

Evelyn Page SEVEN DECADES



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Janet Paul and Neil Roberts

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PREFACE

Evelyn Page's life is one of extraordinary zest and independence of spirit. These qualities have been made visible in the paintings she has created over seventy years – vibrant, perceptive, direct expressions of her responses to sights, places and people. Landscapes, portraits and still lifes all reveal her delight in interpreting the visual experience.

The result of seven decades of activity has never been seen in one exhibition beyond Wellington. This exhibition has been brought together to survey her achievement and make her work available to audiences throughout New Zealand.

During the course of research for this book and the preparation for the 1987 tour of the exhibition *Evelyn Page – Seven Decades*, assistance, advice and information has been given by many.

Acknowledgement is made of the major contribution by Janet Paul and the Robert McDougall Art Gallery Curator, Neil Roberts, for research and writing. Evelyn Page, with characteristic grace and good spirits, contributed much biographical information and details of her works.

For their valuable help we also wish to thank the staffs of the Auckland City Art Gallery, National Art Gallery, Dowse Art Museum, Alexander Turnbull Library, Victoria University, Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Hocken Library, and the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Many private owners of works by Evelyn Page were most patient and cooperative in providing access to their collections and granting permission to reproduce works. Their assistance is very much appreciated.

A major acknowledgement of gratitude must be extended to the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand for their considerable financial assistance, without which neither the book nor the touring exhibition would have been possible.

John Coley
Robert McDougall Art Gallery

Biography
JANET PAUL

Childhood

Evelyn Margaret Polson was born in Christchurch on 23 April 1899. She was the youngest by eleven years of a family of seven, so much younger that she felt she owed her upbringing to her sister, Winifred, twenty-one years her senior. She described her parents as Victorians; upright, devoted and intensely private people. Her mother, Mary Elizabeth Renshaw, born in the north of England, had come with her parents to Dunedin as a young woman.

John Sutherland Polson, Evelyn's father, had been born in 1851, near Peebles in the Highlands of Scotland and had emigrated as a child. He had married Elizabeth Renshaw in 1877 and moved to Christchurch where he became clerk in charge of accounts, and later manager, of the Suckling brothers boot and leather factory.

The Suckling brothers were Open Brethren: John and Elizabeth Polson joined that community. Old John Suckling and his brother had, to quote his daughter,

Shoehorned Papa out of Presbyterianism. They were a sort of offshoot of the Quakers and were upset by conformity in religion. At their meetings they sat in a ring and let the spirit move them. I was taken to meetings and sat at the back out of the chosen few: I used to read *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.¹

The house where Evelyn grew up was a square villa with a central passage extending from a wide front verandah to a big kitchen across the back of the house. It was surrounded by a garden made memorable by a big mulberry tree.

My father was mad on native plants and loved trees both European and native. In the backgarden was an enormous ribbonwood tree. An orchard grew down one side. Round us were paddocks with gorse hedges and larks. At the back an old gabled house stood in a six acre plantation.

John Polson and his wife had been in their early forties when their youngest child was born. She was their delight and grew up with the full attention of her whitehaired parents – her school friends thought they were her grandparents. Her father would take her long walks from Sydenham to Port Levy on a Saturday afternoon, pointing out the seabirds and naming the native plants. 'Both of them emphasised to me so many things. I felt I had been over-brought up. I went to the other extreme with my children.'

Although she had six siblings Evelyn really knew only her sisters since her two brothers left home soon after she began school. All four girls were encouraged to study music and painting by parents who themselves had talent but little training. Her sisters Caroline and Alice were both students at the Canterbury College School of Art when Alfred Walsh and Sydney Thompson were on the staff. Neither continued to paint seriously although Caroline would occasionally paint a watercolour landscape. Alice went from Canterbury to three years study in Rome, Florence and Milan, but completely gave up painting when she married.

Evelyn, encouraged by her older sisters, learned to read both words and music and to draw before she went to Sydenham School in 1906. In 1908 she began piano lessons. A pre-school photograph already shows a startling maturity. An observant, direct, strong-willed and beautiful child, she was

¹ These and all following unidentified quotations are taken from the recorded conversations of Evelyn Page and Janet Paul from 1979 to 1985



FIG. 1 Sydenham, Christchurch (c.1913).
Private collection

understandably the centre of attention. 'The whole family hung about and egged me on towards art school. As a great treat I was allowed to paint on cardboard with the remains of oil paint on Caroline's palette.'

First Decade Training

Because her father was the subject of her admiration, Evelyn early expressed her intention to learn book-keeping and shorthand to 'help' him in his business and insisted on being sent to the Christchurch Technical School. However the reality of that did not interest her and in 1915 she commenced classes at the Canterbury College School of Art. It was possible to go there on proficiency and take a course combining art with a general secondary education. There were about a dozen junior pupils taught by staff from the university and the School of Art staff each gave them a morning or afternoon. Richard Wallwork was the life master, Cecil Kelly took them sketching or set up still life and Leonard Booth taught drawing from the antique. She attended the School of Art from 1915-1922.²

Herdman-Smith was the Director until 1918. To teenage Evelyn he appeared 'a bit of a phoney - used to wear black velvet jackets and cravats, and white silk shirts with flowing sleeves.' She has some memories of the shock art school gave her, coming as she did from a prim Victorian home. On her first day she was sent to the life-class. The nude model was male. She was told to get herself a donkey. Why on earth would she need a donkey? She was given a wooden contraption to sit astride and rest her

² For details concerning Evelyn Page's School of Art career see also Neil Roberts's essay in this book



FIG. 2 Evelyn
Margaret Polson
(c.1903).

paper on, and set to work on a large drawing which reached the privates and the bottom of the page simultaneously. She turned her paper over and went on.

Outside the life-class she was hailed by an older girl who paused in her rush downstairs to cry 'Well met by moonlight!' It was Ngaio Marsh, later distinguished for her theatre productions and detective fiction. That encounter was the beginning of a long friendship.

In her five years at the School of Art Evelyn Polson lived 'a very orderly life' at home. She walked from Sydenham to the School. She read novels, 'was transported by them', by Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, by Dickens's *Bleak House*, by Henry James and Edith Wharton. Her parents' interests reinforced her own. They subscribed to the English art periodical *The Studio* and each year received the Royal Academy catalogue.

Since students came and went, her friends varied. Margaret Anderson, Ceridwen Thornton, Ngaio Marsh and Viola Macmillan Brown remained close friends for life. A more flexible group included James Courage, Rhona Haszard, Ronald McKenzie, James and Alfred Cook. Later John Weeks returned from the war. 'He was great fun in the life-class.'

Olivia Spencer Bower did not become a student until Evelyn was a senior. Some students returning from study in Edinburgh, London or Paris, talked of Cézanne, Gauguin, van Gogh, Lhote, but visual stimulus was more English than European. Her teachers were either English or graduates from Canterbury who had studied in England. They directed their students to *The Studio* and reproductions of Augustus John, not to the Cubists or copies of *Blast*.

It was usual for young students to be set to draw from the antique for a year before being allowed to draw from a live model. However, Evelyn Polson's ability was so striking that she was sent to life drawing on her first day, while, as well, undergoing the strict training of antique drawing with Leonard Booth, not for one year but for five. She was made to work meticulously in charcoal. Looking back she views the exercise as having taught her to make 'frighteningly accurate photographs in pencil.' When she herself had to teach drawing from the antique she realised that she hated 'that sort of vision which had nothing to do with real painting.' She saw it as reinforcing an outmoded nineteenth century tradition and dearly wished that she could have discouraged the gifted William Sutton when he was her student from working so skilfully in that manner.

What I got from these years was a grounding in academic studies from the antique; in painting from life and landscape with set rules of composition. I do not remember being aware of colour as such until a chance remark from an elder sister [Caroline] who herself had studied at the School of Art: 'Why don't you try using pure colour?'

The artist, at eighty, may perhaps have predated her interest in pure colour when she added, 'from that remark a whole world had opened up.' In fact, pure colour was little evident in her work before her first trip to Europe in 1937.



PLATE I *Grapes fruit and wine* 1980 (cat. no. 63). Mr and Mrs N.R. Anderson, Wellington



PLATE 2 *Self portrait* (1916) (cat. no. 1).
Evelyn Page, Wellington

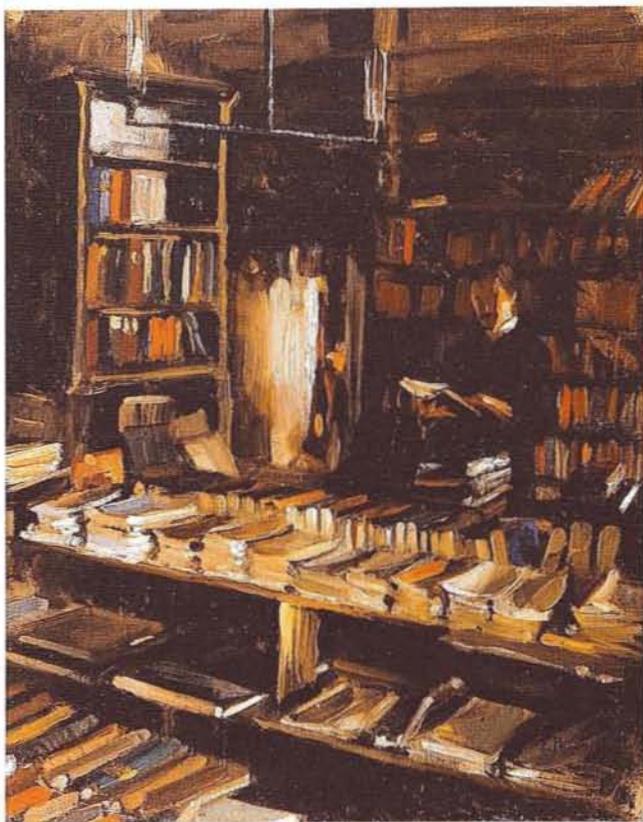


PLATE 3 *The old bookshop* 1922 (cat. no. 2). Robert McDougall Art
Gallery, Christchurch

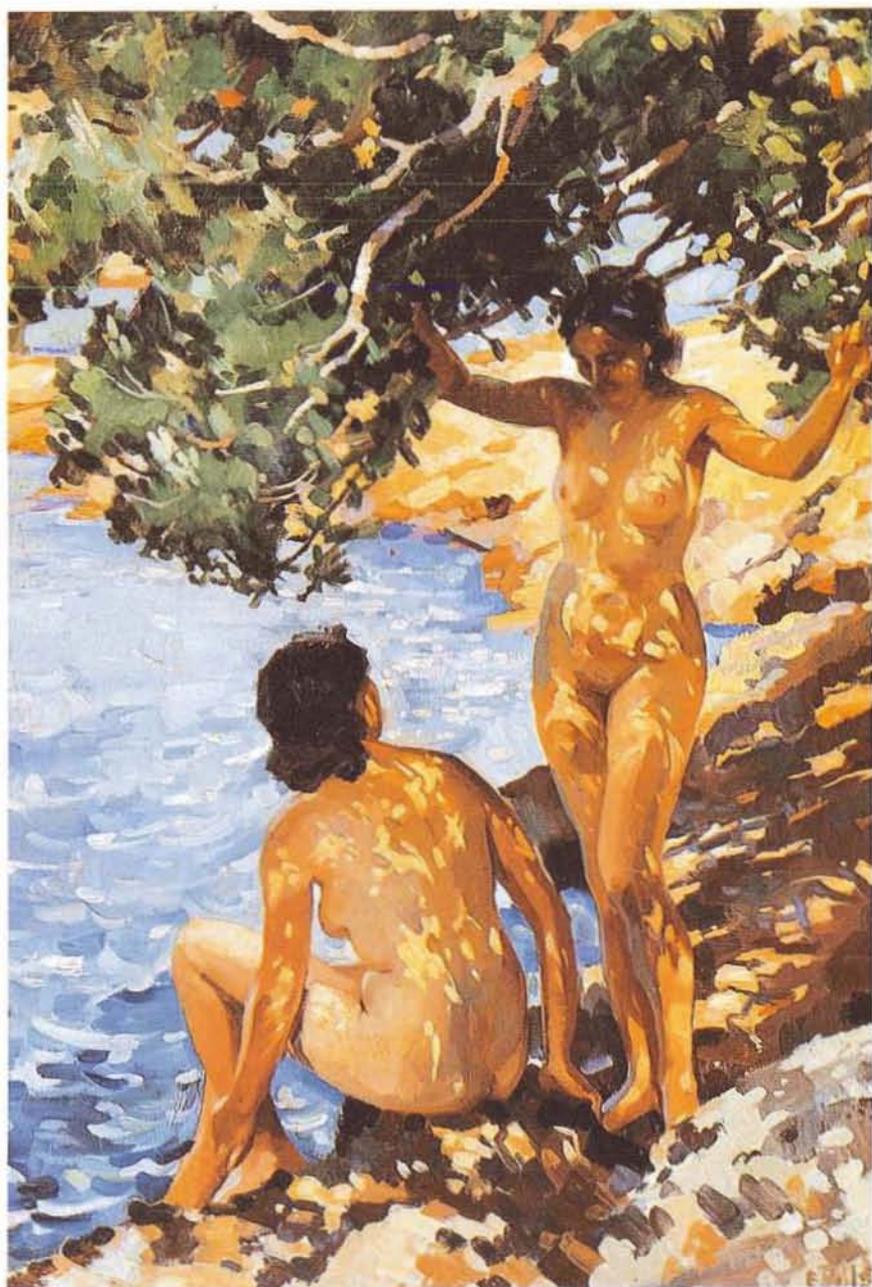


PLATE 4 *Pohutukawa Rina* (1930) (cat. no. 7). Christchurch Polytechnic

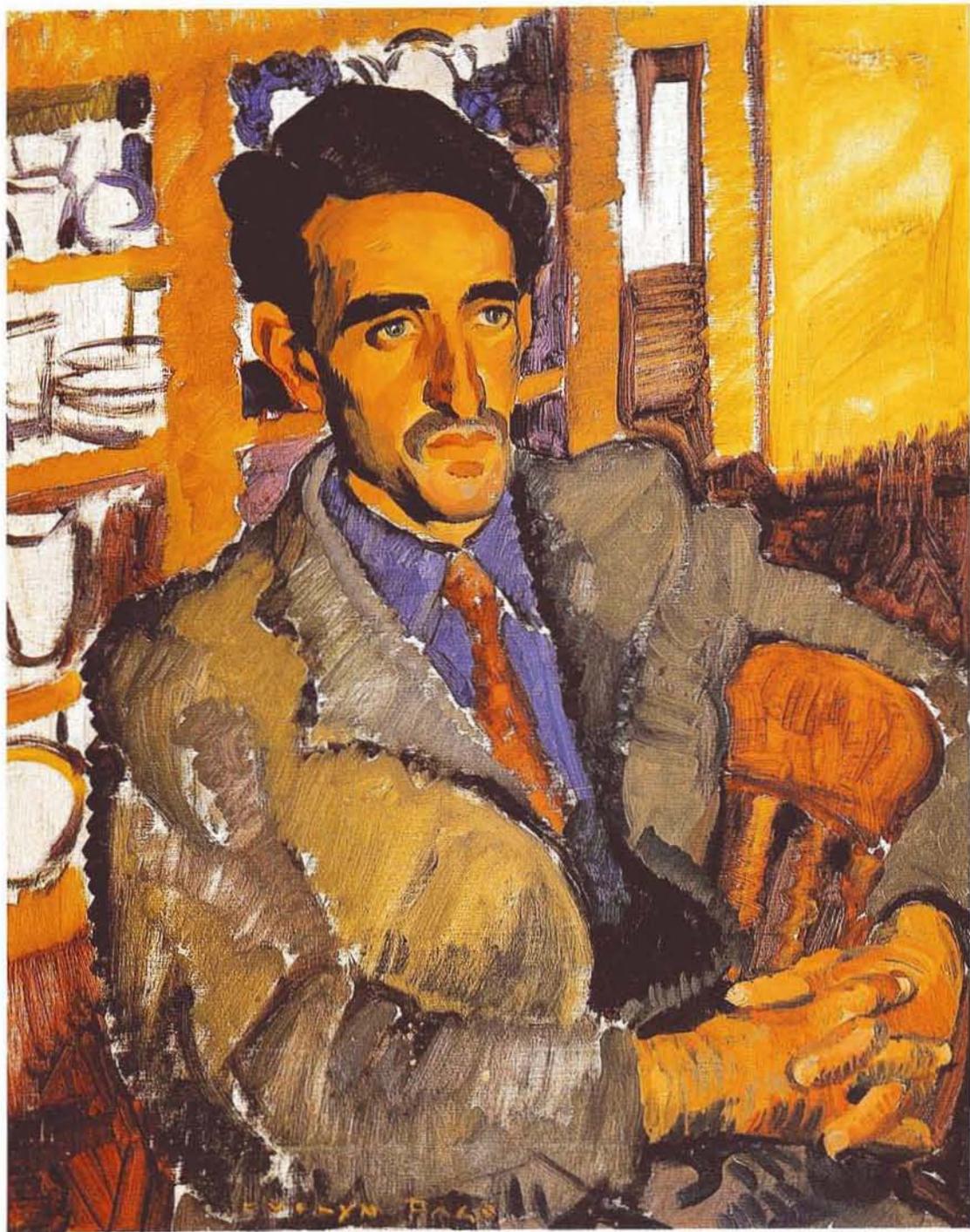


PLATE 5 *Charles Brasch 1937 (cat. no. 14). University of Otago, Dunedin*



PLATE 6 *Morten Hampstead* 1937 (cat. no. 15). Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch



PLATE 7 *Elespie at Governors Bay 1939* (cat. no. 17). *Dr and Mrs I. Prior, Wellington*

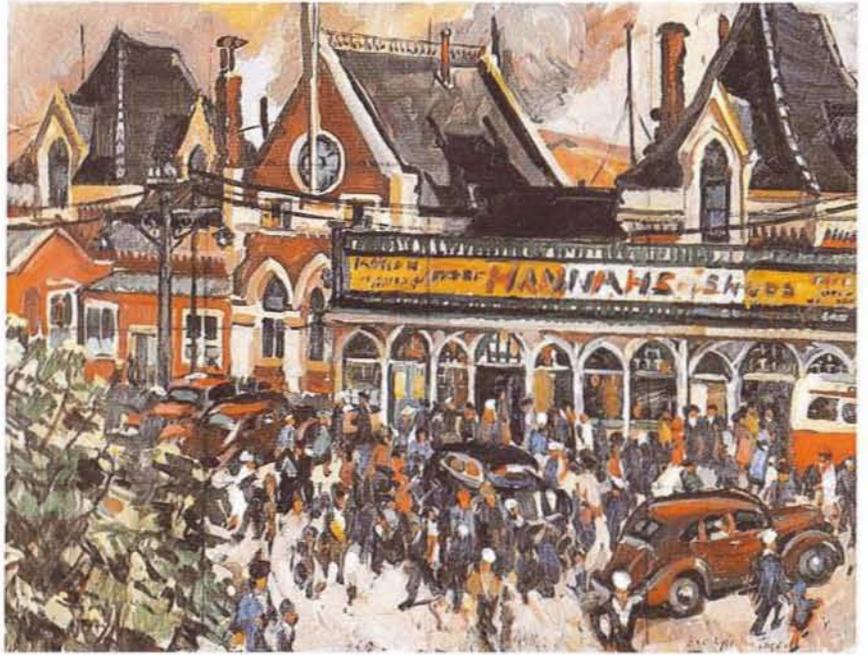


PLATE 8 *Christchurch Railway Station* (1944–45) (cat. no. 27). Mr J. Bristed, Wellington

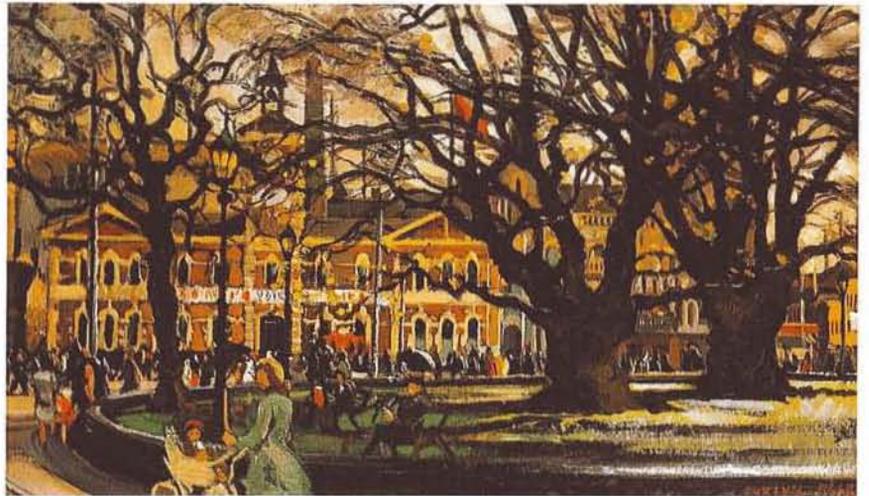


PLATE 9 *Post office Cathedral Square* (c.1945) (cat. no. 28). Hocken Library, Otago

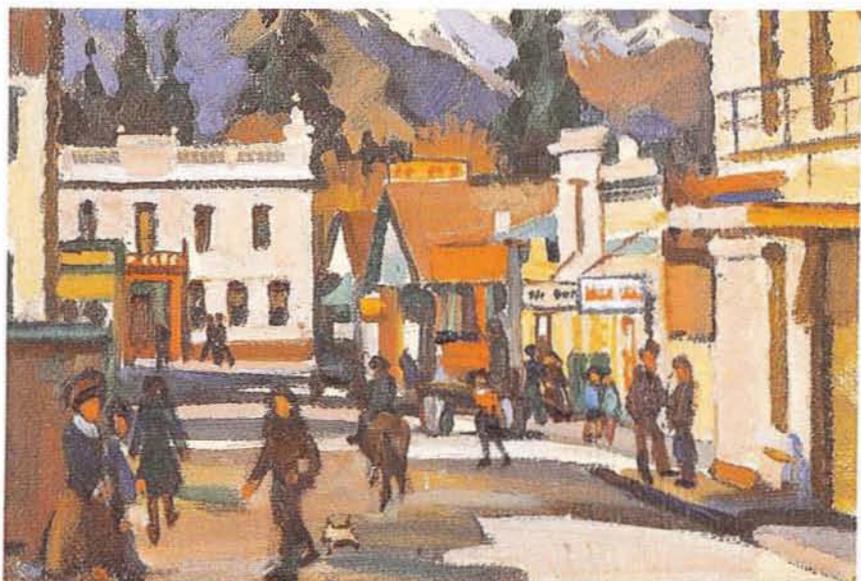


PLATE 10 *Towards Eichardts* (1941 or 1942) (cat. no. 19). Dr and Mrs I. Prior, Wellington



PLATE 11 *Admiral Byrd's flagship and sailors playing* 1947 (cat. no. 31). Mrs June Pottinger, Wellington

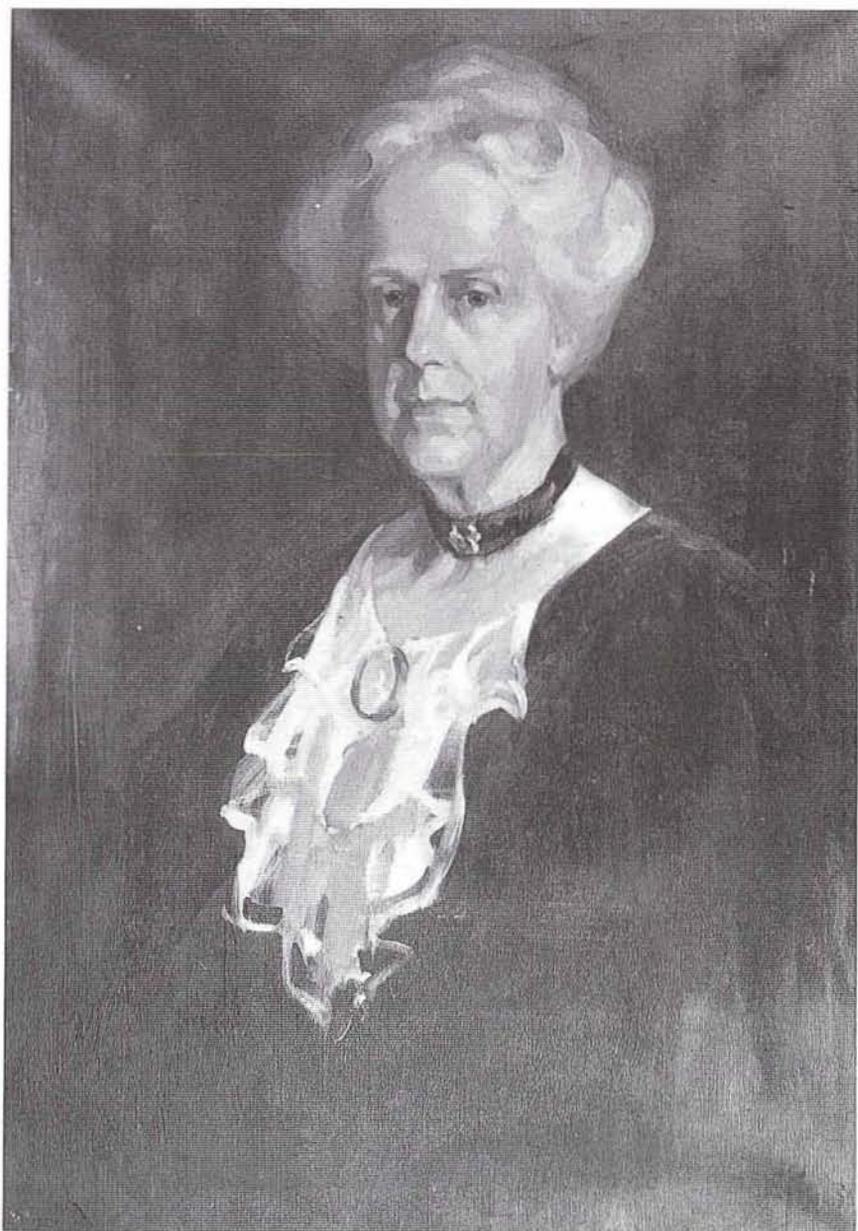


FIG. 3 *Portrait of
Mary Elizabeth Polson
(1923) (cat. no. 3). Mrs
A.C. Wilson,
Christchurch*

Instead, by 1921, the quality of two self portraits shows a painterly understanding of the niceties of tone. She was ready to begin her own career as a painter with strong, well-composed, freely painted landscapes in the best manner of the Canterbury School training. Their colour was pleasing but not adventurous.

In March 1922 Evelyn Polson was elected a working member of the Canterbury Society of Arts (CSA). That year she also exhibited in Wellington at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts (NZAFA) and the

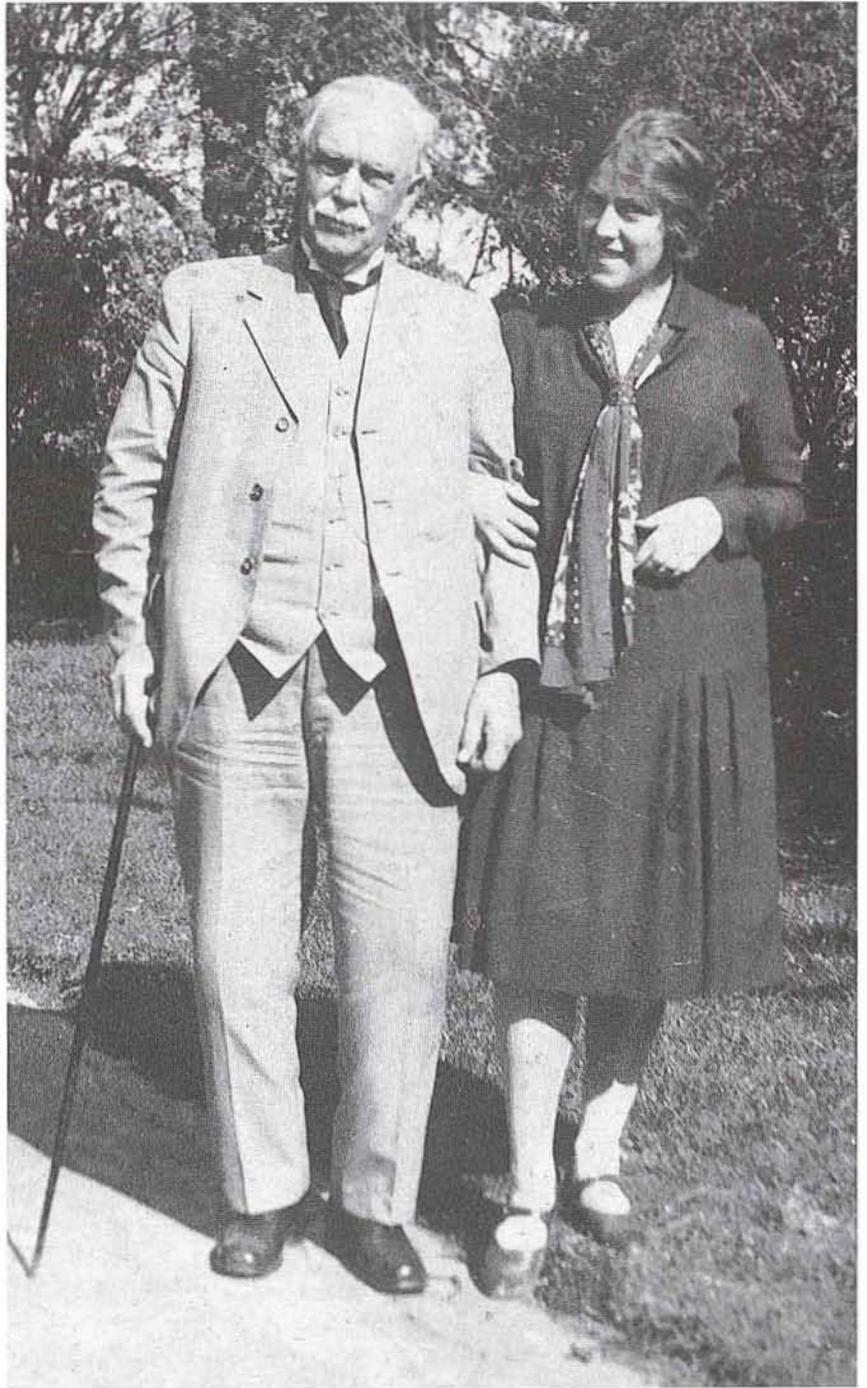


FIG. 4 Evelyn Polson and her father (c.1926).

Otago Society of Arts (OSA). In 1923 she sent work to the Auckland Society of Arts (ASA). That is, she established a professional circuit, contributing to an art society exhibition in each of the four main centres over most of the following ten years. In the 1920s there was little other exhibition space, though some artists' supply shops did show work. The only way a painter could make a modest contribution to a living was through the art societies. Some of Evelyn Polson's paintings did the rounds, others dropped out and were replaced, presumably as work was sold for four or five guineas.

Another pattern she established was a painting holiday each January. In 1923 Eve stayed with friends of her sister Caroline, a Highland family called Stewart, whose farm *Glenkenich* near Tapanui figures in her work. In Christchurch she did etching with Cora Wilding and they went out painting together. A huge medlar tree in the grounds of an old men's home at Sydenham was the subject of a deeply bitten etching for which the copper-plate is still in good condition.

Evelyn Polson would have been one of the 'large number of appreciators of painting' to attend an exhibition by Sydney Thompson in 1923. Reviewers were delighted with the native son returning after twelve years spent working in France. They reported the colonist's ultimate accolade, that 'his pictures were to be found in many European galleries, and in private collections in all parts of the world.' And they suggested that he had assimilated 'van Gogh, Cézanne, or Manet. In every picture colour and movement predominate masses of colour bold and brilliant – colour rich vibrant. There is no muddiness; neither . . . the mass of detail which clutters the work of the New Zealand artist. . . .'³

3 *Sun* (Christchurch) 20
December 1923

Thompson was lionised. Mrs Beswick, a passionate admirer, arranged for him to give private lessons in her garden. Evelyn Polson went, but briefly. He referred to her as 'his best pupil' but her memory is of being 'sick to death with old Syd's almond tree; he peppered the country with it.' It is likely that the artist has not wished to recall any indebtedness to Thompson, although her portrait of Lincoln Kearne, painted outside in the summer of 1924–25, shows a more direct use of pure colour and a freer brushstroke than earlier portraits which makes it nearer in style to Sydney Thompson.

What work of her contemporaries had impressed her? She remembers being 'bowled over' by one outstanding painting, the view through an old tram barn, by Rhona Haszard in her final year. It was unlike any other work she had seen in the School of Art. She also found distinctive the paintings done by Viola Macmillan Brown. They were 'a bit like the pre-Raphaelites but more poetic – a vision seen behind a veil.' And Ceridwen Thornton, 'extremely tall like a beautiful Matisse head with clear features outlined in black, was a very good painter with her own style and technique and lovely colour schemes.'

In January 1924 Evelyn and Ceridwen Thornton walked from Westport to Karamea. They could not carry painting gear as well as their packs, but their primary purpose was to get to know the landscape. They were made welcome in Karamea and stayed with a kind couple who ran the local store.

Back in Christchurch she worked on the vigorous portrait of Lincoln Kearne, the father of her friend Dorothy. He was an orchardist, tall, handsome and greatly admired by Evelyn. She also did commissioned portraits of an old family friend, Myrtle Hamilton, and of Prudence Pottinger, the small daughter of another friend. Later that summer, or early spring, she painted at Arthur's Pass and Otira.

She had maintained her double interest in music and painting but at this time it was weighted towards music. In 1923 she had begun to study the piano with Ernest Empson who was a key figure in the musical life of Christchurch. Ernest Empson (1880-1970) had been encouraged by Sydney Thompson's mother to make music his profession. He was a pupil of Godowsky in Europe and on his return taught almost every New Zealand pianist of note at some stage of their careers. Evelyn spent hours a day practising. Another reason for her lessened output of paintings would have been the increasing ill-health of her mother, who died in August 1926.

So, at the end of her first decade as a painter, we see an individual, vigorous talent, already recognised. A woman of twenty-six, economically dependent, living at home. A youngest child who passionately loved her father. A daughter with a sense of obligation to old parents, who was also an adult with freedom to pursue her own life. If she had affairs of the heart she kept her own counsel. Her friend Dorothy spoke of her self-possession, her physical strength, her humour, her dress sense.

