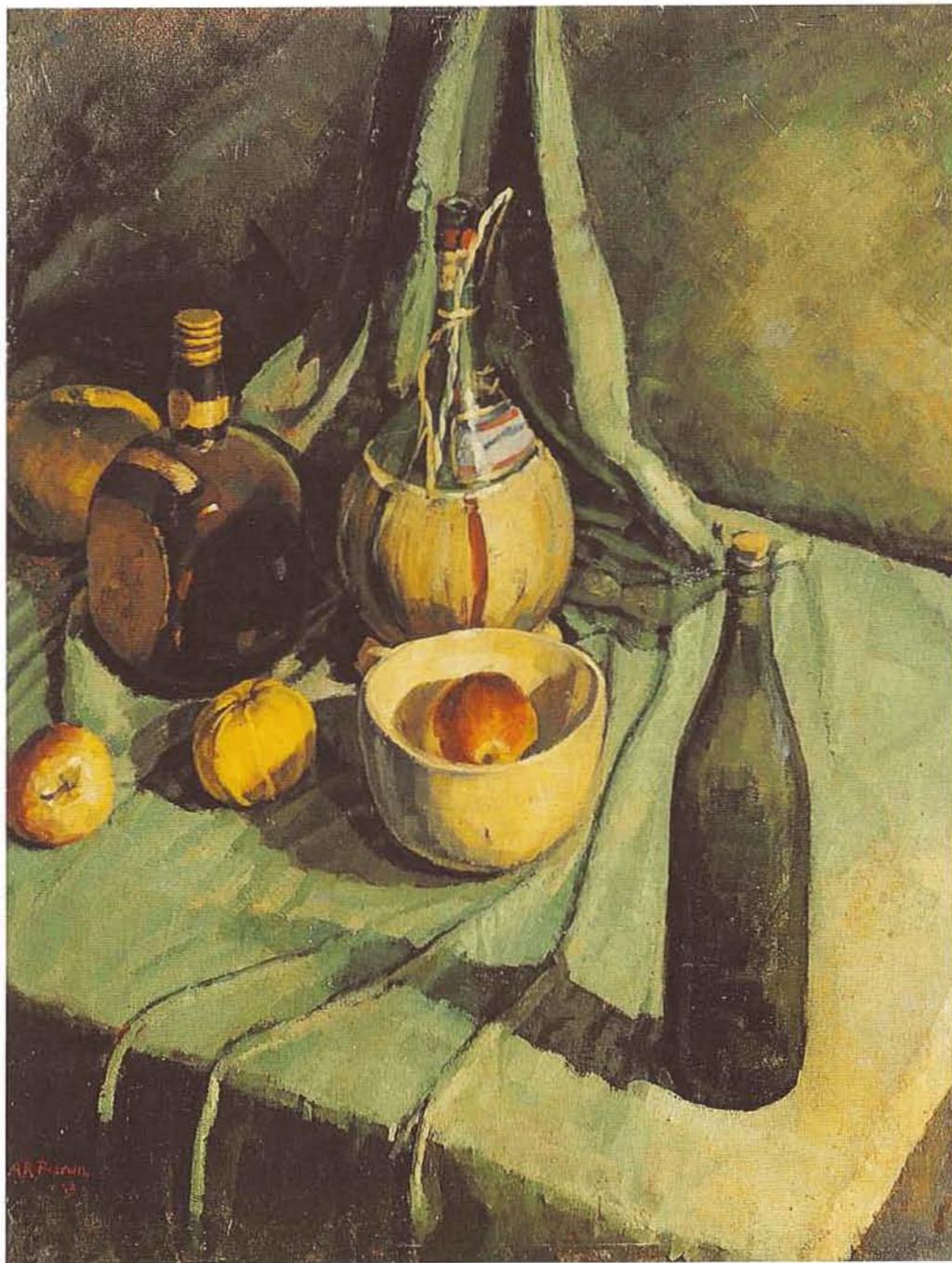
Right: *Should we go should we stay* 1990

Graphite/Pastel  
420 x 565mm  
Collection of the Artist

Far right: *West Coast New Zealand  
Apparitions* 1993

Pencil  
212 x 295mm  
Collection of the Artist





*Still Life* 1958  
Oil on board  
905 x 690mm  
Collection of the Artist

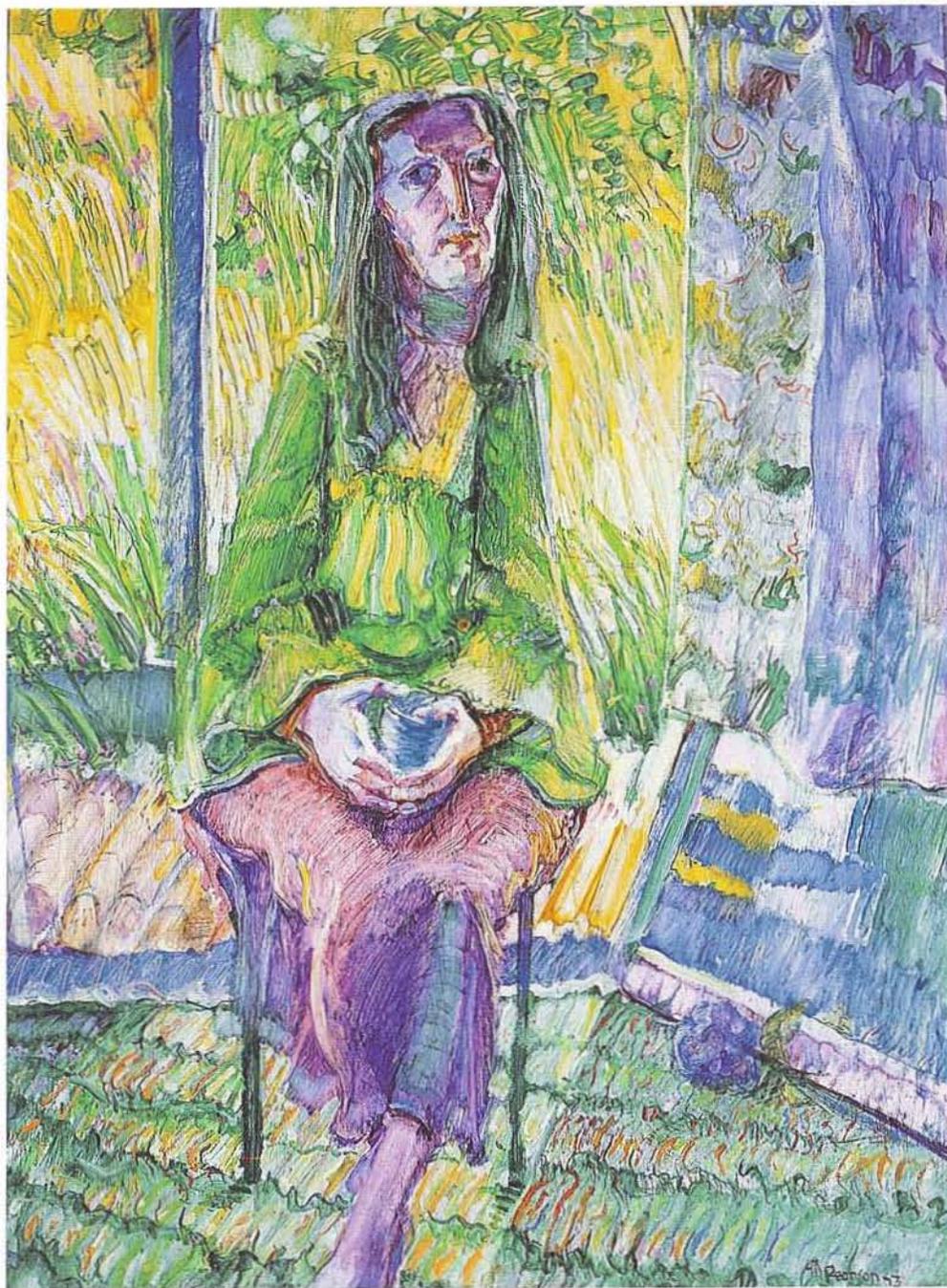
*Margaret Tyndall and Alan Oliver,  
22 Arnagh Street 1958  
Oil on board  
910 x 680mm  
Collection of the Artist*





*Winter Waimakariri 1960*  
Oil on board  
610 x 509mm  
Private Collection

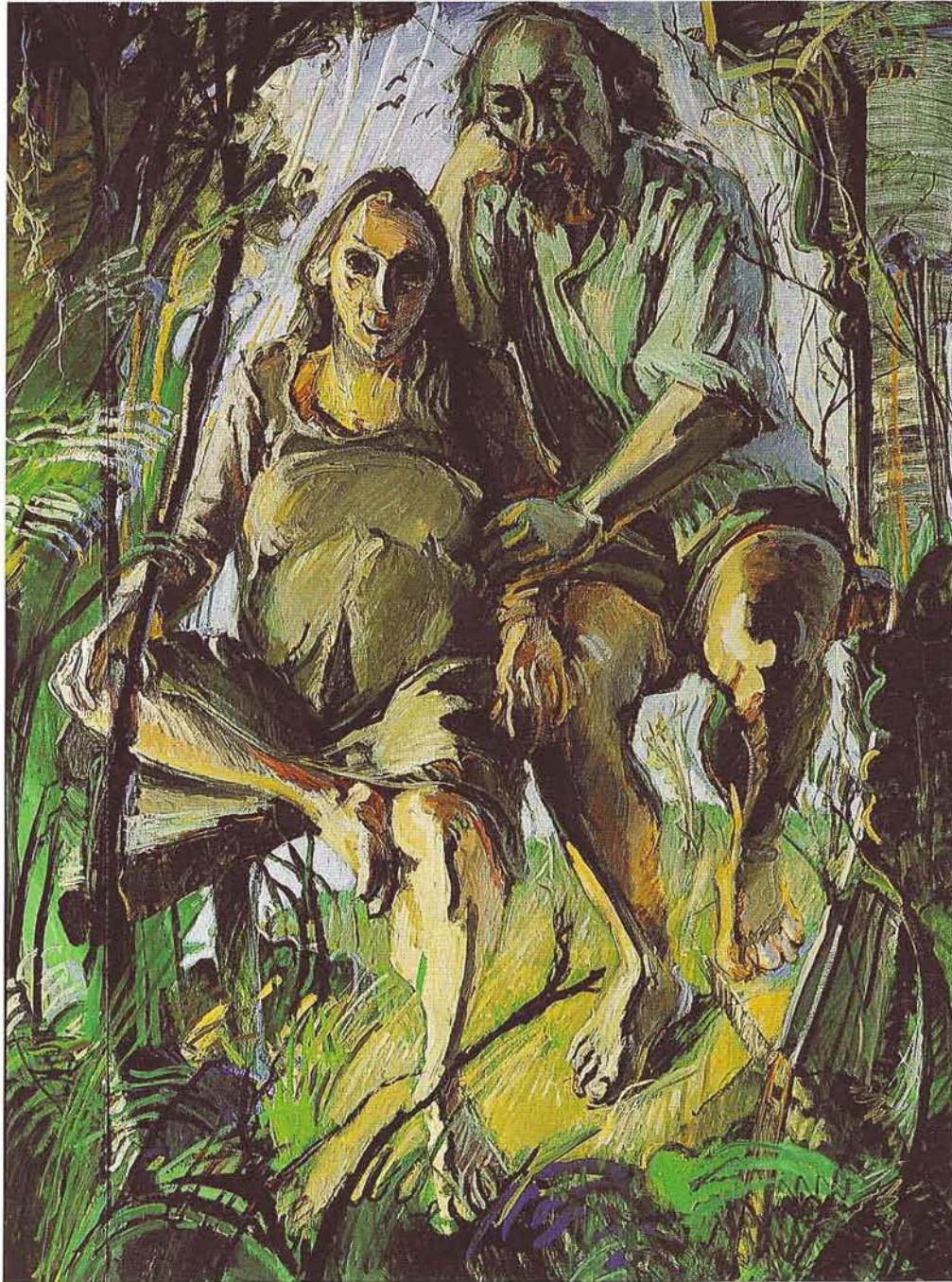
*Portrait of Yvonne Jones* 1973  
Oil on board  
1288 x 988mm  
Collection of Hocken Library, Dunedin