One of the enduring traits Evelyn had acquired was a taste for fine food. She already had a flair for seasoning and presentation but, at home, small opportunity to practise cooking. When her mother's health declined a housekeeper had taken over who did not tolerate intrusion into 'her' kitchen. But John Polson had taught his youngest daughter discrimination in the choice of foodstuff. He was something of a gourmet and his daughter became a splendid cook making memorable meals in the most inconvenient kitchens. Her memory of his eating habits gives us a rare picture of Edwardian New Zealand in which she grew up.

People used to send him haggis around New Year. Others sent real Scotch shortbread. One friend made damson cheese - compacted and cut into blocks: another made him laurel jam. (I was sometimes allowed a teaspoonful as a special treat). Some factory near Dunedin made each year a whole stilton cheese. We had a lot of roast meat - lamb, pork, sirloin. Amazing pork sausages from Kincaids in Christchurch. We had a Friday night ritual. I would go with my father to choose ham (on the bone) and sausages and imported tinned foods. Papa was very fond of fish which also had to be chosen. We used to eat a lot of smoked fish. When he chose pork for roasting the rind had to be scored in a certain way. Papa also had a passion for claret and knew his wines and vintages.

Later in her painting career meal tables, bottles of wine, reflections in glass and the rich luscious colour of plums, apricots and grapes became favourite subjects.

When Evelyn finished her first decade of work it was still a close reflection of sound teaching. Unsigned works could be taken for paintings by Cecil Kelly, Archibald Nicoll or Rata Lovell-Smith, that is, they were



FIG. 5 *Matai Valley*, 1928 (oil on canvas board). Miss D. Kearne, Christchurch

in the best tradition of 1930s British landscape oil painting which stemmed more from Constable than from the French Impressionists. In composition she favoured subjects which would fill the whole picture plane: no far distance nor one-third sky. Hills and trees cut through or rose to the top of each canvas. She handled paint with an assured, even richness using wide strokes made with a full brush. She had a sure mastery of tone and form and used silvery-greys and low toned colour rather than 'pure' or vibrant colour.

Some literary titles such as *Babbie*, *Peep o' blue*, *Melisande* or *Devotional* suggest a vapid romanticism. Her few portraits were perceptive of character but conventional as compositions – watered-down Augustus John. But at her best her work had an individual poetry. Evelyn Polson was looking attentively at New Zealand landscape. Her paintings range from Godley Head to Otira and Tapanui. She had begun to think for herself about the problems of painting a nude figure out of doors. And she was, as well, working seriously at music.



FIG. 6 *The old medlar tree*, (c.1927) (etching). Evelyn Page

**Second Decade
Independence**

1926 was an eventful year in Evelyn Polson's painting. In the summer she and Margaret Anderson had painted in a remote place at St Martin's, between Sumner and the Cashmere Hills. Each posed nude for the other at the head of a waterfall. In June she exhibited five paintings with the ASA. Two were landscapes but the other three, *Sunlight and shadow*, *Figure out of doors*, and *The green slipper*, excited comment and one outraged letter. These works had been quite acceptable in Christchurch.

After her mother's death Evelyn made her first move away from home. Ceridwen Thornton had been teaching art at Westport High School but took ill and had to have a term off. She asked Evelyn to come and relieve her. Evelyn remembers nothing of the experience of teaching, but characteristically recalls 'the marvellous old Yorkshire woman' where she and Ceridwen had rooms. 'She used to fry fish and make Yorkshire pudding – food out of this world! And such a nice person!'

That Christmas holiday Evelyn went again to Karamea on her own and was made welcome. This time she had brought her gear, found her model and planned a painting on the bank of the Karamea River. The subject was the back of an unclothed standing figure with, below, a girl in a summer frock looking up from a moored boat. As she worked she saw that the composition required a third female figure. It says a great deal for the strength of her determination that she could persuade the model's husband to sit in the stern, under a parasol, wearing his wife's pink voile dress.

Summer morn (cat. no. 6) was reproduced in colour in *Art in New Zealand* which, in the same issue, illustrated work of the newly formed Group in Christchurch. The Group has been described as an attempt to break with the CSA and its conservative tradition, but Evelyn Page remembers it more as a social club for young painters who wanted to find

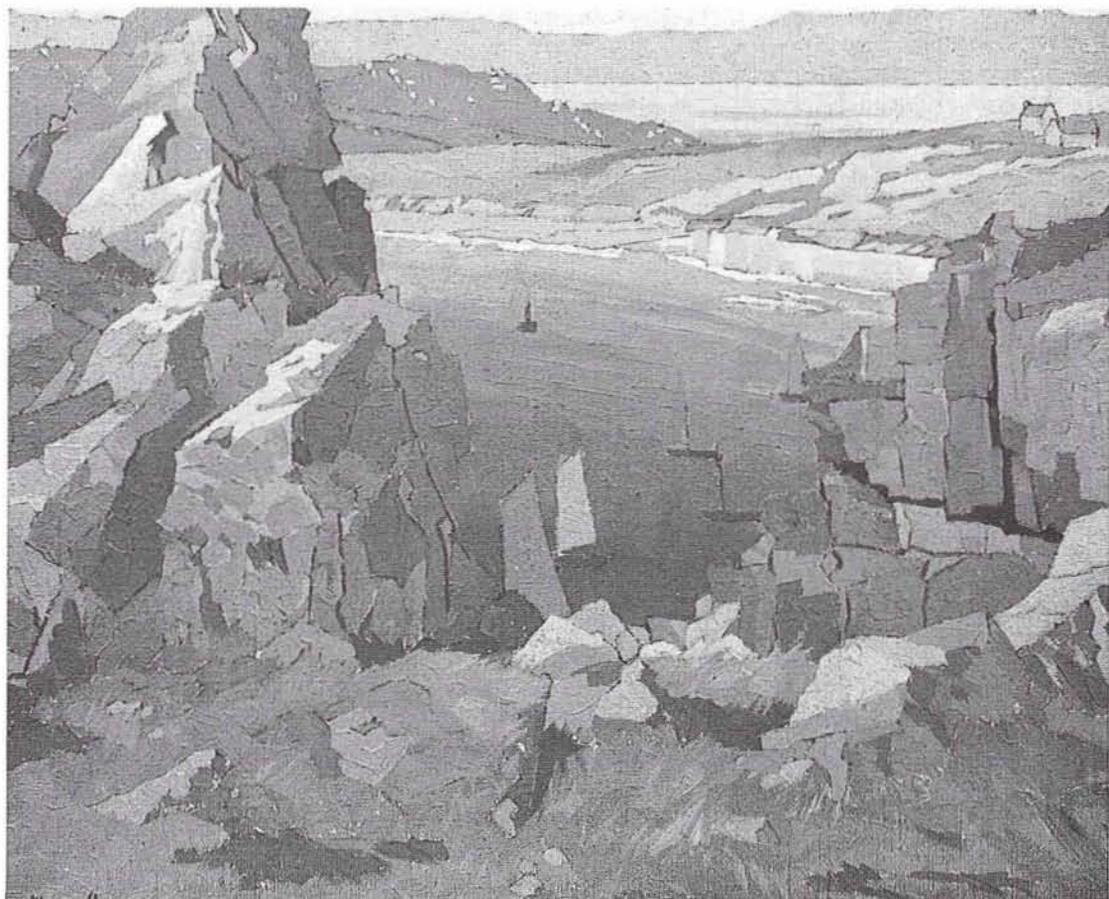


FIG. 7 Rhona Haszard, *The sea and bay*, 1927. Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch

somewhere to meet away from their Victorian parents. She and her friends from the School of Art were its foundation members. Others exhibited by invitation. Of the Christchurch painters most continued to exhibit with the CSA as well.

During 1927 Evelyn worked also at etching on copper. One deeply bitten plate, *The old medlar tree*, and a slighter work, *Ursula*, have survived. *Man in the shadows*, exhibited at the CSA and ASA, was a linocut.

In 1928 she and Margaret Anderson accompanied a doctor from the Health Department on a trip up the West Coast to Nelson. *Bush scene Nelson* and *Matai Valley*, though exhibited later, would have been painted then.

Although her subject matter was becoming individual, when Evelyn Polson's work is compared with that of other outstanding New Zealand painters at the end of the 1920s – with her seniors Frances Hodgkins and Edith Collier, or with her contemporaries Rhona Haszard, Helen Stewart or the slightly older John Weeks and Godfrey Miller – hers more diligently reflects academic training. Their work showed that they were aware of developments in French painting and was more experimental in complexity of composition, in drawing, paint surface and use of colour.

Few of Evelyn Polson's paintings are dated 1929. It may be that music had taken precedence. Ernest Empson was still teaching her piano and Frederick Page was also a pupil. They must have known each other by sight and by repute since they both belonged to the Aolean Club which met once a month to give recitals. There Evelyn heard Ernest Empson and Annette Chapman give a Schubert recital and determined to learn to sing German *Lieder*. But when she approached Annette Chapman for singing lessons 'she wouldn't teach me to sing *Lieder* until I learned to speak German.'

Dr Otto Frankel, a soil scientist, and his wife Tilli arrived in Christchurch from Vienna in 1929. Like others who followed later, they introduced a few New Zealand intellectuals to European ways of preparing food and furnishing as well as to Bartok's music, Rilke's poetry and Kokoschka's lithographs. They drank 'real' coffee, dressed their salads with olive oil, cooked with wine or garlic and ate salami, clear signs of different ways of living.

Tilli Frankel was prepared to give German lessons and later invited her pupils, Dorothy Davies, Frederick Page and Evelyn Polson, to a party. There Evelyn startled the tall, sensitive, aesthetic Frederick by pulling a terrible face at him. She thought him 'so beautiful.' He was twenty-four, six years younger than she.

In November 1929, John Polson died. The depression had already affected the firm of Suckling Brothers and he had helped a number of people with his savings. When he died there were debts but few assets. The house was sold. Evelyn was left without income and deeply grieving. She went to live with her married sister, Winifred McLaren, in Fendalton. Her aunt Alice invited her to spend the summer in Northland where she and her husband lived overlooking a beautiful bay five miles from Russell. There Evelyn painted *Pohutukawa Rina*. She made up the name to suggest its Maori model and the native pohutukawa growing by the sea north of Auckland.

Another of the people most helpful to the young artist at this time was the painter, Margaret Stoddart.

She came to the house many times after my father died. A real stalwart to me. I'm very ashamed that I was not more perceptive to her work. She was a wonderful human being and especially to the young. She gave private lessons in a studio at her house in Hackthorne Road. She had a face like a Persian cat: a great big mouth and a short face. She used to wear hats we all laughed at. The young are so cruel. We were fond of Margaret Stoddart but she was more or less a figure of fun. We all suffered from our Victorian parents and she was lumped in with that. (I am absolutely certain that that was why we started the 1927 Group. It was necessary to have somewhere to get away out of the Victorian atmosphere.) What she did for me was absolutely wonderful. I clung to her too. My father had become a sort of passion with me, I was so fond of him. When he died it was the end of the world.

Margaret Stoddart was not the only friend to help. Richard Wallwork arranged a part-time teaching job. Evelyn was to give lessons in the antique. An old family friend, Gertrude Secretan, rented her an upstairs

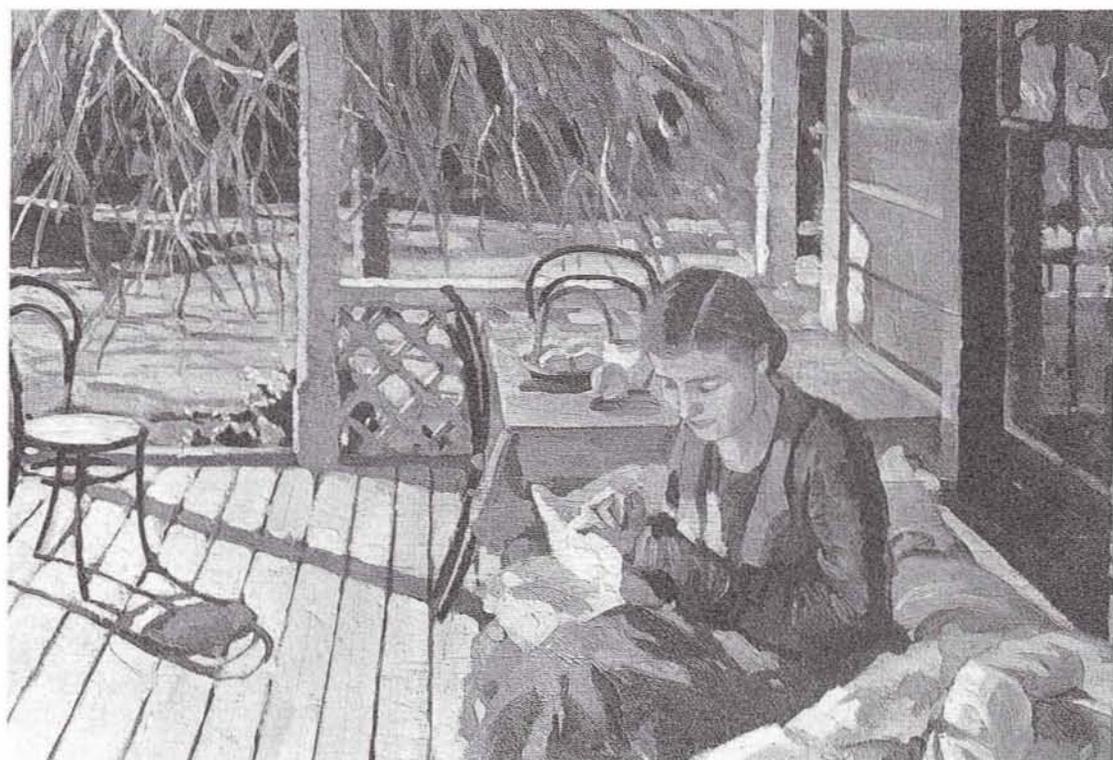


FIG. 8 *The quiet hour*, 1930. Present location unknown

flat, conveniently near the School of Art where Evelyn taught from 1930 to 1936. Her work and the experience of independent living occupied her fully.

Frederick Page was a frequent visitor, bringing newly published books and music. They played duets on the battered studio piano at the School of Art in the lunch hours. The first oil portrait of Frederick Page, dated 1931, is her only major work for that year. She was too busy living to give much time to painting. At thirty Evelyn Polson began an independent working life: new experiences in music and reading, new friends, weekend and holiday expeditions with other painters.

Between 1930 and 1935 she painted three portraits of women. Tilli Frankel, sparse, enigmatic, stylish; an intense, somberly romantic painting of Valmai Moffett; and a truthful, evocative picture of the painter, Olivia Spencer Bower. She showed a remarkable empathy for the very different characters of her subjects. These are not formula portraits. The artist was gathering her forces, finding an individual style and her own way of looking. She found the art life of Christchurch 'fairly humdrum.' The exhibitions at the CSA were 'just a jumble of colour' but the Group showed some interesting work. Painters travelled. Rhona Haszard sent back startling landscapes of southern France. Evelyn saw painting by R.N. Field and Christopher Perkins – English artists teaching in New Zealand. Sydney Thompson returned to Christchurch and again exhibited in October 1934. Something of his neo-Impressionist use of colour and



FIG. 9 *Portrait of
Frederick Page,
(c.1931) (pencil).
Evelyn Page*

freedom of brushstroke may have rubbed off.

In 1933 Evelyn Polson was one of the foundation members of a New Zealand Society of Artists. It aimed to 'encourage . . . artistic achievement' and 'to interest the public in the living movements in art' and to foster the 'appreciation of original works.' New members were to be elected by a majority of existing members and the affairs of the Society were to be run by artist members. Studios and a club room were rented on

the corner of Colombo and Gloucester Streets. They worked to set up a library of recent publications and planned lectures and loan exhibitions.

The Society of Artists' exhibitions in 1933 and 1934 were eagerly welcomed. Evelyn Polson showed nine works but Frederick Page came away wondering what all their talk of 'modern movement' could have meant. In his view only T.A. McCormack's watercolours deserved the tag. Through all their long association Frederick appears to have been more responsive to contemporary painting than Evelyn who, like most painters, looked for ways of seeing akin to her own emotional and conceptual preoccupations, and was often vigorously selective in her responses. In the early thirties Frederick was quicker to see integrity and freshness in the work of Flora Scales, T.A. McCormack and Rita Angus. It was his enthusiasm which made Evelyn study paintings by William Nicholson, Vanessa Bell, Mark Gertler, Eric Gill and William Roberts in the Empire Art Loan collection of contemporary British art shown in Christchurch in 1934.⁴ Here she saw for the first time a portrait by Augustus John, *La Duchesse de Grammont*, in which a young woman looks directly out of the painting, against a freely painted suggestion of flowers, clouds and sea. It deeply impressed her as did, later, John's portrait of Joseph Hone in the Tate Gallery, London.

Through exhibitions arranged by Mrs Murray Fuller in the early thirties they came to know other selections of 'modern' English painting. They were excited by William Sickert, Christopher Wood and John Nash to whom Frederick wrote. Later they visited Nash in England.

Frederick took Evelyn to gramophone parties, tennis parties and piano recitals in some of Christchurch's grand houses. He also introduced her to two cultured Jewish women who were daughters of Dunedin's art patron Willi Fels: Emily Forsyth and Kate Thompson. They were also aunts of the young poet, Charles Brasch.

They were marvellous people. They put themselves out for the young who showed promise or interest in any field. If any of them were ill a cheque would arrive with a note saying 'now – no more about this.'

Douglas Lilburn looked back at this time much later and described the vital atmosphere.