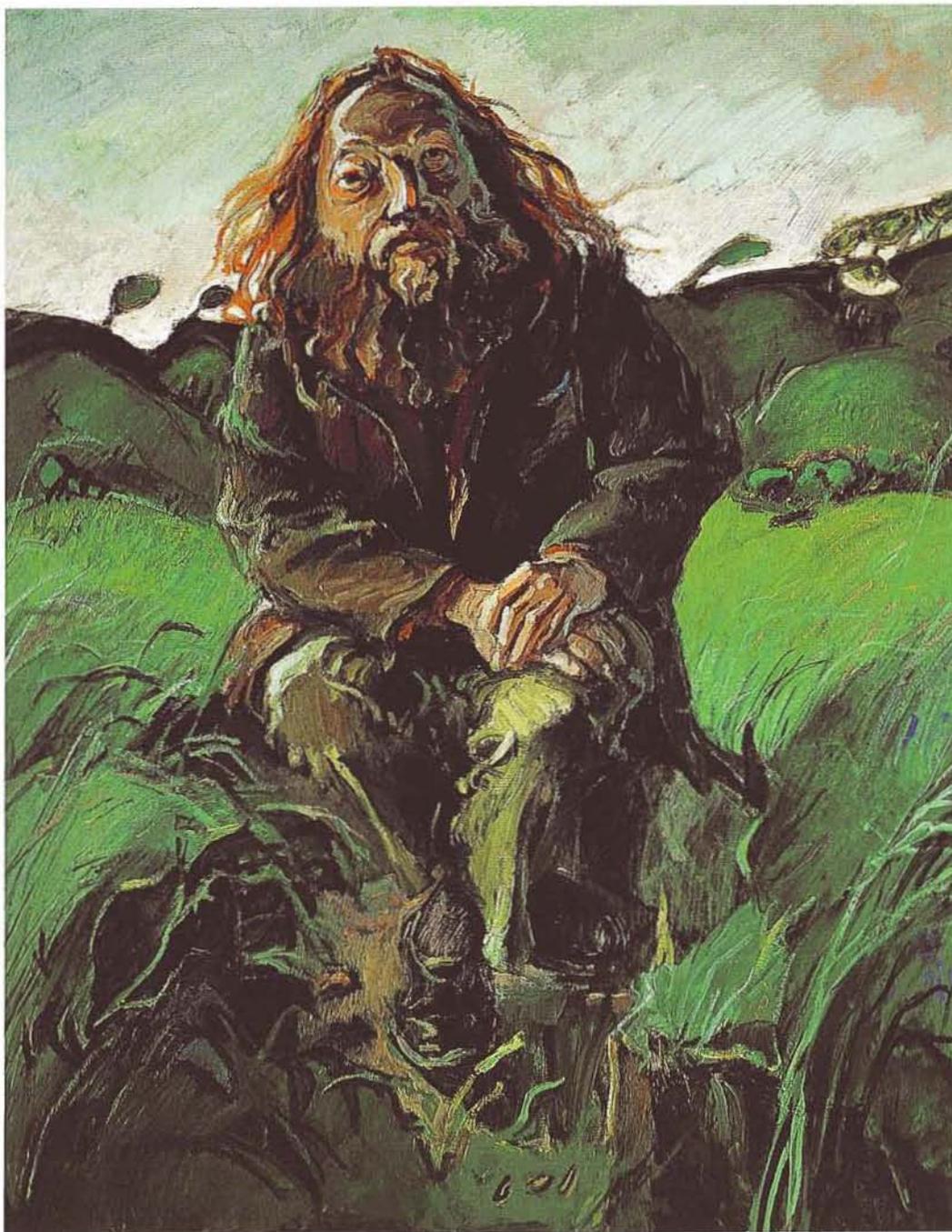




*Huis Nymph* 1978  
Oil on canvas  
983 x 750mm  
Collection of the Artist

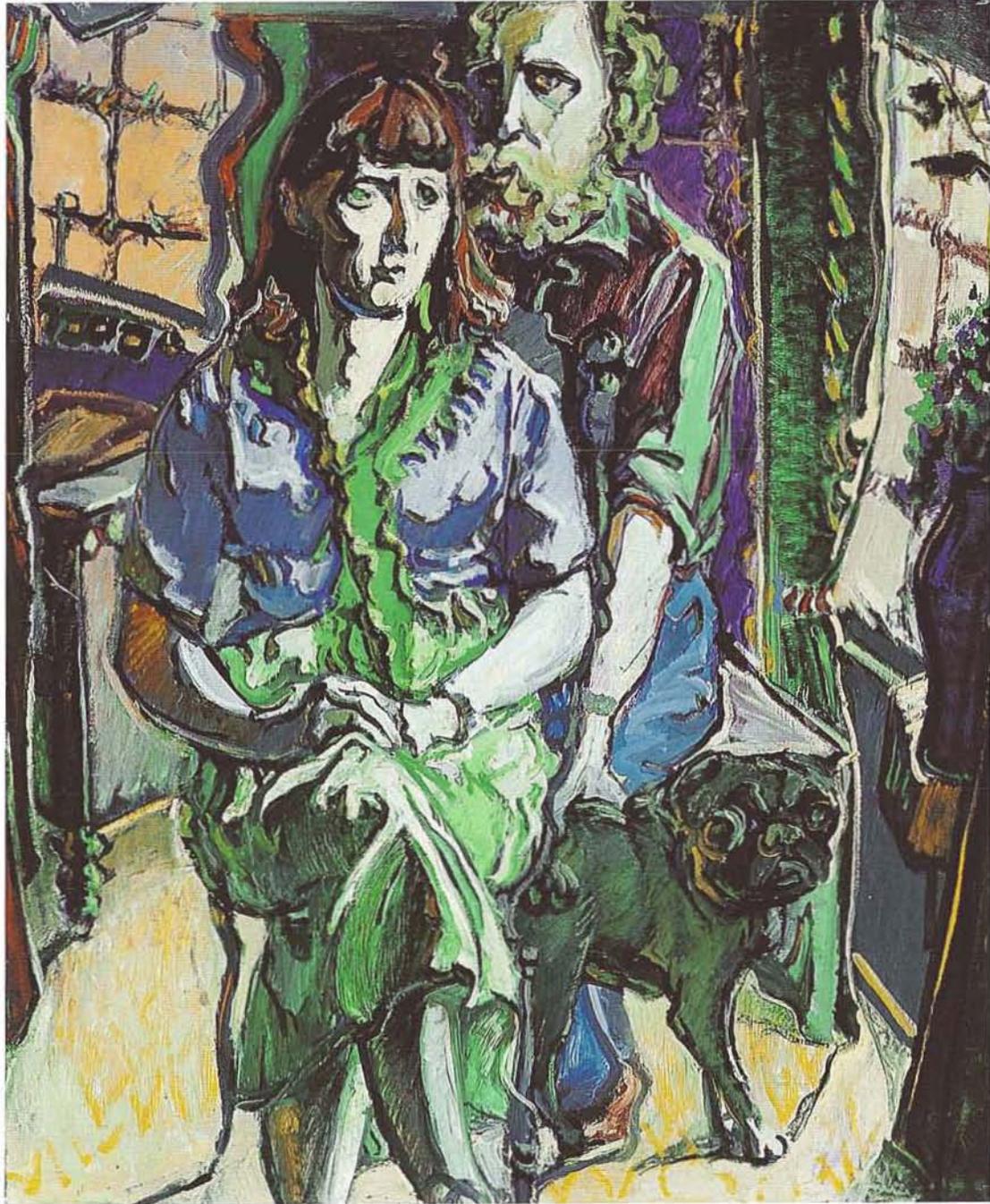
*Huia Couple Linda and Leo* 1978/79  
Oil on hardboard  
1810 x 1370mm  
Collection of Robert McDougall Art Gallery





*Portrait of the Poet, Denys Trussell 1978*  
Oil on canvas  
1200 x 940mm  
Collection of Auckland Art Gallery  
Toi o Tamaki

*Herne Bay Couple* 1978.  
Oil on canvas  
1200 x 990mm  
Collection of the Artist

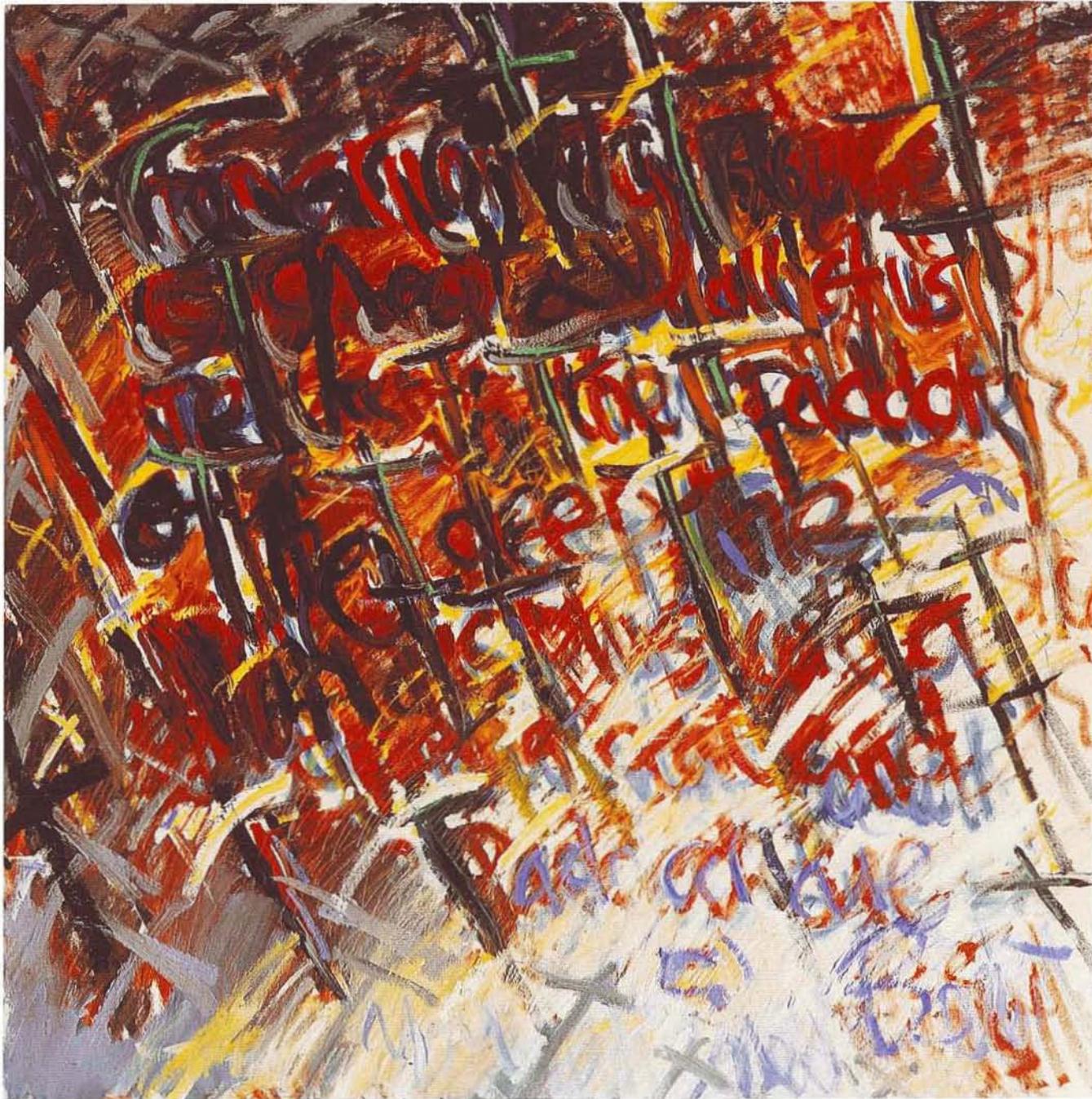




*Huia Dances* 1978  
Oil on canvas  
890 x 890mm  
Collection of the Artist

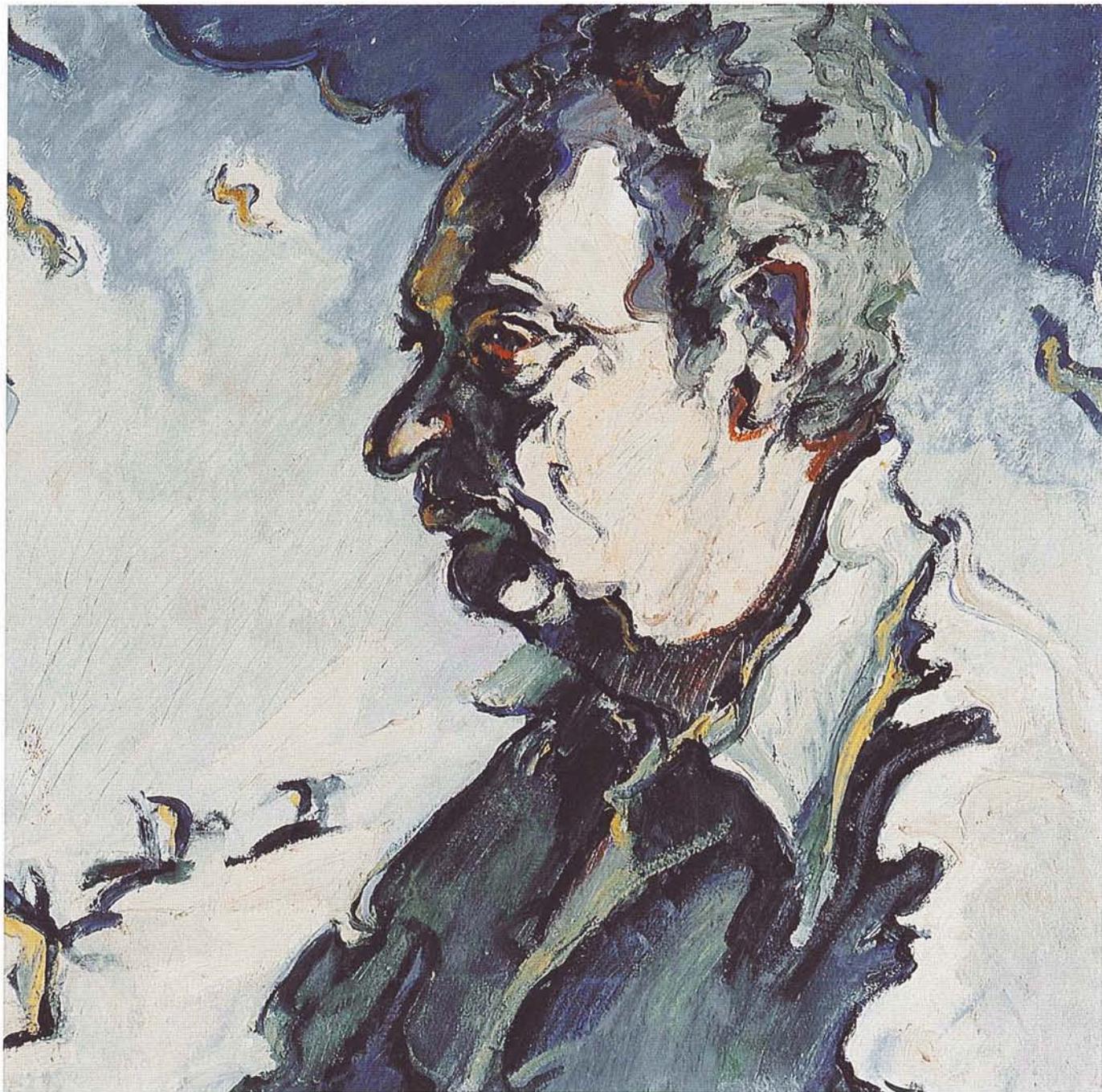
*Portrait of Mrs Oliver* 1979  
Oil on canvas  
1012 x 1012mm  
Collection of Robert McDougall Art Gallery





*In the Paddock of the Deep, Painted Poem 1980*  
Oil on canvas  
1090 x 1100mm  
Collection of the Artist

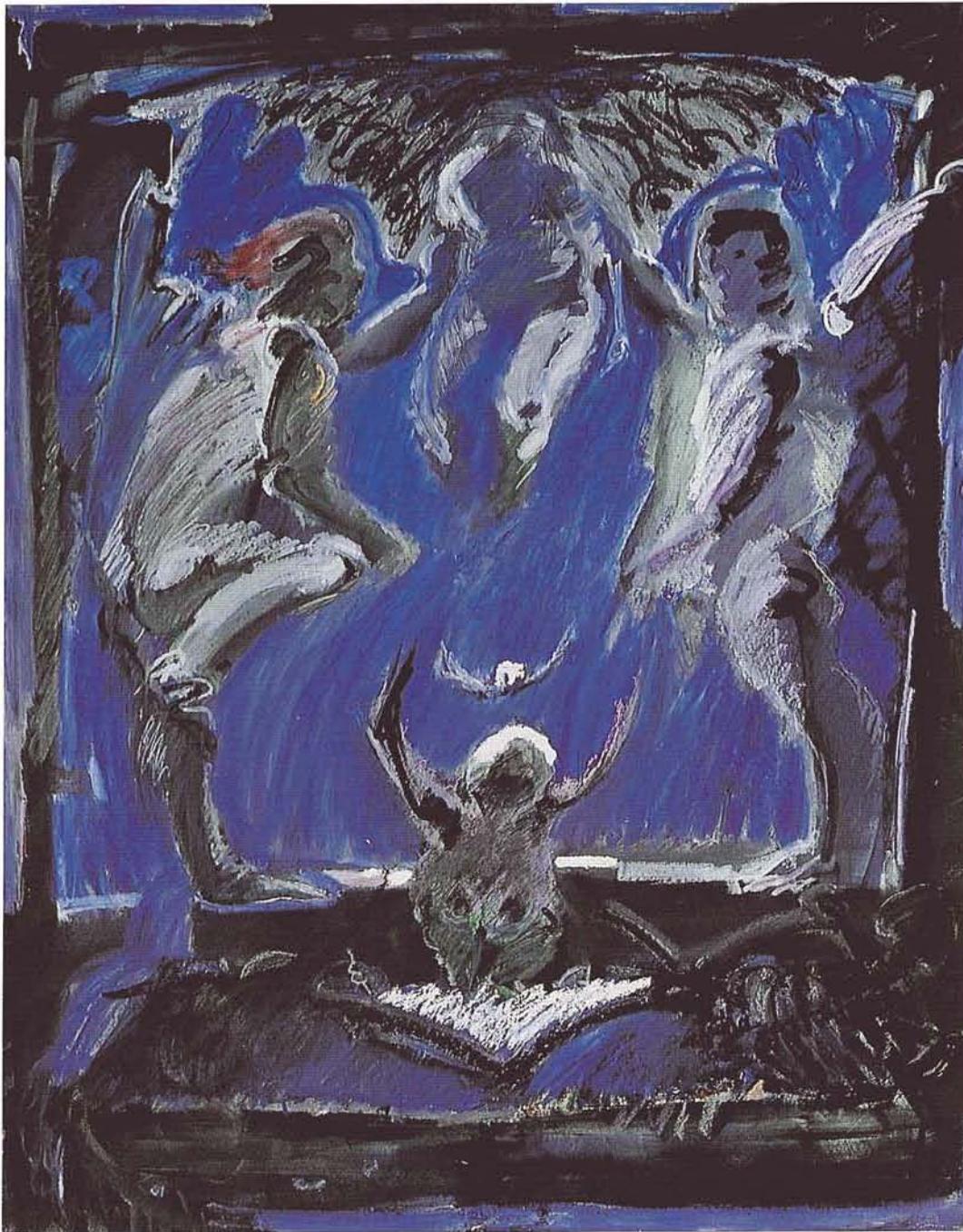
*Portrait of Gregorio, Italy 1980*  
Oil on board  
510 x 500mm  
Collection of the Artist





*Terremoto* 1980  
Oil on canvas  
1130 x 1130mm  
Collection of the Artist

*Theatre – The Ascension of the Holy Spirit* 1984  
Oil on paper  
1200 x 960mm  
Collection of the Artist