I think I was lucky again to be a university student in that Christchurch of the thirties, less retrospectively for its music than for its ferment of poetry and painting and politics . . . positive, stimulating, energising.⁵

Frederick Page finished his studies in 1933 and graduated Bachelor of Music in 1934. He left for London early the next year to study at the Royal College of Music. Evelyn, too, wanted to travel. They planned to meet in London in January 1937.

In 1935 she also worked as part-time art teacher at the Christchurch Girls' High School. She painted a portrait of Dr Otto Frankel. She did not show any work with the Group in 1936 for she was working hard for her first solo exhibition. It was opened by John Schroder on 14 December 1936, in the Christchurch Art Gallery, 'a funny old brick building in

⁴ The Empire Art Loan collection of more than 250 works of contemporary art, shown in the CSA in March 1934, was the fourth Murray Fuller exhibition. See Ann Calhoun. Two Wellington entrepreneurs of the thirties: the Murray Fullers *Art NZ* 23 (1982) pp. 22–25

⁵ Douglas Lilburn. *A search for language*. Wellington: Alexander Turnbull Library Endowment Trust assisted by the NZ Composers Federation, 1985. p. 16

Durham Street.' Her friends rallied and bought all the work. She made £300: more than her year's salary.

As soon as her show was over Evelyn left for London arriving at the end of January 1937. Waiting on the wharf at Portsmouth was an 'awful figure with a white face and a black coat flapping round his ankles.' There was Frederick Page, desperately thin and ill. He had discharged himself from hospital observation to come and meet her. He had told the hospital that his sister was arriving from New Zealand and would look after him. It was a story that stuck with them for the next few months. He had been lent a coastguard's cottage about ten miles from Exeter at Beere, a romantic hamlet on huge cliffs falling sheer to the coast. But once in the cottage the seriousness of Frederick's illness was woefully apparent. He was each day more ill.

Even after three weeks in Exeter Public Hospital no cause for his illness was found until a young Australian house surgeon suggested hydatids, a disease unthought-of in England. And so it proved to be. He needed a serious operation and a long convalescence.

Their landlord at Beere had found board for Frederick's 'sister' at the YWCA in Exeter. Charles Brasch, teaching at a school for disturbed children, entered into the game, collecting Evelyn Polson's letters from New Zealand House and forwarding them in an envelope addressed in large handwriting, 'Miss Page.' And again, when Frederick was well enough, a local squire on the Board of the YWCA, Hayter Hames, took care of them. He found 'the siblings' rooms with one of his tenant farmers, about two miles from a little provincial market town, Chagford. Charles Brasch came for weekends announcing his arrival in a huge, totally uncharacteristic scrawl on postcards to 'Miss Page.' When he came they cooked delicious meals, laughed and talked endlessly. 'At night we played barmy games of hide-and-seek. I never saw Charles so carefree since.'

With help of other New Zealand friends they found an unfurnished flat at Aubrey Crescent, Nottinghill Gate. Before they moved in they went across to Paris. Evelyn remembered with most pleasure an exhibition of early French portraiture and a fine exhibition of medieval tapestry. The London flat was made welcoming with furniture which Charles Brasch had stored while he was teaching at an experimental school in Great Missenden. He had offered his bookshelves and furniture as though they were helping him.

In London Evelyn was able to resume her own name without embarrassment. Their friends accepted the relationship. Her Scottish relations, she avoided. Frederick returned to the Royal College and to outside counterpoint study with Gordon Jacobs. Evelyn worked on the gallery collections with the catholicity of a colonial's fresh excitement. She responded to Giotto, French portrait painting, Manet and Degas, Matthew Smith, Augustus John and Wilson Steer. She looked at the commercial gallery exhibitions in the West End intently and critically.

The one thing the couple lacked was a piano. Frederick practised in a rented cell at Broadwood's warehouse. One day an employee there said to

him 'a marvellous piano has just come in from an old dowager's drawing room. It has never been played. A real snip: ninety-nine guineas.' But they didn't have that kind of money. Then came a letter to Evelyn from a lawyer. Aunt Alice had died. There would be enough to buy that Broadwood grand piano. They raced to see whether it was still available.

In his two years in London Frederick had come to know all sorts of interesting people – musicians and writers. Some were English relations of Christchurch friends. They went often to dinner with Esmond, Dora and Mary de Beer, cousins of Charles Brasch, in their Regency Terrace house at Sussex Place. Emily Forsyth arrived in London and took them to Glynedebourne. James Courage, then an art student, and Rene Lonsdale, an optician, both friends from Christchurch, were frequent visitors. They went to opera and concerts, discussing performance. Faced with so much civilised erudition Evelyn 'had a great feeling of inferiority' but hers was a modesty which made her welcome fresh ideas and interesting conversation.

For her there was creative excitement too. She did at least ten paintings in that crowded year. *Exeter* (cat. no. 16) was painted when Frederick was in hospital and *Morten Hampstead* (cat. no. 15) while he was convalescing. When they went to visit Charles Brasch at the Abbey School she painted *Turkey farm, Great Missenden*. It is a carefully composed, low-keyed painting which has an Englishness of style as well as subject matter, a suggestion of John Nash or Roger Fry. The only portrait from this period, *Charles Brasch* (cat. no. 14), has a piercing honesty. It is a directly painted, assured work which catches the complex quality of a man she respected: strength, sad introspection, the intelligent probity of the young poet and future founder of *Landfall*. Brasch had kept a journal and used it in his memoirs.

The two artist friends whom I saw most at that time were Frederick Page the musician . . . and Evelyn Polson the painter . . . for whom thought came only in feeling, whom the world tossed continually in a riot of colour, form, sound . . . I was sitting for her now, many long sessions . . . every quarter hour or so I was allowed to get up, stretch cramped limbs, and eat some of the delectable chocolate fudge that Eve made to bribe me. Fred would sometimes play . . . while Eve painted. The portrait was gloomily like me . . . To Fred and Eve music and painting were the world – with good living (and it was just possible then to live well on very little money) and friendship.⁶

He made an illuminating comment which shows us something of the unpolitical nature of the artist.

Eve Polson, after seeing and absorbing all she could in England and Europe, wanted to go home and paint; we had talked a lot about painting in New Zealand, about differences in light and air between New Zealand and Europe . . . They urged me to follow them, and I wanted to do so even though I dreaded leaving England . . . But – unless I did not know them well enough – they had no sense of the world's guilt, and was it possible to live among people without that?⁷

In October 1937 Evelyn and Frederick visited the Paris Exposition.⁸ They had already journeyed through Europe in their second-hand Morris in the

6 Charles Brasch.
Indirections: a memoir
1909–47. Wellington:
OUP, 1980. pp. 252–53

7 *ibid.* p. 270

8 Sydney Thompson
noted this visit in *Art*
in NZ 38 (December
1937) p. 114

summer on their way to Salzburg. In the cities they had stayed in cheap, clean pensions with bare, scrubbed wooden stairways and eaten in small local restaurants. When they could, in the country, they camped as others would have done at that time in New Zealand. They had bought two pillows and two lilos, a pair of army blankets each, and a small primus. In 1936 no one else seemed to be camping under trees or by wayside streams. When, near Hanover, they drove to the end of a road and slept under apple trees in lush grass they were wakened by an irate forester who at first demanded compensation but stopped, amazed, to watch them make toast and coffee. After he had accepted a cup, he left.

The return journey was made separately. Evelyn called in at Ceylon and stayed in the interior north of Kandy with Eunoë Thompson who was then married to a surveyor. While there, she worked on a portrait of Eunoë and her baby in the garden.

Returning by ship from Colombo in March 1938, Evelyn had time to think about the visual stimulus of that marvellous year and the kind of life she and Frederick would establish. Christchurch meant living among friends – but where? They had loved the varied experience of the old cottage and garden at Chagford, and the spacious, well-proportioned rooms of the Nottinghill Gate flat. Could they possibly rent any house with the beauty and sense of history of the one, or the fine space of the other?

Frederick Page had returned to his parents in Lyttelton. He loved the hill-perched town where he had grown up, the busy wharf, the changing colours of the wide harbour which he describes vividly in his journal.⁹ They had decided that they would look for a house in that general area near Governors Bay, remembering delightful summer picnics in a little bay at the foot of Dyers Pass Road with Otto Frankel and Margaret Anderson.

In February 1938 Charles Brasch also returned from Europe. He was visiting Christchurch when, with Otto and Margaret, they went on a house-hunting expedition. Tom, the bus driver living at Governors Bay, had a vast old car he used to run over the hill at 8:00 a.m. and back at 5:00 p.m. They asked him to help them find a house. He took them around all the little bungalows available but none had room for a grand piano. Wasn't there anywhere with *one* big room? There was only *Waitahuna*; and, he assured them they wouldn't want to live there. It was neglected. A tenant had committed suicide in the stables. It was said to be haunted. There was bad access, a lavatory in the orchard, no conveniences.

Walking down a long drive beside an orchard, they knew that here was a place quite comparable, in sense of history and beauty, with Chagford, but quintessentially New Zealand.

The property was for lease at twenty-five shillings a week. It lay at the foot of Dyers Pass Road, only twelve kilometres from Cathedral Square, on a promontory that ran out into the harbour. The original tiny cottage still stood beside a drive planted with huge walnut trees. To the right of the drive was an orchard – pear, apricot and plum trees; apple and quince were laden with autumn fruit; honeysuckle, roses and wild grape covered outhouses. Beyond the cottage was the red-painted gabled house. It lay across the base of the promontory and faced towards the sea.

⁹ Frederick Page. *A musician's journal*. Edited and arranged by J.M. Thomson and Janet Paul. Dunedin: John McIndoe; 1986

FIG. 10 *Governors Bay* (c.1935) (cat. no. 13). Mrs R. Collins, Auckland



The house had been built in the 1850s by John Dyer. It had the simplicity and good proportions of some early colonial houses which retained an eighteenth century style. Big sash windows and French doors opened out under the verandah, tree trunks and leaf shapes were silhouetted against the sea. On one side the ground fell steeply to a stream, on the other sea lapped a cliff and a private beach. It was a setting idyllic beyond dreams. That they would have to cook on a wood stove worried them not at all.

They signed a lease and arranged to be married in Saint Cuthbert's Church, Governors Bay. Although their income would be minimal they looked forward to living off the land. Otto Frankel promised to put his agricultural knowledge to good use by building them a magnificent vegetable garden. Mr and Mrs Small on the next farm could supply milk and butter and eggs. A butcher in Lyttelton, an old friend of the Page family, would, they knew, deliver superb meat. They would be able to supply all their friends with fruit from the orchard.

The wedding is best described through contemporary eyes. Charles Brasch was there.

They got married in April at the small church in Governor's Bay. Oliver Duff, an old family friend who had been editor of the *Press* and was soon to be first editor of the *New Zealand Listener*, gave Eve away, the painter Margaret Anderson was her bridesmaid, I was Fred's best man; there was Otto Frankel, an Austrian refugee scientist who worked at the Wheat Research Institute and was soon to marry Margaret, and no one else except the Page and Polson families.¹⁰

¹⁰ Brasch. *op. cit.*
p. 316-18

FIG. 11 *The orchard in spring Governors Bay* (1940) (cat. no. 18). Evelyn Page, Wellington



Evelyn and her friends had spent the morning making sandwiches at *Waitahuna*. With only a bed, a table and apple boxes for furniture, the house was made welcoming for a splendid wedding breakfast. Wherever they were to live their house would become a warm focus for their friends. Charles Brasch described the setting:

Almost overhead, cows and sheep were feeding on a little alp of green fields nearly among the gorse and just below the soft grey of the rock rim. . . . The house was cradled in sound – that of ripples breaking gently below, of wind in the gum-trees, where tuis called throatily. Fred and Eve were as excited about it as children, and with reason; it was an idyllic place, which seemed designed just for them. Yet they could scarcely afford the rent of twenty-five shillings a week; Fred went into town four times a week to teach music, very rarely still Eve sold a painting for a few pounds. . . . But they did not seem poor; Eve was a gardener as well as a splendid cook, so that they were able to live well if usually simply.

11 *ibid.* p. 317

I stayed with them often and they made me feel wonderfully at home.¹¹

Later, Evelyn found out that she had, in fact, visited *Waitahuna* with her father when she was a child. They had walked over from the tram terminus at Cashmere. She also learnt how the original garden had been so well planted. The Dyers had had friends in London. One of them was the head gardener who had designed the grounds at Crystal Palace. He came out to Governors Bay and, as a wedding present, had designed the Dyers' garden and orchard. It was he who had planted the mulberry tree which still dropped its luscious dark berries, and the alternate laburnum and kowhai lining a track to the beach.

Waitahuna and Governors Bay were the inspiration for Evelyn's few



PLATE 12 *St Peter's
Church and Wellington*
(c.1954) (cat. no. 39).
*Victoria University
of Wellington*



PLATE 13 *Lambton
Quay* (1949) (cat. no.
32). *Canterbury Society
of Arts, Christchurch*



PLATE 14 *Dahlias* (1953) (cat. no. 37). *Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Nelson*

PLATE 15 *Sir William
Hamilton* (1961) (cat.
no. 44). *C.W.F.
Hamilton & Co Ltd,
Christchurch*

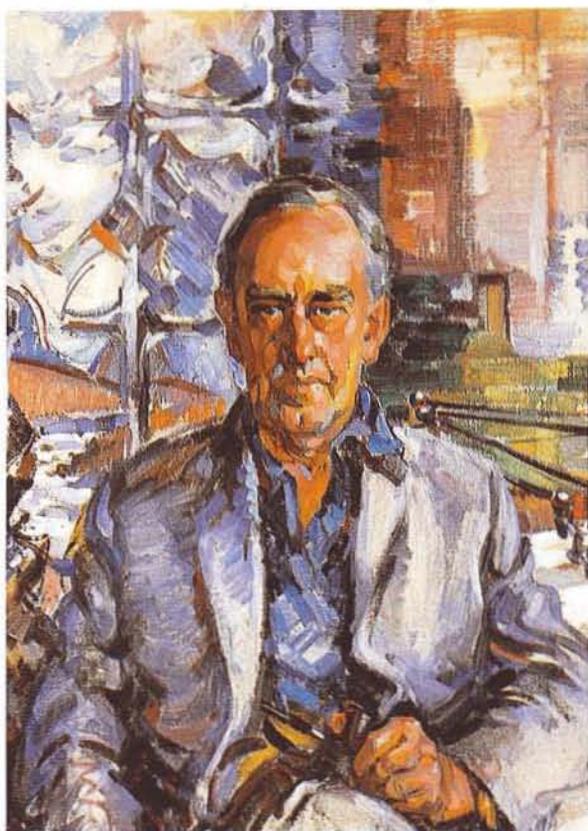


PLATE 16 *Sir Thomas
Hunter* (1948) (cat. no.
34). *Victoria University
of Wellington*

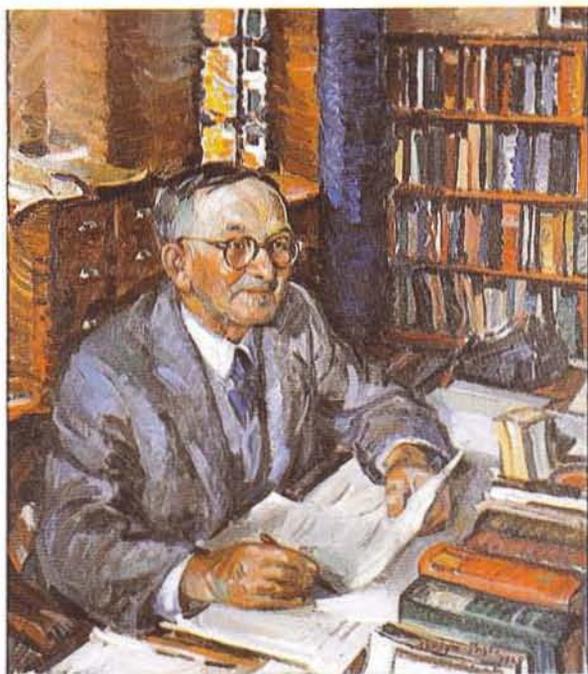




PLATE 17 *Nude (bathing)* (1960) (cat. no. 42). Dr and Mrs I. Prior, Wellington



PLATE 18 *Luncheon under the ash tree* (1960) (cat. no. 41). Dr and Mrs I. Prior, Wellington

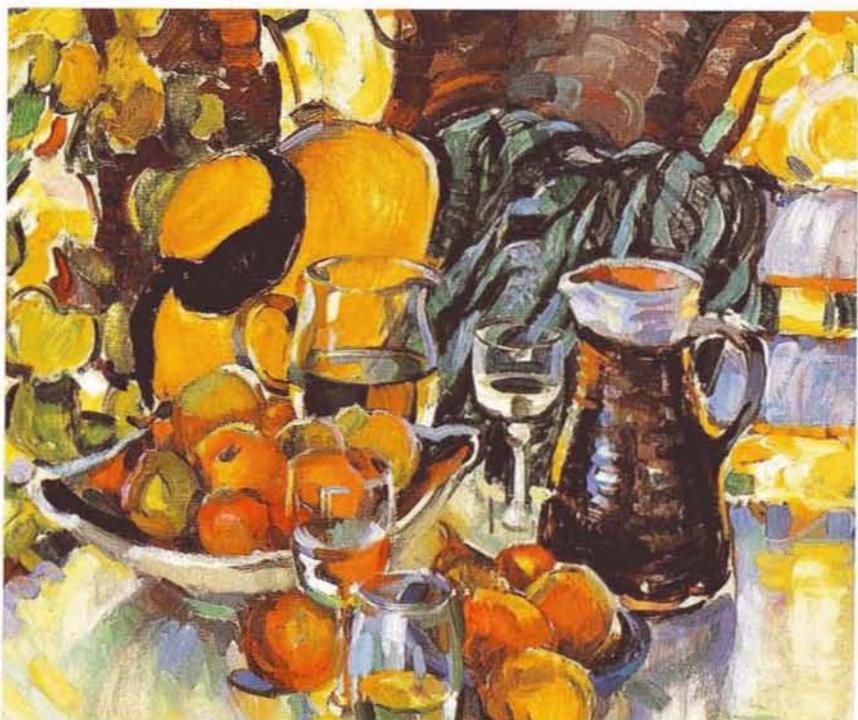


PLATE 19 *Objects in shade* (1964)
(cat. no. 46). Robert
McDougall Art Gallery,
Christchurch