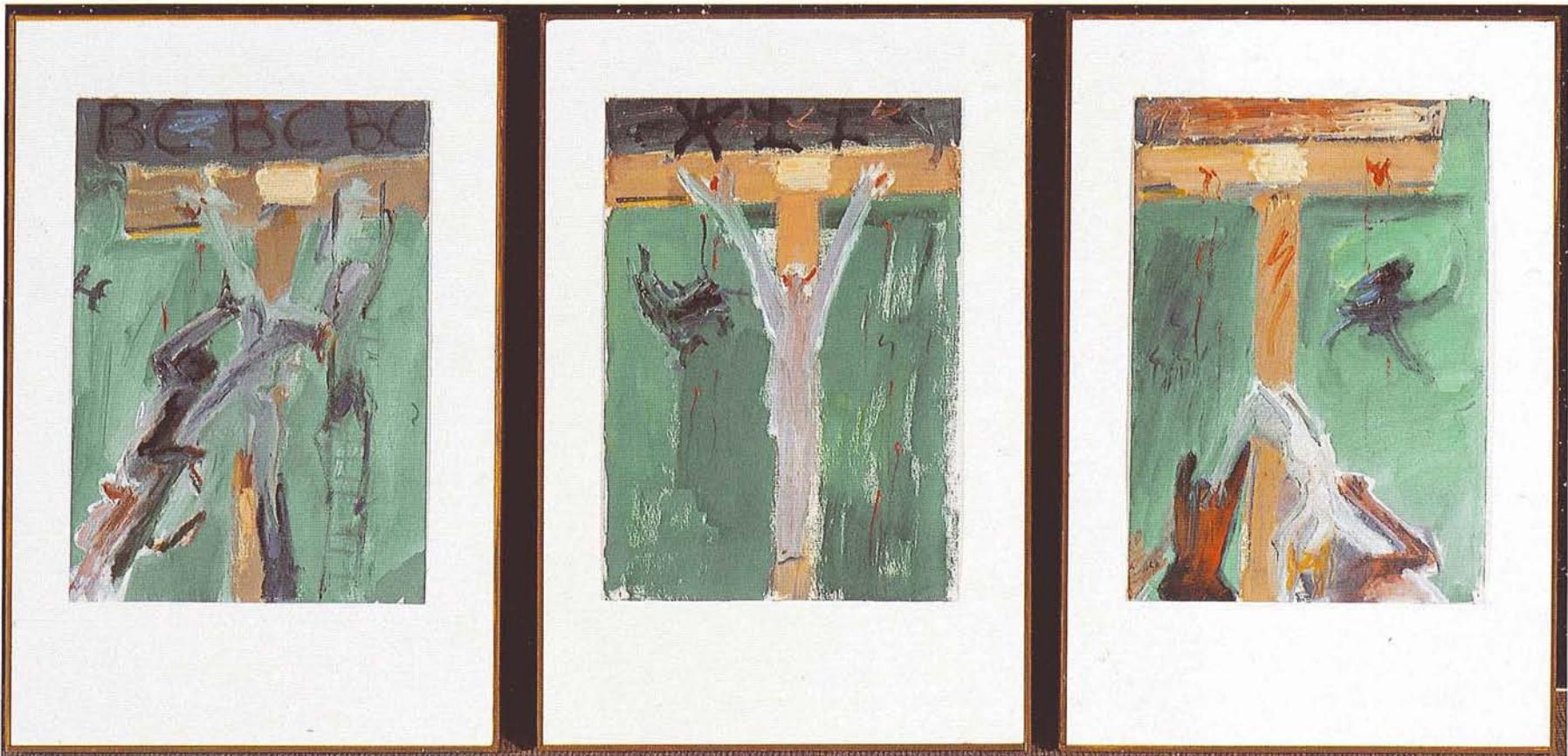




*Covent Garden from the Gods* 1982  
Oil on canvas  
945 x 870mm  
Collection of the Artist



*Crucifixion Triptych* 1985  
Oil on board  
1230 x 2314mm  
Collection of the Artist



*Crucifixion Triptych (Dunedin) 1987*  
Oil on paper on card on particle board  
610 x 1260mm  
Collection of the Artist

*The Last White Hero of the Western World* 1987  
Oil on canvas  
1010 x 1065mm  
Collection of the Artist





*A Fatal Attraction at Taylors Mistake 1987*  
Oil on paper  
440 x 610mm  
Collection of the Artist

*Heaven and Blood* 1988  
Oil on canvas  
1155 x 1525mm  
Collection of the Artist



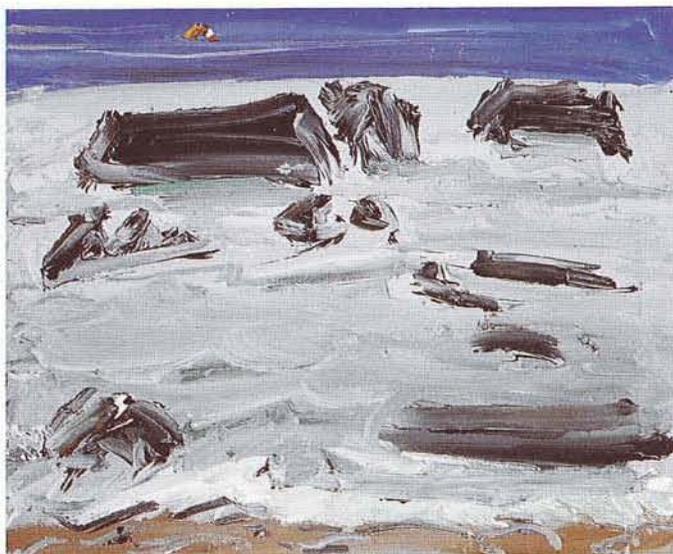


*Sentence of Death* 1987  
Oil on watercolour paper  
680 x 590mm  
Collection of the Artist



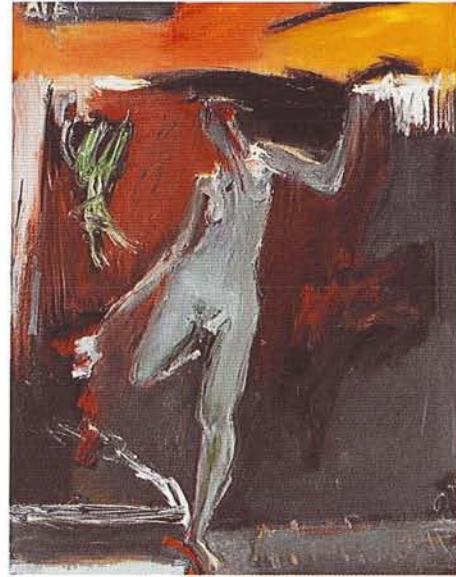
*Go Home Pommy Bastard 1 and 2* 1991  
Oil on canvas  
940 x 1880mm  
Collection of the Artist

*Grey Variations 12 Mile* 1993  
Oil on canvas on board  
500 x 620mm  
Collection of the Artist