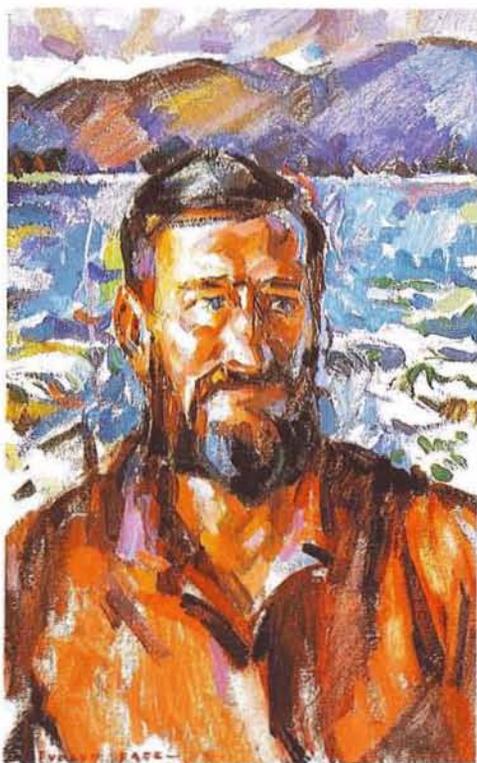


PLATE 20 *Portrait of Denis Glover* 1968 (cat. no. 49). Auckland City Art Gallery



PLATE 21 *Girl at a coffee bar* (1971) (cat. no. 50). Bank of New Zealand, Wellington

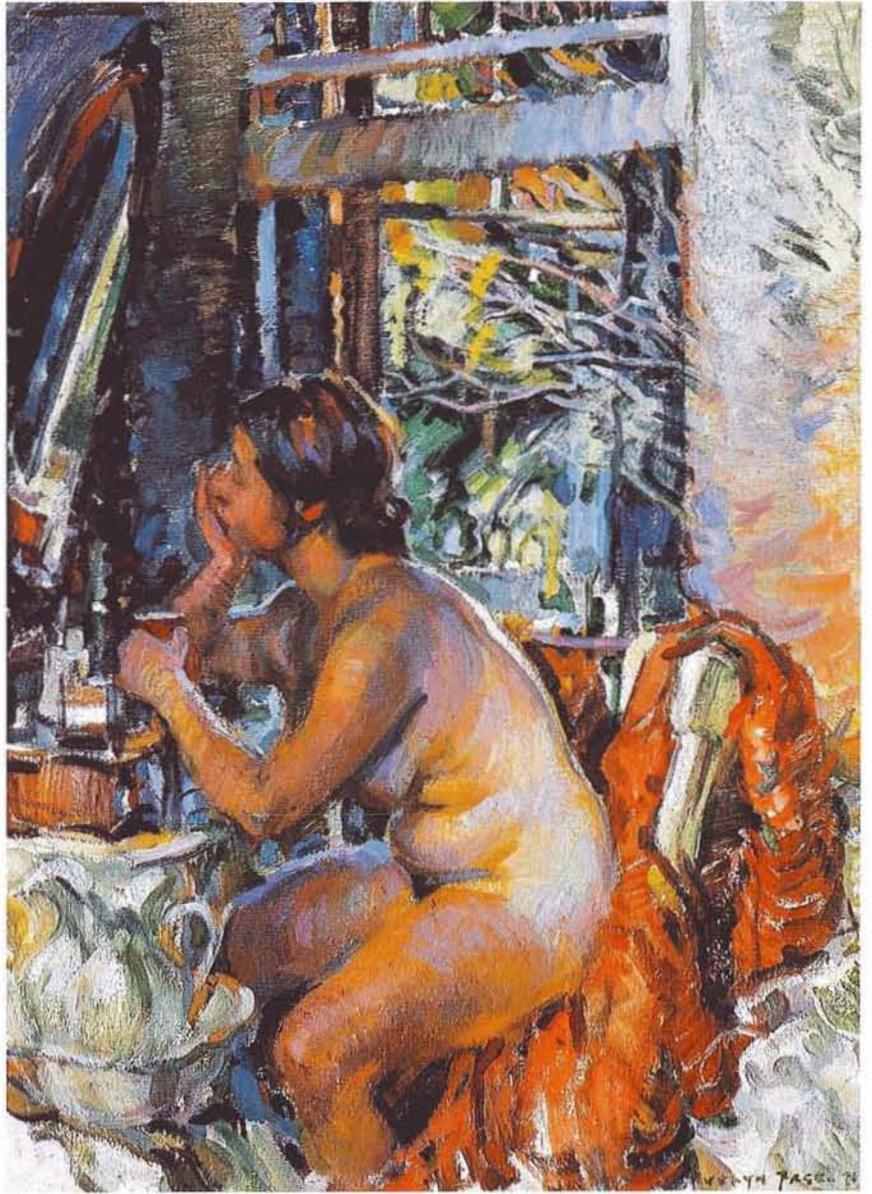


PLATE 22 *Girl at a window* (1971) (cat. no. 52). Dowse Art Museum, Wellington

paintings in the later thirties. The first of them, *Governors Bay* (cat. no. 13), a view looking down from the Summit Road over the Governors Bay inlet and shown with the Group in August 1938, was purchased with pleasure by Brasch. Even though she was too busy to do much painting she exhibited in March 1939 with the Group and showed five works, painted in Europe, with the CSA.

She worked on one major painting in January 1939. It was of Elespie Forsyth (cat. no. 17). She and her cousin, Tim Thompson, were staying at *Waitahuna*. It was, Evelyn said, 'done out of the blue.' She moved the oval dining table in front of French doors in the music room, dressed Elespie in one of her own rose-printed dresses and sat her facing into the room.

Here Evelyn Page begins to sing as a colourist. Soft brushstrokes create, through open French doors, a fluid pattern of leaf shape and shadow: emerald, terre verte, light yellow, indigo and dark red-purple. The face in greenish shade is haloed with red hair, a white frock patched with red/pink and light blue. Colour glows in green-blue reflections on the polished table top from a small glass of field flowers and the transparencies of wine glasses. Nearest to the viewer, a balloon-backed chair is slashed with deep blue and amber.

Part of a letter from Charles Brasch, undated but referring to Evelyn's pregnancy, gives a good background to contemporary English work. When we seek to estimate her stature as a painter we need to remember that it is against these names that she was finding her measure, rather than against her contemporaries in New Zealand. Brasch wrote about a show at the National Gallery in London called *English painting since Whistler*.

The three artists who interest me most are Matthew Smith, Stanley Spencer and Frances Hodgkins . . . The Nashs don't show up so well; I find Steer palls. [Augustus] John's early paintings are thin; and from Sickert, after all, one knows what to expect. The younger people, Coldstream and Co are unimpressive, what there is of them. Gertler seems a solid painter, but I don't find him a very sympathetic one, and I begin to find Duncan Grant rather a bore . . . But I wish you could have been here just to go with me.¹²

12 Letter, Charles Brasch to Evelyn Page, undated [1939]

Another letter, written 3 May 1939, in response to a telegram reporting the birth of Sebastian Page at Ranui Nursing Home, begins: 'Hail, parents of a man-child! Ave Sebastiane!'

Sebastian's early care was helped by a very efficient Karitane nurse who came and lived in the house for a month. Eve was forty-one and had had no experience of, nor any particular fondness for, small babies.

During the winter Frederick drove to Christchurch in the old Morris 12 which they had bought in London for forty pounds. His main previous experience in driving had been on the German autobahn, now he was driving over the Summit Road four days a week to teach piano and get copy for his *Press* reviews. 'The Port Hills are forbiddingly bleak in winter, swept by every wind, often in fog or cloud; the Dyer's Pass Road is a constant hazard then.'¹³ And indeed Frederick Page did have a serious accident.

13 Brasch. op. cit. p. 318

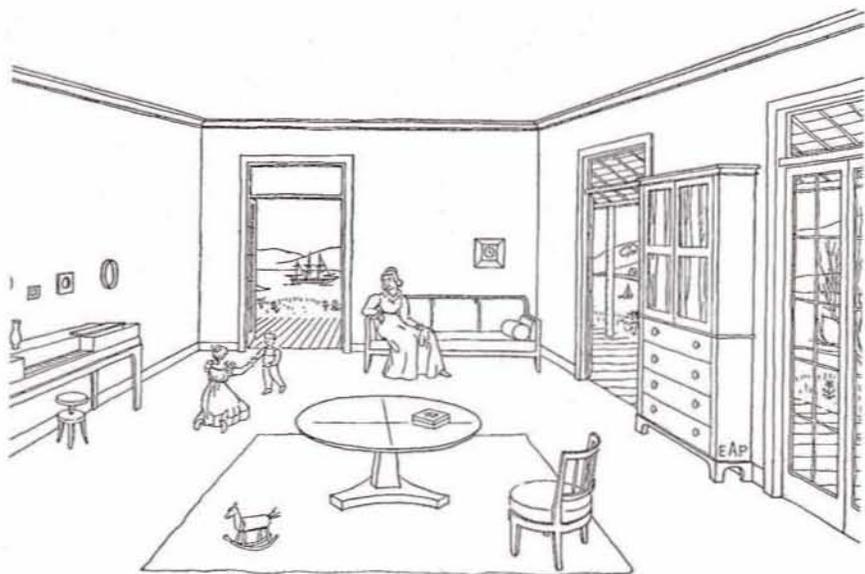


FIG. 12 The colonial drawing-room, based on *Waitahuna*, by E.A. Plishke (Wellington, 1947)

In 1940, Otto Frankel brought a Viennese friend and fellow refugee, Ernst Plishke, to visit. Although already well-respected in Europe as an architect, Plishke's qualifications were not recognised in New Zealand and he was working in the State Housing Department. He had designed a special state house for Maori tenants which proposed a large central kitchen for family living. Like a *whare whanau* it would open at one end into a deep, covered porch. At that time state houses had a small, functional kitchen, closed off from a minimal space for meals, and another for sitting. The Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, had refused to consider Plishke's plan. He thought such a distinctive design might imply that the Maoris were being offered something less than their Pakeha brethren. Plishke had been delighted to see at *Waitahuna* pioneer solutions to domestic life similar to his own suggestions. He admired the proportions of the rooms and their easy access to the outside and was especially pleased with the detailing of window frames and doors. He was so busy taking notes that he could scarcely be persuaded inside for a meal.

Ernst Plishke later used drawings he had made at Governors Bay as the prototype for a pioneer living room in his book *Design and Living*.

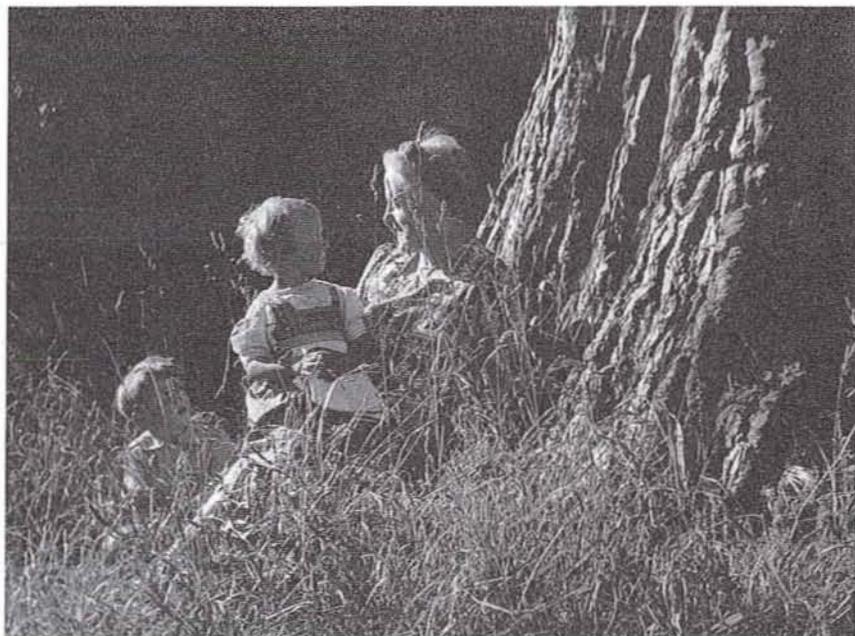
The big glass door-windows open the rooms towards the gardens and towards the landscape; they admit light and air in a way that you rarely find in houses of later generations.¹⁴

¹⁴ E.A. Plishke. *Design and living*. Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1947. p. 32

Plishke's friendship had an important effect on Evelyn's work. It was he who, in thanks, sent a postcard of Bonnard's *Breakfast table*. This was her introduction to the French Post-Impressionist painter whose work was to prove so sympathetic.

In May 1940 Evelyn's sister Winifred looked after the baby while his parents took a holiday with Emily Forsyth in Queenstown. Evelyn painted

FIG. 13 Sebastian, Anna and Evelyn Page in the garden at *Waitahuna*, Governors Bay (c.1945).



there and in Arrowtown. They returned to their own sociable life. Guests stayed frequently in the cottage, among them the young composer Douglas Lilburn, and Douglas McDiarmid, who made a delightful naïf record of the Page family in their garden.

On New Year's Day 1941, Evelyn drove to Lyttelton to collect guests. On the way back she saw a vivid scene of holiday-makers gathered to watch the Anniversary Day boat race. For a serious painter the subject that arrests is one which seems to fuse emotional response with a perceived logic of composition. A certain grouping of figures, of colours, of geometric shapes, a poetic balance of light against dark – any combination of these can spark off an aesthetic preoccupation which has been waiting to be developed. People in a crowd, colour and movement, yachts racing, waves – nothing static – a painting to be composed like music. Here was her visual spark to be fanned into being with strokes and patches of pure colour (cat. no. 22).

Abruptly Evelyn Page left her guests at *Waitahuna*, picked up her gear and drove back to Corsair Bay. 'I painted for three hours. My palette congealed on my thumb. I looked around. There was an audience about 500 strong on the hill watching me. I had become part of the entertainment.'

The guests she left could have been Ursula Bethell or Oliver and Jess Duff, or Winsome and John Schroder. One of them sat for her portrait in the garden. A figure in a garden was to become a main theme in Evelyn Page's work. She loved to weave a colour pattern made of figures in leaf shade and sun-dappled light. In the late 1920s figures and ground had remained separate, descriptive. By 1941 her work moved towards more painterly compositions which, in time, would dissolve distinctness in unity

FIG. 14 *The Campbell family* (1942) (cat. no. 24). Mrs P. Graham, South Canterbury



of brushstrokes and play of colour. As an artist she had found her direction. However, she did continue in the 1940s to paint Canterbury landscapes, but less and less did she think of herself as 'a landscape painter.' She was not interested in recording scenes but in the geology which suggested creative force, or in the movement of boats and people in landscape. The small lively glimpses she exhibited were, in her view, 'potboilers,' the means to pay off specific debts. Throughout the rest of her career she would paint a subject which sufficiently interested her when she needed a quick sale. It was the equivalent of a pianist playing for a fee when the rent was due.

Later in 1941 Evelyn was again pregnant and in December they went for their usual holiday to Queenstown. One of her pleasures was to take a lilo onto the lake and lie there under a parasol, looking or sleeping. Frederick, in Emily's garden, kept watch and would announce, 'Look, Eve's drifting out, someone had better go and rescue her.'

This time Evelyn had decided to have a home birth. Because the housekeeper who had been engaged failed to arrive, Frederick Page shared chores with the midwife and did all the cooking. Anna Christian Page was born 5 February 1942. At the end of the month the midwife declared she had never enjoyed a case with such interesting people, nor eaten such 'divine food,' nor laughed so much.

In the last term of 1941 Frederick Page had been standing in for Dr Bradshaw and, on 23 February 1942, he was invited to carry on at Canterbury University College as temporary lecturer in music. The CSA purchased Evelyn's *Road through Arrowtown* when it was exhibited in March with *Towards Eichardts* (cat. no. 19), a painting more remarkable

for its richness of colour – pinks, ochre, vermillion, emerald, enlivening strokes of purple, sombre green and brown. She showed her quick eye for unusual composition in another smaller painting, *Trench digging, Hagley Park*. To use Douglas Lilburn's telling phrase, apt in this context, it was 'creative brooding on facts of our own experience.'

Emily Forsyth lived in Dunedin. Early in November, the painter stayed with her and went each day across the road to lunch with Mrs Forsyth's father, Willi Fels, before getting to work on a portrait drawing of him which she wanted to give her friend for Christmas. The drawing, dated 4 November 1942, is now in the Hocken Library Collection. Comments in Charles Brasch's hand on the verso give an idea of the difficulty people have in accepting a painter's vision of a dearly loved face. Brasch, who was devoted to his grandfather, tried to make his own corrections.

The twisted mouth is wrong; and his eyes were never dead like this; can he have been drowsing while being painted? The bone structure of the forehead hasn't been caught. Otherwise a good likeness. C.B.

Emily took Evelyn to visit her Hallenstein grandparents' family home at Speargrass Flat. They took picnics. Evelyn painted *The stables Thurlby* and a view from upstairs looking out from the master bedroom which, since the house has decayed, is now an historic record. On one such journey she stayed with Dr Robin Bevan Brown at Oamaru and painted a street scene with the Post Office.

From 1944 Evelyn Page had more energy and more time for painting. When she was working at *Waitahuna* she sometimes attached Sebastian by a long rope to a pear tree, putting toys within easy reach. He did not seem disturbed by the restriction, but it greatly amazed an English visitor. A neighbour's daughter, Caroline Small, became a treasured daily help and allowed her to spend whole days away from the house. Frederick was now less frequently in Christchurch since his lectureship had not been confirmed, after the appointment of Dr Vernon Griffiths as head of Music at Canterbury University College. At this time their income was mainly the painter's small private income supplemented by picture sales. They were fortunate in being able to live off the land. They grew fruit and vegetables in abundance and the butcher at Lyttelton let them have meat for a nominal price.

In 1944 and 1945 Evelyn painted some notable works: *Lyttelton Harbour* (cat. no. 25), *Colombo Street from Cathedral Square*, *Christchurch Railway Station* (cat. no. 27) and *Post Office Cathedral Square* (cat. no. 28). Her subject is movement, evoking or depicting in human presence the full, busy richness of life. Strong and original, these early cityscapes are lively grids of colour, their compositions given unity by swift brushmarks. Although they may be looked at, forty years later, as a record of lost buildings or as social documents, these aspects were not crucial to the painter's purpose. She did isolate an evocative slice of city life, but her real subject was the complex vitality in the movement and colour of paint itself.

In *Christchurch Railway Station* people flow around the cars and



FIG. 15 *The house and family Governors Bay* (c.1946) (cat. no. 30). Evelyn Page, Wellington

through the wooden Gothic curves of that curious building in an active, calligraphic flicker of paint. For that subject she had asked permission to paint from an upstairs window in Storey's Hotel, opposite. Was she conscious of imitating the French Impressionists? Monet had done a series of views from the Thames seen from the Savoy Hotel in autumn, 1899, and also in Paris in 1900. Picasso had begun work on views of the Pont-Neuf. Later Bonnard and Marquet had also looked down onto busy Paris streets. Sickert had hired rooms in Camden Town to paint from. She was certainly not then aware that L.S. Lowry in Manchester and Kokoschka in London were both recreating city life in similar ways to her. She saw Lowry's peopled landscapes first in 1950 and found them poetic with 'beautiful subtle colour describing stark reality.'

Many of Evelyn Page's contemporaries in New Zealand were still painting 'landscapes with too few lovers' – unpeopled distant views. Occasionally Russell Clark, Eric Lee-Johnson or Elise Mourant moved in close, added a few emblematic figures. Lois White's figure compositions *The warmongers* or *After the deluge* were stylised, imaginative constructs. John Weeks, and later the Tole brothers, used city buildings in a compositional balance stemming from Cubism. In making these comparisons it is clear that Evelyn Page always worked her musical rhythms from a given visual base, and expressed the uniqueness of her vision by the way she used paint and by the richness of her colour sense.

Post Office Cathedral Square takes its surface vitality from a counter rhythm established between long white horizontals and small black and white lozenge shapes on the red ground of a distant building. These are set against a superimposed, undulating rhythm, created by the dark, bare

branches of three plane trees which penetrate the top and both sides of the picture plane. The trees themselves are held in balance between two opposing circular rhythms. A stone border circling the little park moves into the picture from the right front, while a line of distant pedestrians appears to move forward, from right to left.

All these paintings were done during wartime but there is no trace of this background. It was a lack which Charles Brasch, haunted by the tragedies of Jewry, had noted in 1937. Evelyn Page appears to have worked in enchanted exuberance, in an environment protected by distance from the troubles of the world. And yet, she is the only painter in New Zealand to have documented that remarkable aspect of any war – the rejoicing at its end. She was staying with Jane Pottinger in Wellington and took her painting gear into the city on VE Day. Working from inside a parked car, at the corner of Stout and Featherston Streets, her animated brush caught the excited crowds, the flutter of torn-up government files falling from Defence Building windows, and the festive white loops of lavatory paper.

There is a tangential reference to the war in a family group centred on a son in airforce uniform who was killed in an accident after the war (cat. no. 24). She sketched on canvas the family together in their garden and then worked, with numerous separate sittings, on each portrait. She became increasingly interested in portraiture and greatly enjoyed painting Nora Walton, beautiful sister of the English composer, an image, which she said, 'just floated onto the canvas.' (cat. no. 26)

In 1945, through Helmut Pappe, a refugee philosopher from Breslau University who, with his wife, was tutoring the Hamilton children, Evelyn met Peg and William Hamilton. They became dear and lifelong friends. In 1961 Evelyn stayed a second time at Irishman's Creek to paint the pioneer jet boat engineer. (cat. no. 44)

The Governors Bay idyll was coming to an end. Victoria University College advertised for a lecturer to set up a Department of Music and Frederick Page successfully applied. J.C. Beaglehole emphasised the importance of music to the College.

A department of music, though without a chair, was started in 1946 under Frederick Page. . . . The teaching of music . . . was something the college had long needed without the need being quite realised; and apart from formal teaching, with the standards involved, there came now also, through serious and able performance, a widening and deepening of emotional awareness that went far beyond the confines of the music department proper.¹⁵

¹⁵ J.C. Beaglehole.
*Victoria University
College*. Wellington:
NZ University Press,
1949. p. 247

Evelyn and Frederick Page were to make an immense contribution to the cultural life of Wellington in the next four decades. As houses to buy were very scarce in Wellington after the war finished, Frederick Page went ahead to begin lecturing while Evelyn and the children stayed on at Governors Bay. The thought of leaving a place concentrates the mind of a painter often making works an intense reminder: *The house and family Governors Bay* (cat. no. 30) and *Point of departure Norwich Quay Lyttelton* (cat. no. 29) are such records. The final painting, in 1947, must have been

The Fourth
Decade
Wellington,
England & China

Admiral Byrd's flagship and sailors playing (cat. no. 31) done on the wharf at Lyttelton just before Admiral Byrd's American expedition left for the Antarctic.

Since no suitable house near Victoria University had been found, Frederick continued to share his friend George Gabites's house in Thorndon and Evelyn and the children rented one in bush, at Pukerua Bay, for fifteen months. The family were together at weekends. Evelyn must have driven frequently into Wellington and she found it visually exciting. She began a painting with Saint Peter's Church tower in the foreground. She could not understand why her contemporaries went on painting unpeopled country and distant mountains. However one of her problems was how to paint in a busy street. She decided to use her car as a studio and arranged for a letter from the Public Service Commission to show any traffic officer who might object. She made one painting in Featherston Street and others in *Grey Street* (cat. no. 33) and *Lambton Quay* (cat. no. 32) in 1949. Still no house was found to buy. The family moved again into a 'shoe box beach bach' at Waikanae and Evelyn bought a dinghy at an auction for the children who occupied themselves delightedly at the nearby lagoon.

Commissioned portrait painting dominated 1949. A family portrait of friends was done in their Karori sitting room over a number of weeks. Victoria University commissioned a portrait of Sir Thomas Hunter (cat. no. 34), the composition of which owes something to Cézanne's *Portrait of Gustave Geffroy*. Evelyn haunted estate agents' offices and one day walked in immediately after its owner had offered for sale a large wooden house in Thorndon. 'I'll take it' said Evelyn. The agent protested that she must look at it first! They went to 20 Hobson Street. It was large. It was dilapidated. The ground floor was divided up into tiny cubicles. Frederick's heart faltered but Evelyn saw what could be done if the rooms were returned to their original generous spaces, if the staircase were taken out and two separate flats made upstairs. She took full responsibility for getting the alterations done and signed a contract.

How she managed to do that and three more cityscapes, as well as a double portrait, is a tribute to her physical energy and her strength of purpose. And she was determined to go by ship to England with her husband on his first sabbatical leave in 1950. Sebastian went to boarding school at Saint Peter's, Cambridge, and Anna to live with the Cresswell family at Governors Bay.

In London they found a flat at Nottinghill Gate and invited an old friend, Sylvia Fox, whose mother in Christchurch had just died, to share it with them. They all shared a passion for opera. Evelyn spent some time looking at the Constable oil sketches at the Victoria and Albert Museum. She saw an exhibition of Matthew Smith and introduced herself to him. They also visited Ivon Hitchens and bought one of his paintings. Evelyn painted a series of lyrical small landscapes at Bablock Hyth, at Chipping Camden and in Kensington and Hyde Park. Outstanding of these is *The coast at Deal*. She visited her sister Alice at Marks Ely, and plucked up



FIG. 16 *Dr Ralph Vaughan Williams* (1950) (cat. no. 35). Evelyn Page, Wellington

courage to ask Dr Ralph Vaughan Williams if she might paint his portrait (cat. no. 35). To her surprise he agreed so long as she didn't give him 'purple eyebrows and green hair.' He gave her five sittings at Dorking while Frederick entertained him in conversation or played, at his request, compositions by Douglas Lilburn and much else. She recalled these visits much later.

Rambling old house all on the ground floor, the room was a sea of linoleum which had worn into holes with priceless Persian rugs placed over them and they too had worn into holes – there were old chesterfields with the covers worn out and when you sat in them you found that the springs had gone. There were countless tables in the room piled up with papers and manuscripts . . . I had to go for my life. I could only get a few bits here and there. He didn't express any opinion of the painting at all.¹⁶

¹⁶ Conversation of Evelyn Page with J.M. Thomson, March 1985

The painter's keenest delight was the city of London, its human bustle, the

colour, the ceaseless movement. She made a number of paintings of Fleet Street, Ludgate Hill and Saint Paul's. On a later visit in 1966-67 she repainted these subjects working from the window of the Australian Embassy.

Before leaving for New Zealand the Pages went to music festivals at Salzburg and Aix-en-Provence; hot evenings listening outside were remembered with joy.

They returned to Wellington with 'its clear, strong colours waiting to be put on canvas.' Renovations had still to be finalised at Hobson Street. They returned with rolls of silk-screened wallpaper (white snowflake on dark blue, the background for many a still life) to paper the small dining room and some fine old tables bought cheaply at auction.

Late in 1951 the Pages bought a corner section on the Reikorangi Road in Waikanae, surrounded on three sides by huge lime trees. They asked Ernst Plishke to design them a weekend house. Then Evelyn began to plan a garden which would serve as the ambience for her painting. Looking at the list of works exhibited it is evident that painting gave way to the care of children, shifting houses, planning renovations and to gardening. During the decade she painted an average of four works a year. Only in the year spent away from her children did she paint more than ten works.

In 1951 she finished paintings begun in England, and made one landscape at Waikanae. The following year Evelyn was working towards her first one person show to be held at the OAS, encouraged by Charles Brasch, who had returned to New Zealand in 1947. In 1952 she showed twenty-one paintings and stayed with Emily Forsyth in Dunedin and in Queenstown.

All this house building and renovation had been very costly. Sales from her Dunedin exhibition had helped, but more money was needed. For the next year Evelyn taught art part-time at Wellington Girls' College, literally just across the road.

Once settled in Hobson Street, the Pages were able to resume the hospitable ways they had so much enjoyed at Governors Bay. Now friends, visiting musicians and students, came to dinner two or three nights each week. Evelyn enjoyed planning meals and worked in a tiny kitchen; the only concession to modern technology was a Kenwood food mixer which she also used to make bread. If her easel and a still life group were set up in one room, then they ate in another. Fruit dried up or decayed since she worked only while the daylight was good.

Her work, meals, music, conversation, reading made the texture of her daily life and painting took its place as part of living. Together, their rich comic sense, Evelyn's laugh and Frederick's ironic wit, made them fun to be with. Young people who came to the house were expected to discuss new music, concerts and books but it was Frederick Page who went to art exhibitions and spoke of contemporary New Zealand painting. And it was he who brought home books each week from any of three libraries. They read and discussed the same fiction, sometimes one snatching an unfinished novel from the other.

In 1956 Evelyn Page was guest exhibitor with the CSA. She sent five

FIG. 17 Evelyn Page in the dining-room at 20 Hobson Street, Wellington, 1956



paintings, one nude and a commissioned portrait of Professor Watson Munro.

Then came an exciting opportunity that year to join Ormond Wilson and James Bertram on the first invited, but unofficial, delegation to visit the People's Republic of China. Evelyn Page's enthusiasm shines through in her letters home. They begin on 28 April in Peking.

This beautiful beautiful place . . . it is more beautiful than Paris, of which it sometimes reminds me. It has that same silvery light, and the streets stretch away under tunnels of trees, just beginning to show their spring green. . . .¹⁷

17 Letter, Evelyn Page to Frederick Page, 28 April 1956

She had been put in the charge of a Chinese woman who spoke perfect English and had spent 'years in Paris, painting, and what she doesn't know may just as well be dropped.' Evelyn visited the Great Wall and determined to return to paint it, and indeed a special expedition was arranged so that she could do so. She admired the Chinese enormously and after a reception for them by Premier Chou En Lai in his winter palace she reflected on their qualities.

They know everything these people – like the Elizabethans – and practise it all. Their finesse just makes one feel uncouth to a degree . . . I just simply did not know that human fingers were capable of such delicate work.¹⁸

18 Letter, Evelyn Page to Frederick Page, 4 May 1956

Music was as important to her as painting.

I had one of the most interesting mornings yet, at the institute of research in music. . . . A professor . . . played us a piece of music 1200 years old. Water flowing down a river, and there was Debussy's inspiration, almost note for note and much more . . . one of their folk songs which you hear in every nook and cranny is extraordinarily like a simple Bartok tune you do on the Piano. Peking opera last night. A gala performance. I have completely fallen for Chinese

- 19 Letter, Evelyn Page to Frederick Page, 10 May 1956

- 20 A selection of Evelyn Page's letters from China were published in *Landfall* 39 (September 1956)

The Fifth Decade Wellington and Waikanae

- 21 Letter, Frederick Page to Evelyn Page, 25 November 1958

- 22 Letter, Frederick Page to Evelyn Page, 15 January 1959

opera . . . I have gone to it night after night, sometimes a terrific effort to keep my eyelids up at all!¹⁹

These letters also record her amazed response to a completely new order of harmony and beauty in architecture. She drew gateways and temples but also children, people in a court, an interpreter. She had not taken oil paint with her and had to buy the only kind available, tubes of Russian pigment which had lost its colour. Of the Tun Huan cave murals, she wrote 'Here are the forerunners of Picasso, Matisse, Dufy, Gauguin, Hitchens – all the French school, primitives as well. Nothing new under the sun.'²⁰ Evelyn and Peggy Garland returned to New Zealand a fortnight after the rest of the party, having been invited to stay on to paint.

Late in 1956, when in Hawkes Bay to paint commissioned portraits, she arranged to visit her brother, Leslie Polson, whom she had not seen since childhood. But they had nothing in common. 'We were absolute strangers.'

The titles of work over 1957 and 1958 suggest that Evelyn Page was spending much of her time painting in the now established garden at Waikanae: *Table in shade*, *Plums in shade*, and other rich still life compositions *Nude under trees* and *Autumn greys*.

From August 1958 to March 1959 Frederick Page travelled again to Europe and shared his experiences with his family. He reports having seen old Christchurch friends Viola Macmillan Brown and Elsa Morrer Kingston whom they had known when she studied enamelling and jewellery at Canterbury School of Art. 'She was the same as ever, and eventually produced box after box of the most beautiful work . . . something quite extraordinary comes through. There is vitality there.'²¹

The next year, still in London, he writes of another New Zealand artist.

I have made contact with Rita [Angus]. She is lonely (I think) and is most forthcoming; we go to intense shows of abstract painting. I took her to one at the ICA in which a set of canvases look as though they had been sprayed with machine-gun bullets. But these strange painters do seem to be concerned with effects of space, and I get something from them, but I don't know what.²²

He was, in fact, far more open to new experiences in painting than his wife. What puzzles and interests one about Evelyn Page's work is her capacity to withstand the movements in modern art. She has shown a most unusual ability to follow her own way regardless of changes in fashion, apparently oblivious to Cubism, Futurism, Dada and the Surreal, Abstract Expressionism or Minimalism; these successive tidal waves have by-passed her islanded vision. Unlike most of her younger contemporaries, her work shows nothing of the flat-surfaced glossiness which consciously abjured chromatic nuance and calligraphic brushstroke. She has seldom followed the work of those renowned in international art magazines. After Archibald Nicoll, Sydney Thompson and Augustus John who influenced her youth, she has selected only a few living painters as mentors. Her later work perhaps shows some influence from study of Skira reproductions of Vuillard and Bonnard and the figure composition of Cézanne in some portraits. Recently she has studied reproductions of Matisse. Consistently though she has turned to those aspects of their work which shared her own

preoccupation with colour.