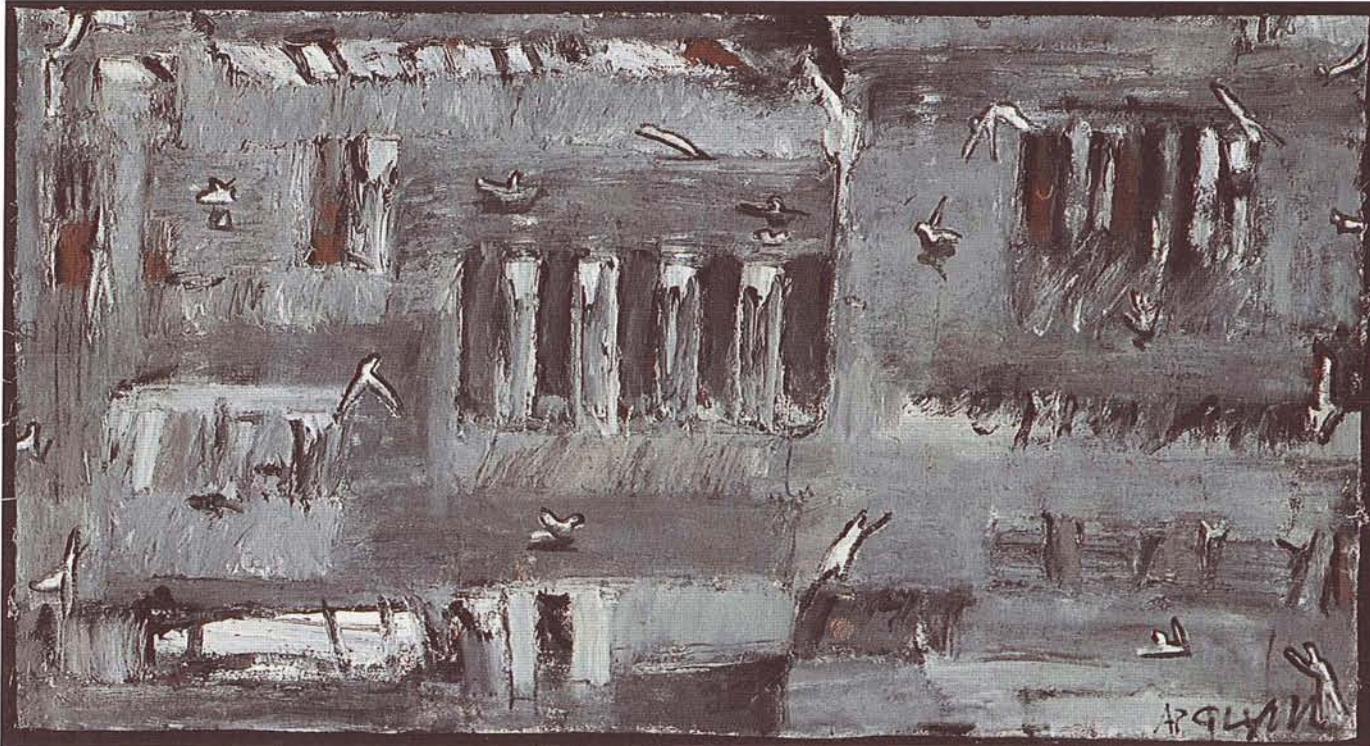


*Black Tasman* 1993/94  
Oil on canvas  
1075 x 1980mm  
Collection of Robert McDougall Art Gallery



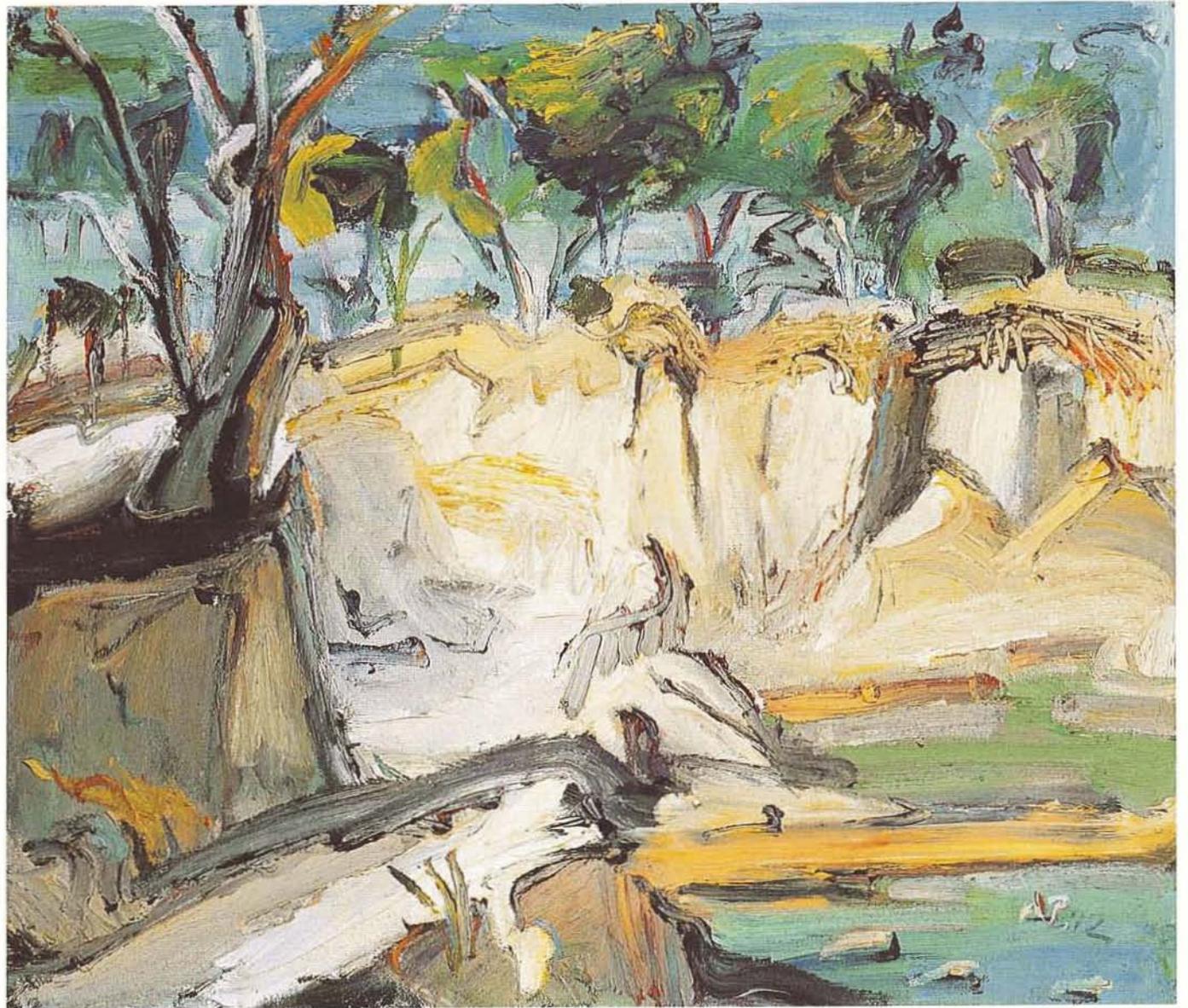


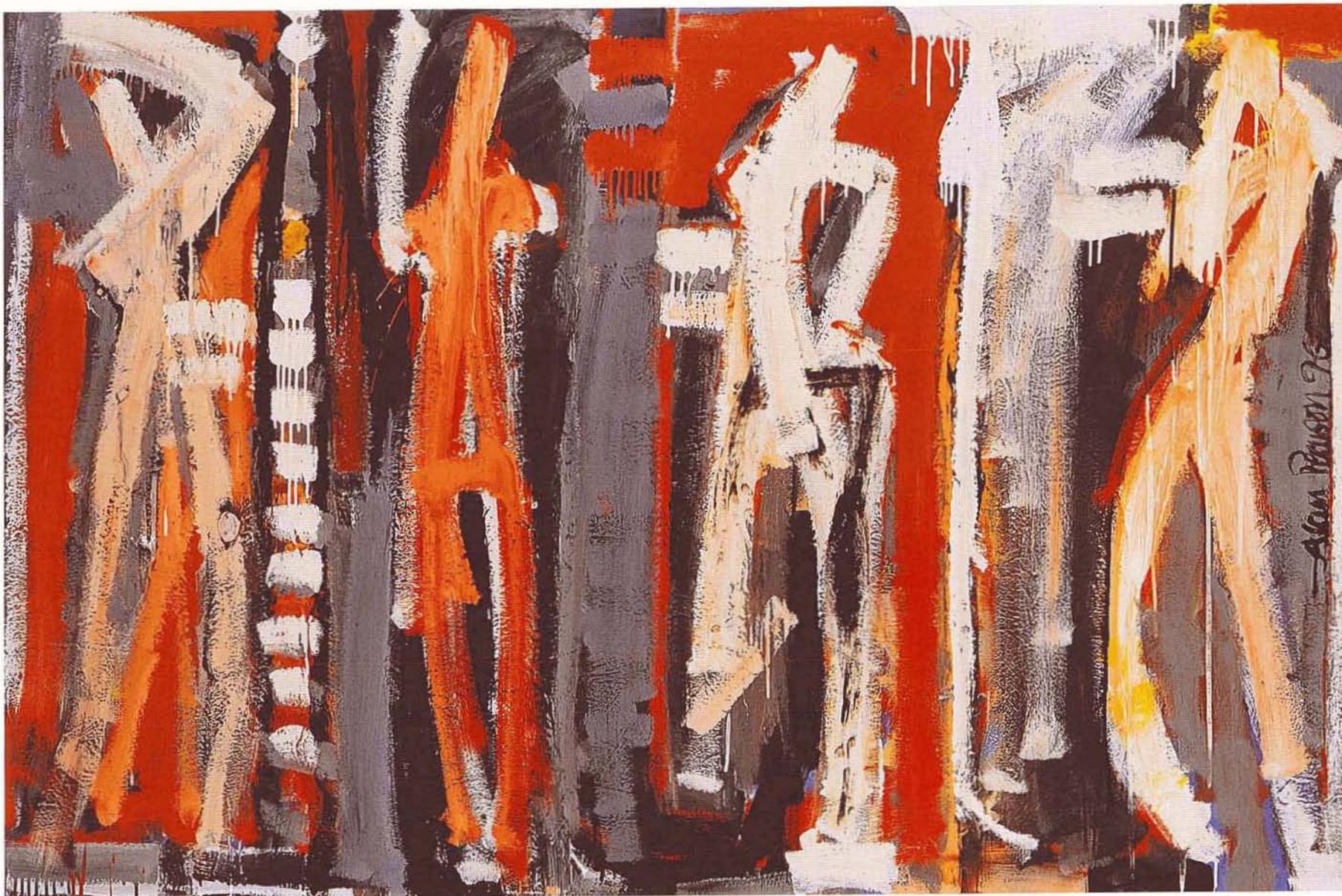
*Flight from the Night* 1995  
Oil on canvas  
1265 x 1015mm  
Collection of the Artist