In some retrospective surveys a viewer is most conscious of the dialogue which the artist has held with his or her contemporaries, with place, with changing perceptions and fluctuating confidence. Not so in Evelyn Page's painting. There are few which point to the possibility of a direction different from the one consistently taken. If the happiest women have no history, then hers might be said to be the work of a happy painter, as innocent of theory as a naiad; the work of a gay, delightful, exuberant human being whose paint salutes the richness, variety and growth of life.

Yet influences there are, and the painter most certainly grew out of the limitations of provincial New Zealand in the 1920s. In her early portraits one may sense Raeburn and Whistler, the gustiness of Augustus John; in the still lifes and nudes the rich enjoyment of colour of another English painter, Matthew Smith, and a kinship with Ivon Hitchens in the *brio* of brushstroke. But her work is more tied to the things seen. She seldom lets the colour or the brushstroke force the image into an abstract movement of colour.

Here came that amazingly rich decade in her – and the century's – sixties. She had a settled life once adolescent frictions were passed and her children became young adults. She had created two environments which sparked her creativity. Her work reflects her perception of essences, her profound visual response to the coloured 'suchness' of objects. Long, close looking means that she had worked out how to translate seeing into painted marks on canvas, patches of pure colour which could sing her lay.

The Auckland City Art Gallery recognised her strength when they included her in their third survey exhibition of contemporary artists, *Eight New Zealand painters*, which toured the country from October 1959 through 1960.

While Evelyn Page moved so strongly forward as a painter in the sixties, she had to contend with arthritic pain variously in hip, knees and hands. A first attack of arthritis had prevented her being with a most-loved sister, Winifred, as her health failed and nor could she go to the funeral in Christchurch. Her life was becoming more housebound but, since she could still drive a car, she went often to paint out at Waikanae.

In the 1960s and 1970s still life and figure compositions reflect her life in the lime-edged orchard garden at Waikanae. A white-slatted table held fruit, a jug of wine, scrumptiously simple food in brown bowls; faces and skin glowed or greened in leaf-broken sunlight; roses and daffodils bloomed and light flooded through open French doors over her serene thickly fleshed nudes seated sewing, washing or lying beside bowls of fruit and swathes of opalescent cloth in an enchantment of the senses.

In May 1962, Frederick Page, six years younger than Evelyn, collapsed in Hobson Street: 'posterior myocardial infarction' was diagnosed and he stayed a month in Wellington Public Hospital. While he convalesced at home, Evelyn painted two further nudes and she certainly expected her models to give her their time. For one of them Kura Glover came out each day from Paekakariki to Waikanae to pose for twelve sittings. This painting with its rich, assured brushstrokes was admired by the English art critic,



FIG. 18 *Point of departure Norwich Quay Lyttelton* (1944-45) (cat. no. 29). Hocken Library, University of Otago

Sir Herbert Read, when he came to give the Chancellor's lectures in Wellington. It was bought by Sylvia Ashton-Warner. Another friend modelled for *Nude with fruit* (cat. no. 43) in the dining room at Hobson Street. The model is browned on her face, neck, arms and legs by intense sunlight while breasts, belly and upper thighs remain white: a brown and white contrast which the painter has incorporated into the whole colour composition. This same friend obligingly walked a small daughter in Lambton Quay to provide foreground figures for *Wellington Park* (cat. no. 45).

Evelyn Page's authority as a portrait painter was also publicly recognised. John Beaglehole gave an amusing account which shows that even the course of public commissions does not run smooth.

For seven months on the Arts Advisory Council, I have been trying to get fixed up a commission for Eve Page to paint the portrait of Walter Nash, and at least got to the point where, a decision of our meeting of the AAC having been reaffirmed at the next meeting three months later, a jittery Sec of Internal Affairs is at last prevailed on to take it to the Minister.²³

²³ Letter, J.C. Beaglehole to Janet Paul, 4 August 1961

About 1964, Evelyn Page made a serene, joyful painting of a young girl, seated nude in a chair, leaning forward. It was an earlier vision of *Girl at a window* (cat. no. 52) where 'reality' is subsumed to the demands of colour composition.

Ten magnificent nudes were painted between 1957 and 1985. They are rare in the history of painting. Rare because few women have painted the female nude; rare also in European painting for the female nude to have been painted with such open acceptance. Evelyn Page uses a rich colour and sensuous paint to depict familiar, even homely flesh. The nude in these paintings is not a sex object; her plump, living, unselfconscious figures

have nothing to do with the sleek or angular models of fashion photography. Neither are they goddesses. They are not idealised. They have much more in common with Rembrandt's lovingly recorded, no-longer-young body of his Saskia – her flesh marked by childbirth, even dented with the elastic of her garters, standing to urinate or leaning on her elbow in bed, than with the glowing, ivory-tinted, desirable bodies of High Renaissance painting. They do also have an affinity with Bonnard's domestic paintings of his wife, drawn when she was in her bath or drying her legs, or examining her face critically in a looking-glass. He, too, had been looking to paint a familiar, solid, real presence. Evelyn Page's nudes are too tranquil, too beautiful in their sunlit settings to be German symbols of the eternal earth mother; nor have they the symbolic sexuality or sad intensity of Frieda Kahlo's self portraits. They do share something of the joyful celebration of life with the nudes of Matisse.

In New Zealand few artists have used the female nude as subject, although Rita Angus had painted her own body with an austere objectivity and her own face as a telling envelope for the psyche.

The Sixth Decade

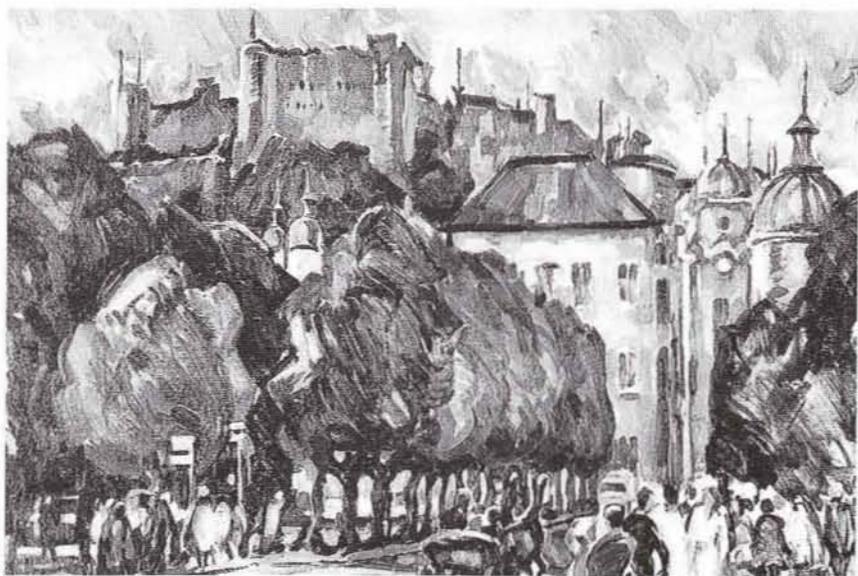
When Evelyn Page turned sixty-six Charles Brasch had written 'how meaningless years are when active and alert in mind.' The painter had made her only application to the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council for a travel grant and was given one hundred pounds. She was planning her final journey to Europe. She had particularly wanted to see a large Bonnard exhibition at Burlington House, but arrived only in time for its last day. 'Bonnard' she wrote, 'has done everything that I would have given almost anything to do.' Sadly, she also missed out on her prime purpose to experience the teaching of Oscar Kokoschka; he had retired to Switzerland and left others to take over his summer 'School of Seeing'. She arrived at the school, set up in the Castle Art Academy in Salzburg, also a little late. A huge class of young people from all over the world was already at work. She felt conspicuously white-headed. After a few days, the German professor who posed the model, glanced at her work and dismissively commented 'schmalz' – too sweet. She persisted with the unfamiliar, but requisite, medium of watercolour and found after a few days that the young crowded around to look at her work, and to talk. Of the school, she said, 'What I learned at Salzburg was to let the subject impress as simply as possible.'

When it was over, Evelyn was too tired to join her family on a planned trip to Prague and Leningrad. She stayed instead to paint Salzburg and then met Frederick for the Festival at Aix-en-Provence.

Back in England Evelyn and her friend Sylvia Fox shared a cottage in the garden of the sculptor Peggy Garland. It was at Eynsham near Oxford and they went off daily on painting excursions around the Cotswolds. Later, Anna Page, who was working for the United Nations Bureau in Paris, joined her in a three-week camping tour through France. There are sketchbook drawings of Chartres, Amboise, and a hill town, Roc Amadour.

In 1967 Frederick Page was made Professor of Music. Evelyn returned to Wellington early the next year. In August, Hobson Street was the scene

FIG. 19 *Salzburg*,
1967 (oil on canvas
board, 450 × 602
mm). Janet Paul,
Wellington



of a wedding of Anna Page to Brent Wilson. Her portrait of the poet Denis Glover with a nautical beard was her only major painting in 1968. In these years, though sometimes using a stick, she was not hampered by arthritis, but 1969 was the last year she travelled as far as Queenstown.

That summer she painted her home help again, posed nude in the garden at Waikanae. The young woman was worried by what her parents might say if they knew so Evelyn painted a hat over her face, intending to remove the red paint later. Somehow it has remained (cat. no. 53).

By 1970 Evelyn Page's reputation was widely recognised although she had no dealer and her only solo show had been twenty years ago in Dunedin. The National Art Gallery and the NZAFA shared the organisation of a retrospective exhibition of ninety-eight works, which was opened on 7 December 1970, by Dame Ngaio Marsh. In a short introduction to the catalogue Douglas Lilburn saluted her 'modestly venerable 71' and quoted Hokusai: 'by the age of 80, I shall have made further progress, and by the age of 90, I shall see into the mystery of things.'

In 1970 Frederick Page retired. He saw that his wife's movements were increasingly made painful and more restricted by arthritis. He also saw that painting was her life and that she still had many works planned in her mind. He did what he most usefully could to support her work. He said, 'you have looked after me for thirty-five years. Now it's my turn to look after you. I will take over all the household shopping and the cooking.' And he did. To save him carrying heavy parcels, they made a weekly shopping expedition by car. Evelyn drove, magnificently double-parked, displaying her disability ticket, and Frederick bought fruit and meat, cheese and coffee from his favourite suppliers in Cuba Street. Well-planned, speedy forays. Each afternoon he visited art exhibitions or libraries, bringing back books for them both. They read novels and biographies – Doris Lessing, Barbara Pym and Muriel Spark, the Sitwells, Harold Nicholson, Leonard

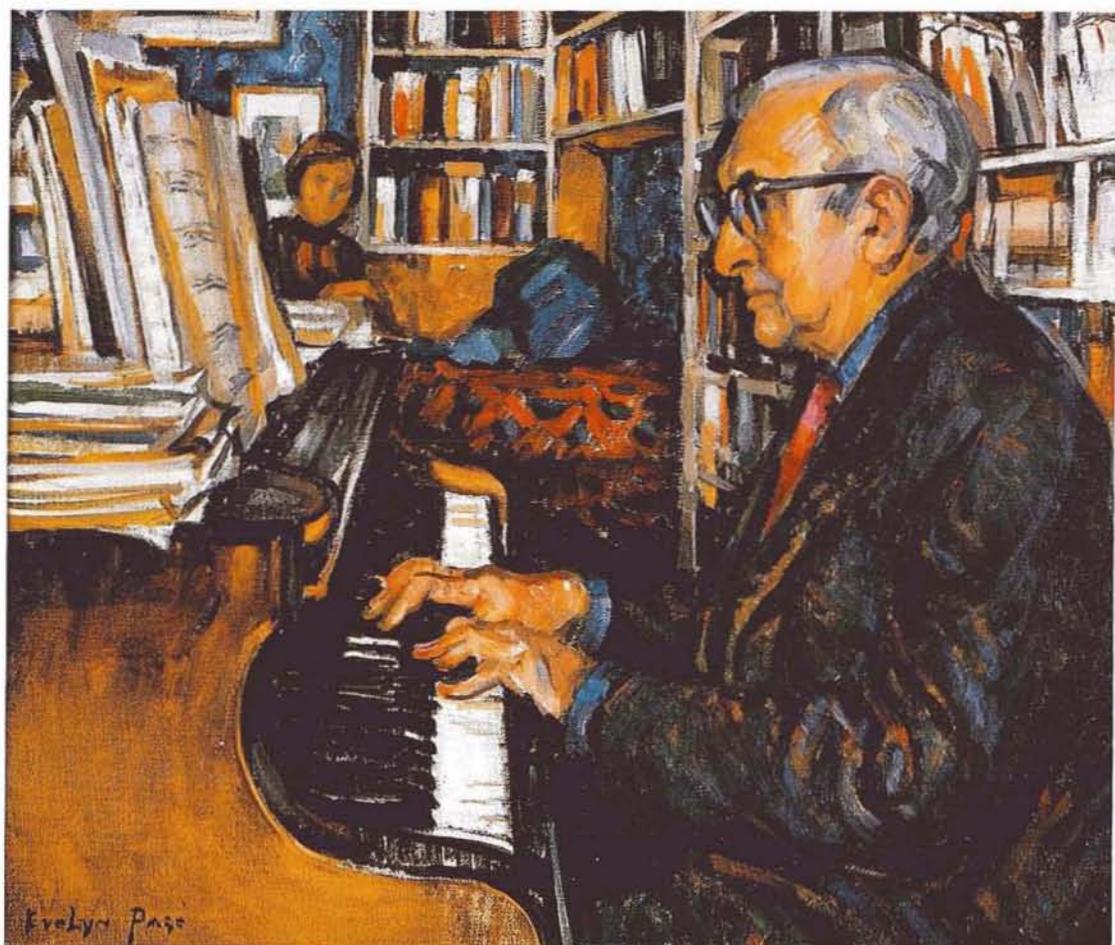


PLATE 23 *Frederick Page at the piano* (1981) (cat. no. 64). Evelyn Page, Wellington

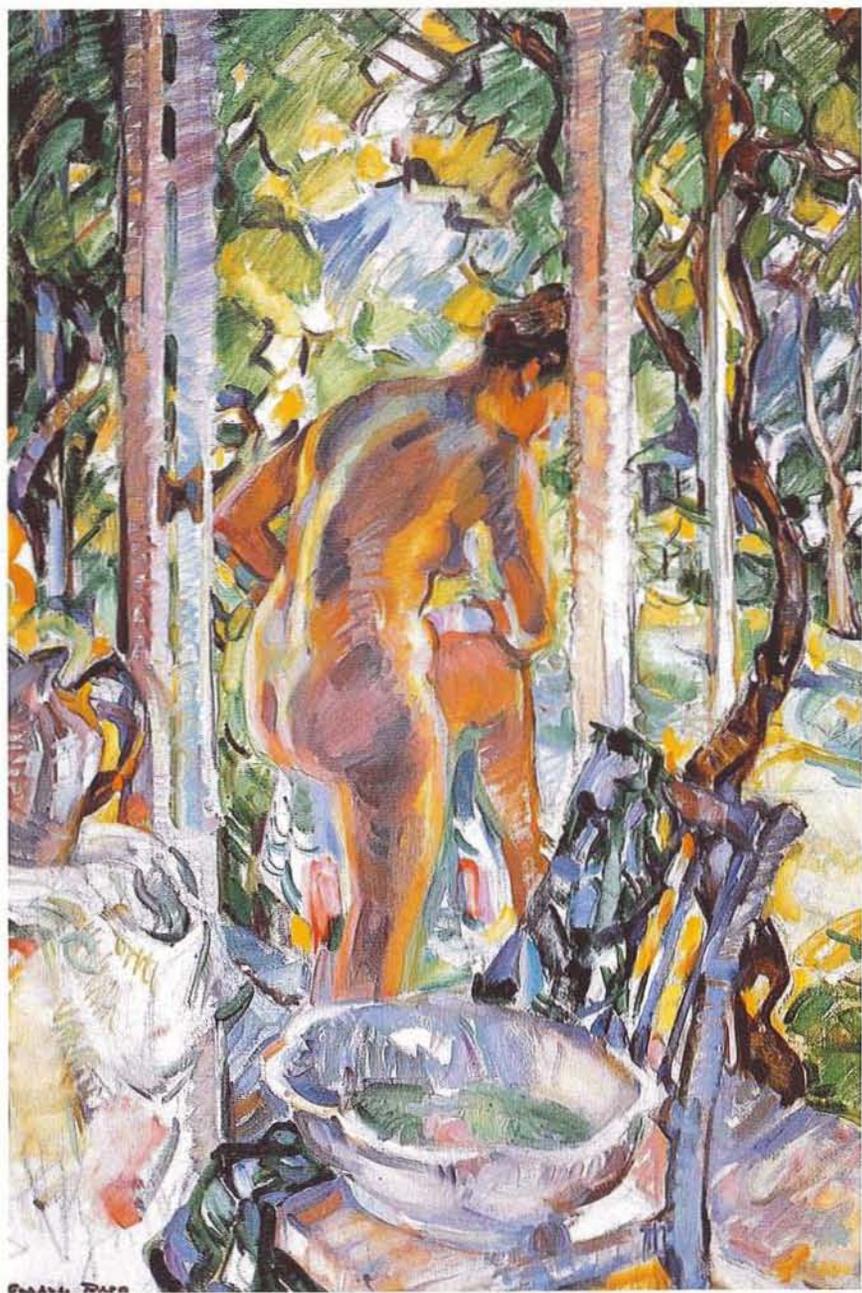


PLATE 24 *Nude in a doorway* (1974) (cat. no. 60). Dr D. Mason, Wellington

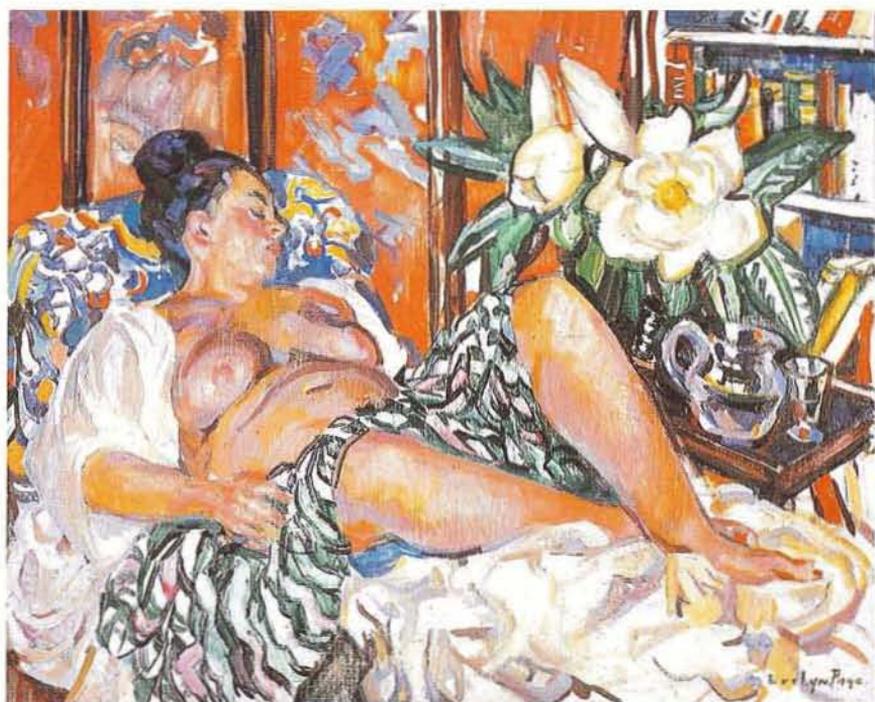


PLATE 25 *Nude with magnolias* 1985-86 (cat. no. 70). Evelyn Page, Wellington



PLATE 26 *Still life with apricots* 1985 (cat. no. 69). Mr P.L. Condon, Christchurch