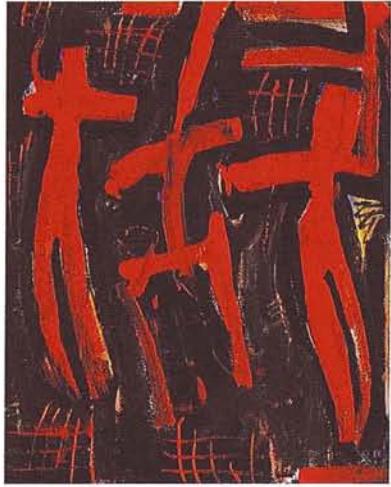
*Sea Pictures* 1994  
Oil on canvas on board  
680 x 1210mm  
Collection of the Artist

*Lightning Ridge (Plein-air)* 1992  
Oil on canvas on board  
665 x 570mm  
Private collection

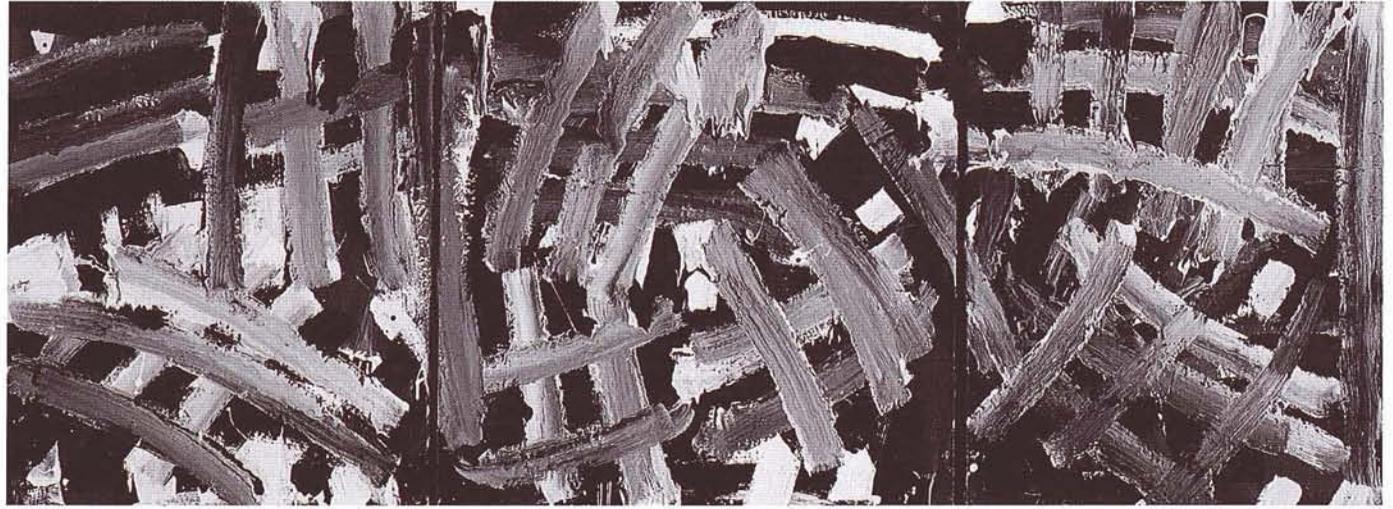




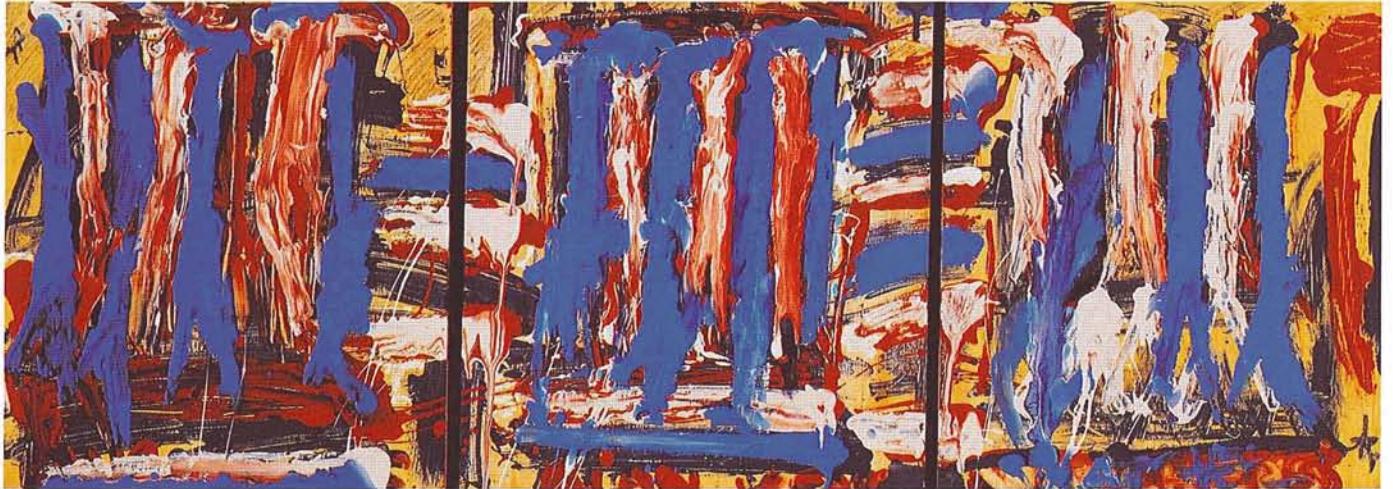
*White Tribe* 1996  
Enamel on board  
1200 x 1800mm  
Collection of the Artist



Above: *Flight from the Graveyard*, Whitecliffs, NSW 1996  
Enamel on canvas  
1260 x 1010mm  
Collection of the Artist



Above right: *Requiem for Marie Staples (Triptych)* 1997  
Enamel on canvas  
600 x 1610mm  
Collection of the Artist



Right: *Australian Symphony (Triptych)* 1997/98  
Enamel on board  
460 x 1200mm  
Collection of the Artist



Above left: *Quartet: Within* 1998/99  
Oil on canvas  
1220 x 3560mm  
Collection of Robert McDougall Art Gallery

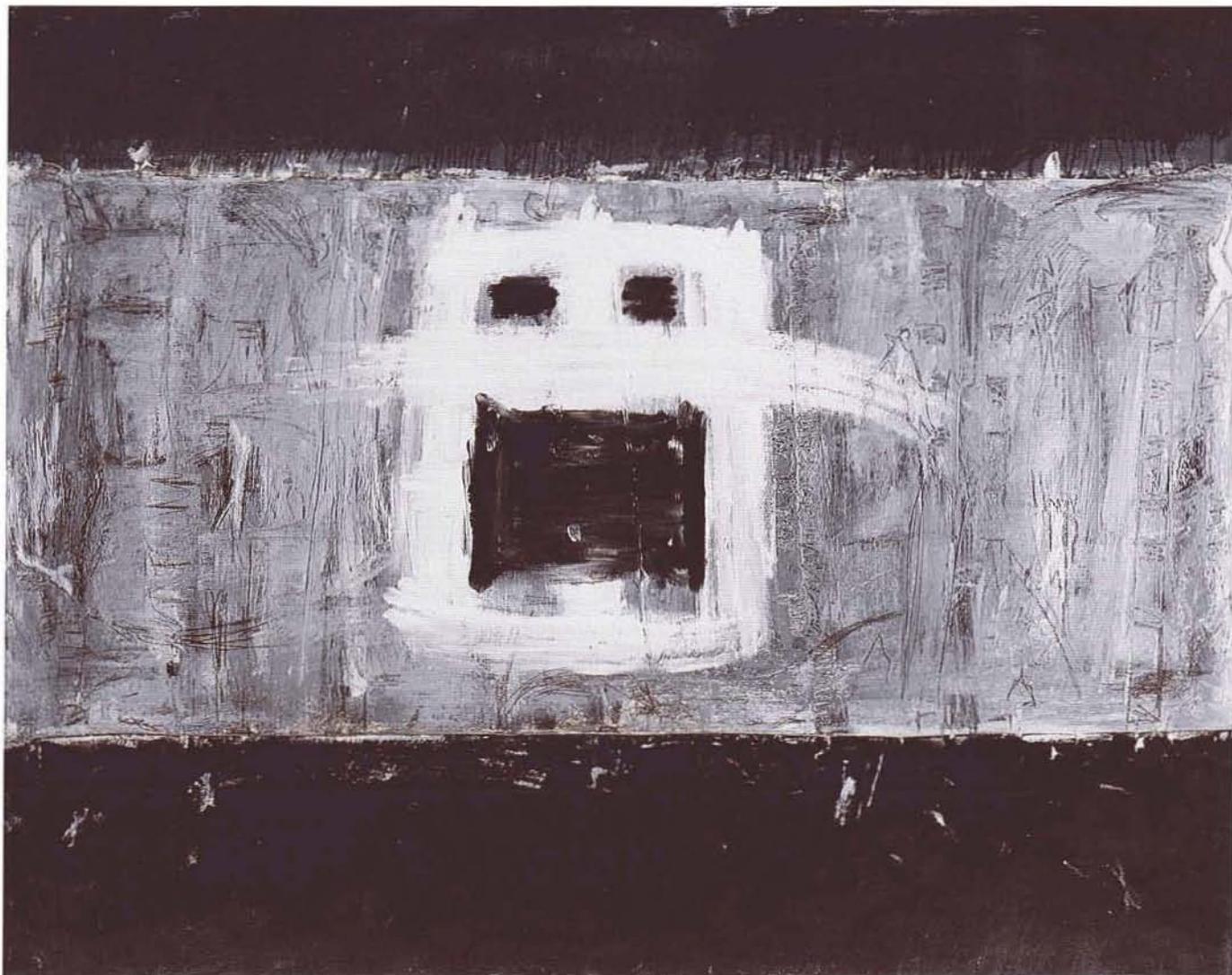


Left: *Embarkation to the Isle of the Dead* 1998/99  
Oil on canvas on board  
450 x 1520mm  
Collection of the Artist



Above: *Six Heads Waiting for Mortality* 1997  
Charcoal on paper  
1700 x 1200mm  
Collection of the Artist

Right: *Last Moment* 1998  
Oil on canvas  
1000 x 1260mm  
Collection of the Artist





*Blood Dance 1997*  
Oil on canvas  
1200 x 1930mm  
Collection of the Artist

*Is There Any Room For Me* 1999  
Oil on canvas  
1400 x 1690mm  
Collection of the Artist



## Errata

Page 13: '...Gaelic theory of literary origins...' should read 'Gallic'.

Page 14: '...Heinrich Boll...' should read '...Heinrich Böll...'

Page 16: The sentence beginning '...And often there is...' should read in full: '...And often there is a similar raggedness of surface suppressing fluency in the interests of a tougher engagement with the eye, placing, thereby, the onus of understanding less on optically mediated secondary qualities than on the primaries of understanding.'

Page 17: The sentence beginning '...For Roger Fry and the Pre-Raphaelites...' should read: '...For Roger Fry and the Pre-Raphaelites it was as if Turner had never existed, and even as late as the mid-1950s Herbert Read could write that Turner was "naïve" and "bore the stamp of insanity" and that there was "no settled opinion about Turner's greatness"...'.

Page 38: Catalogue entry 6, *Portrait of Coral* 1969, should be dated 1966 and should show the collection as being The Rutherford Trust Collection, not Electro Corp. Wellington.

Page 40: Catalogue entry 90, *The Elitist* 1973, should be dated 1993.

Page 42: 'Group Exhibitions' should have the exhibition dates as follows:

## Group Exhibitions

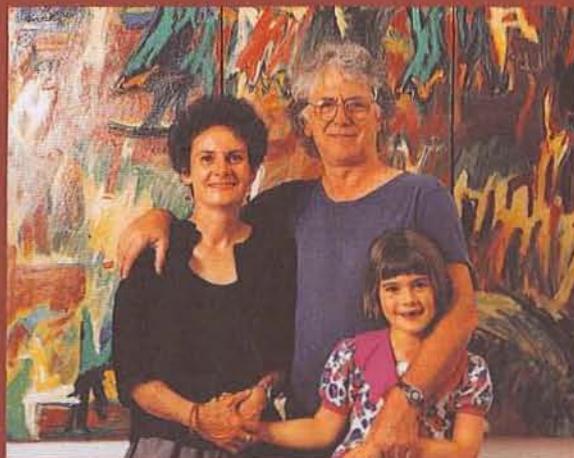
- 1959 Fine Arts Diploma Graduate Exhibition, Canterbury Society of Arts (CSA), Christchurch
- 1962 The Group, CSA, Christchurch  
Annual Autumn Exhibition, Canterbury Society of Arts, Christchurch
- 1963 Hays Prize Exhibitors, CSA, Christchurch
- 1964 Annual Autumn Exhibition, CSA, Christchurch
- 1965 New Zealand Artists in London, New Zealand House Gallery.  
Qantas Gallery, London.
- 1966 Camberwell Gallery, London.
- 1971 Thirty Plus, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.
- 1972 Contemporary Artists, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.
- 1974 Portrait Exhibition, New Vision Gallery, Auckland.
- 1975 Artists' Gardens, New Vision Gallery, Auckland.
- 1976 Land, CSA Gallery, Christchurch,  
Pan Pacific Arts Festival, Noumea;  
NZ Drawing, National touring exhibition.
- 1977 Summer '77, New Vision Gallery, Auckland.
- 1978 New Year, New Works, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland.
- 1979 Small Works, Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland.

- 1980 New Vision Auckland; Denis Cohn Galleries, Auckland; CSA Gallery, Christchurch.
- 1983 Centenary Exhibition, Edward Lucie-Smith, Leinster Gallery, London.
- 1984 Paperchase, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch;  
Anxious Images (national touring exhibition), Auckland City Art Gallery.
- 1985 Acquisitions, Auckland City Art Gallery.
- 1986 Piece of Art for Peace (national touring exhibition), Robert McDougall Art Gallery Christchurch.
- 1987 The Self (national touring exhibition), Suter Art Gallery Nelson.  
President's exhibition, Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru.  
Dunedin Painters, Hocken Library, Dunedin;  
Patricia Bosshard Gallery, Dunedin.
- 1988 Canterbury Painters, Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Acquisitions, Auckland City Art Gallery;  
August Exhibition, Peter Small Galleries, Christchurch, Wellington, Auckland  
Cityscape, CSA Gallery, Christchurch;  
Artists' Self Portraits, Moray Gallery, Dunedin;  
President's Exhibition, CSA Gallery, Christchurch.
- 1989 Drawing Exhibition, Hocken Library Gallery, University of Otago, Dunedin.
- 1990 Goodman Suter Biennale, Suter Art Gallery, Nelson.  
Canterbury Perspective, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.  
Self Environment, CSA Gallery, Christchurch.  
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- 1996 New Zealand Real, Milford Galleries, Dunedin
- 1998 Nature through the Frames of Culture CoCA, Christchurch  
40 out of 40 Forty Canterbury artists 1958-1998, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch





# heaven and blood



Alan Pearson, born in 1929, lives in Christchurch, is married to Alison and has a 13-year-old daughter, Nellie. Arguably New Zealand's foremost expressionist painter and portraitist he has a large public following and is represented in many public and private collections both in New Zealand and overseas.

The 1999 retrospective exhibition, Heaven and Blood, that this well-illustrated publication supports, spans 40 years of Pearson's life as an artist and incorporates both painting and drawing. His career as an artist has not always been easy; the title of this publication and the exhibition reflects the dichotomy of Pearson's life and work in New Zealand.

Cover design by Tim Chapman



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MCDUGALL  
ART GALLERY  
AND ANNEX

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HAZARD PRESS  
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ART GALLERY

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