PLATE 27 *Portrait of Edith Campion* 1983 (cat. no. 67). Mr M.R. Campion, Wellington



PLATE 28 *Valmai Moffett* (1933) (cat. no. 11).
Dunedin Public Art Gallery

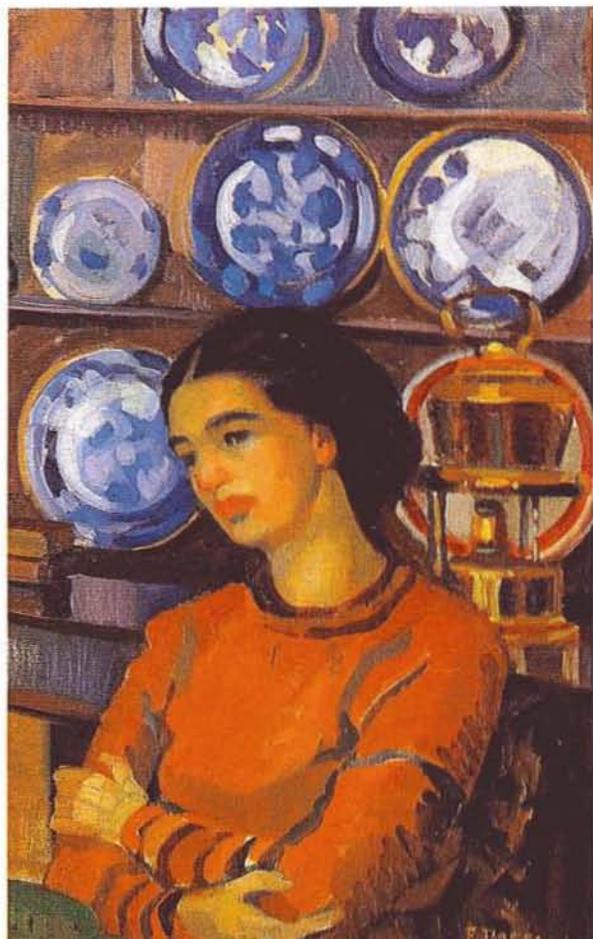


PLATE 29 *Olivia* 1934 (cat. no. 12). *Mr and Mrs P. Jarvis,*
Auckland

PLATE 30 *Summer morn* 1929 (cat. no. 6). *Robert McDougall*
Art Gallery, Christchurch





PLATE 31 *Recumbent nude* (1972) (cat. no. 54). Dr N.C. Baskett, Auckland



PLATE 32 *Breakfast at Hobson Street* (1975). (cat. no. 61) Mrs M. McAlpine, Christchurch



FIG. 20 Evelyn and Frederick Page (c.1970)

Woolf and each volume of Virginia Woolf's letters as it appeared. They also reread Henry James and Edith Wharton.

Evelyn had begun a painting in Mary Seddon's coffee bar in Majoribanks Street, but had found the constant activity of her models too distracting. She gave it up. When a painter friend urged her to continue, Frederick set up a bar in the sitting room at Hobson Street and roped in some friends and students from the university music department as models so that *Girl at a coffee bar* (cat. no. 50) could be completed. He now also had time to be a model. One of the painter's favourite works, *Breakfast at Hobson Street* (cat. no. 61), was done of her husband in the Hobson Street dining room, reading the morning newspaper, beside a great vase of spring bulbs brought in from the Waikanae garden.

Often, on fine days, they took lunch and drove around to Evans Bay. Evelyn loved the boats in the harbour, the red tugs, the yachts racing, and often went back to paint from the car. She was working for her only solo show in Auckland, in 1972 at the John Leech Gallery. She also showed in Wellington and had a one person show with the Bett-Duncan Studio Gallery. *Plate of apples* (cat. no. 58) was shown first then. The Alexander Turnbull Library commissioned a memorial portrait of John Cawte Beaglehole (cat. no. 59). The artist worked from memory, often making versions in charcoal of photographs taken by one of Beaglehole's former students, Lynn Corner.

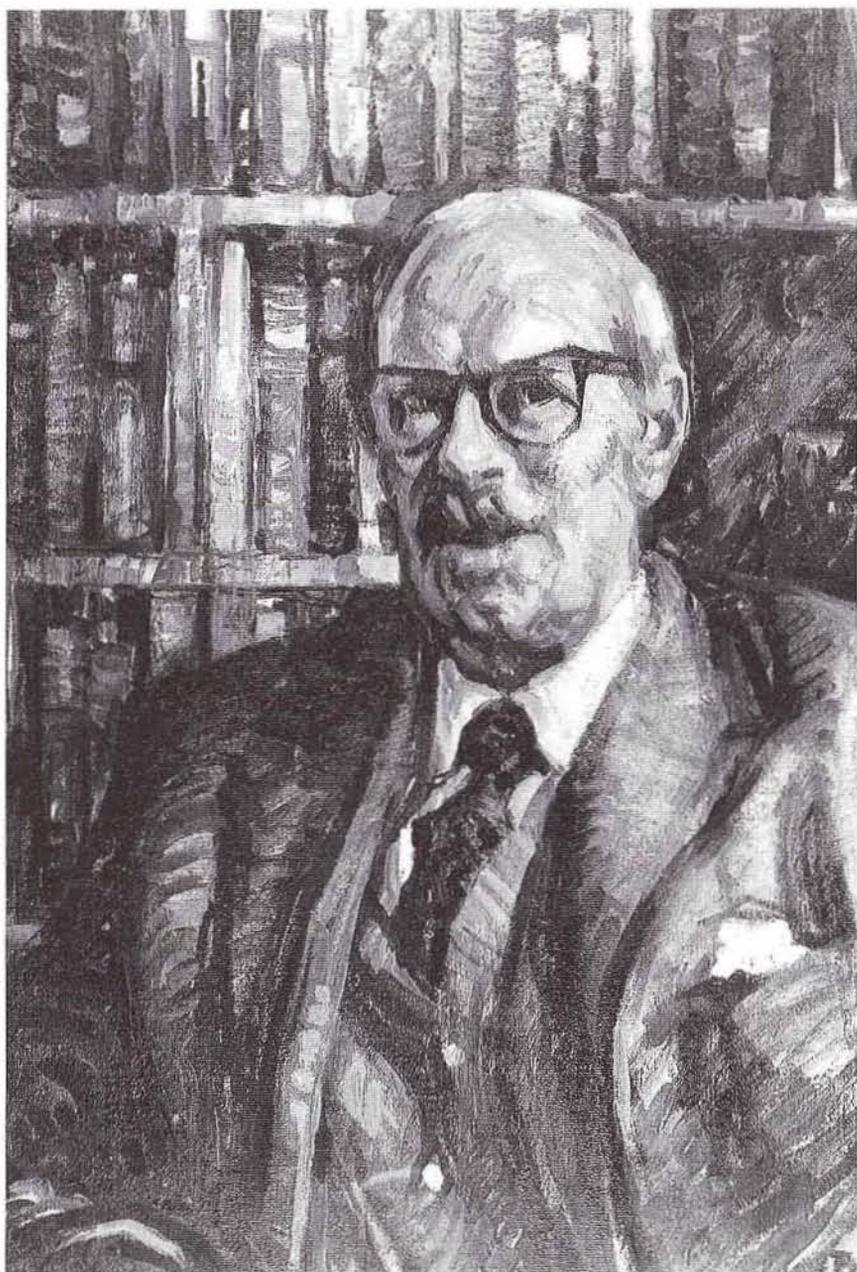


FIG. 21 *John Cawte
Beaglehole OM (1974)*
(cat. no. 59). *Alexander
Turnbull Library,
Wellington*

The Seventh Decade

Between 1975 and 1980 there are only two major paintings. Evelyn was increasingly crippled by arthritis and had had several falls which were followed by acute sciatica. She was in hospital with bronchitis and in March 1979 fell and broke her right arm. She spent the day of her eightieth birthday at Ewart Hospital. A photograph taken there gives an idea of her physical presence, her concern for people and the courage and gaiety she has brought to all her disabilities.

But in 1980 she was at work again: a series of drawings of friends was begun that year, charcoal heads, often in profile, remarkable for their visual accuracy and their perception of individual character. She set up a great still life on a table in the bow window of the living room and worked for two months in 1980 on *Grapes fruit and wine* (cat. no. 63) while the fruit disintegrated and replacements were eaten, because they were not exactly the right colour.

In 1981 she began a painting she had wanted to do for a long time. It was of Frederick Page playing in the music room at Hobson Street (cat. no. 64). It was his habit to go to the music room at nine o'clock each morning, write his *Listener* articles or answer letters, and then play for two hours before 'luncheon'. Evelyn had her easel placed in the window, the piano moved into better light. She painted the speed of his moving hands, his concentrated expression, his controlled stance. A portrait in movement and a poignant likeness.

Then she went on and painted a high-keyed still life, *Pears on a plate* (cat. no. 65). She wanted to add a few new paintings to an exhibition of her selected works to be held at the NZAFA in April 1982. This show was opened by the playwright and old friend, Bruce Mason.

In 1983 Evelyn Page was made first Fellow of the Academy and presented with the first Governor General's Award by Sir David Beattie, an occasion which Frederick Page had to miss because he was teaching piano to advanced students in China. One of the last works she made with her husband's help was a portrait of Edith Champion in which the sitter's lively attention is a response to his amusing conversation (cat. no. 67). His hands appear on the right edge of the painting. Soon after that Evelyn was in hospital following a fall. She was still unwell when, on 29 November 1983, Frederick Page put down the book he was reading in bed, and died.

Since then, she has lived only to paint. She worked on a fine still life between March and May 1984, finishing it before she went to Calvary Hospital for a hip replacement operation. Before she left hospital, she had already arranged for the theatre nurse, Erin Criscillo, who was a friend, to model for her again in January the next year. She had 'other prospects in mind.' One was to accept a commission for a portrait of Sir Alexander Turner (cat. no. 68). And both of these projects have eventuated, both painted from her wheelchair. The portrait was begun in March and finished early in June. *Nude with magnolias* (cat. no. 70) was painted in the music room at Hobson Street and although the figure was painted in January 1985, the background had to be set aside until the following January. At eight-six she has done all this and three still life compositions, as well as continuing to study, from reproduction, Matisse.



FIG. 22 *Ormond
Wilson, 1980 (pencil).
Cecilia Johnson,
Wellington*

His colour and clear pattern have influenced her late still life.

Now she spends hours sitting at a table in the bay window of her studio cum living room, analysing what it is she sees when she looks at light on a leaf shape, or studying the nuance of flower construction, reflections on glass, the sheen of skin. She will be working while she sits considering how to express all these things in paint, how to keep a moving balance in a composition. 'Now I think I know how to do it' she will say of some part of a canvas which may have occupied her thoughts for weeks or months.

She cannot always take the cap off a tube of paint or unscrew a bottle of turps or bend to pick up a dropped paintbrush. She speaks through her

work. She needs no intermediary. She paints to communicate her vivid reverence for life. Those who have her work on their walls continue to value it above currency. In Japan, an artist of the stature of Evelyn Page would long since have been declared a 'precious living treasure'.

Towards Independence
Neil Roberts

'She will be a painter with whom future historians of Art will have to reckon.'
Professor James Shelley, September 1929

There is no question that this prophecy about Evelyn Page has begun to be realised. Over seven decades as an instinctive representational painter she has developed her palette as much as she has the human interest of her subject matter. Her treatment of colour has given her a place as one of New Zealand's foremost colourists.

As a painter she has maintained a unique faith with the formative years of her training, grounded as it was in the traditions of the British School. But like other progressive artists she has not remained rigid in her ideas and has developed an interest in others' work, particularly the modern masters. Cézanne, Bonnard, Kokoschka, Augustus John and Matthew Smith have all drawn her interest more than her New Zealand contemporaries. Yet she has never followed them slavishly but carefully assimilated the ideas that have suited her independent purpose. Above all her vision has always been singular and sure as she has looked at the real world through what she has termed 'her window.'

Whatever speculation there might be as to influences upon Evelyn Page's painting style one influential factor is inescapable, and that is her formative training at Canterbury College School of Art, Christchurch. It is my purpose to discuss this influence against the backdrop of some of the artistic circumstances that placed constraints on Evelyn Page as a painter up until the late 1930s.

I have used contemporary press reviews of her work from several sources, but principally from the two Christchurch dailies, the *Christchurch Press* and the *Lyttelton Times*. The reviewers for these papers during the twenties and thirties were as different in approach as they were in background and reflected two distinct levels of opinion. The *Press* had as its principal art critic Dr Lester who wrote as an amiable amateur connoisseur. (He was a Christchurch medical practitioner, prominent in the affairs of the Canterbury Society of Arts (CSA) during the 1920s and 1930s.) On the other hand Professor Shelley, writing sometimes caustically for the *Lyttelton Times*, was an educated art historian who subjected the work under review to more learned and searching criticism.

Evelyn Page, then Evelyn Polson, commenced her studies at Canterbury College School of Art on 23 February 1915. It was wartime and there was a higher number of female students not only at Canterbury but in the art colleges throughout New Zealand. The Canterbury School of Art had been established in 1882 and was affiliated to the Science and Art Department of South Kensington London although it was more a colonial version of the Royal Academy College of Art. By 1915 it had no rival in New Zealand.

Since 1905, the School had been under the directorship of the flamboyant Robert Herdman-Smith, who had enjoyed a career as a musician before training at Manchester College of Art. Herdman-Smith instructed several classes himself, including the painting of the figure out of doors, and was assisted by a staff of twelve.

The School offered four main courses of study, but it was in the drawing



FIG. 23 Life class at Canterbury College School of Art (c.1916). Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch

and painting department that Evelyn Page enrolled. This department was run by Richard Wallwork, Leonard Booth and Cecil Kelly. Students usually progressed through elementary, intermediate and advanced stages and classes included: drawing from natural and fashioned objects, figure drawing from the antique and life and figure painting and composition in both the studio and landscape. Elementary students usually took classes in object and antique drawing as preparation for the life class as well as perspective and memory drawing and painting from still life and nature.

Evelyn Page, because of her ability, was permitted to pass straight into the life class. This was taken by Richard Wallwork (1882–1955). He was English-born and had attended Manchester College of Art and the Royal College of Art. He was King's prizeman in anatomy, had studied mural painting under G.E. Moira and etching under Frank Short. He was an accomplished academic artist in that his work was based on a formal regime of disciplines focused on direct observation and analysis, rather than creative interpretation.

Life class students were tutored in both drawing and painting from models, nude and costumed. Training was often extended to figure composition in which figures were disposed on the canvas against an invented background. Studies of the head made in these classes provided a grounding in the elements of portraiture.

The antique drawing class, which Evelyn Page took throughout her time at the school, was tutored by the Byronic Leonard Booth (1878–1974).



FIG. 24 Cecil F. Kelly, *Sunlight*, 1925. Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch

Booth was not only the most poetic in appearance of the staff, he was also the most poetic in his own work. He had himself attended the School of Art and was very much a product of this training. He was an excellent draughtsman and a sound instructor, perhaps the most imaginative and versatile member of the staff at that time. The antique class was considered to be vital preparation for the understanding of form in the life class, as was still life.

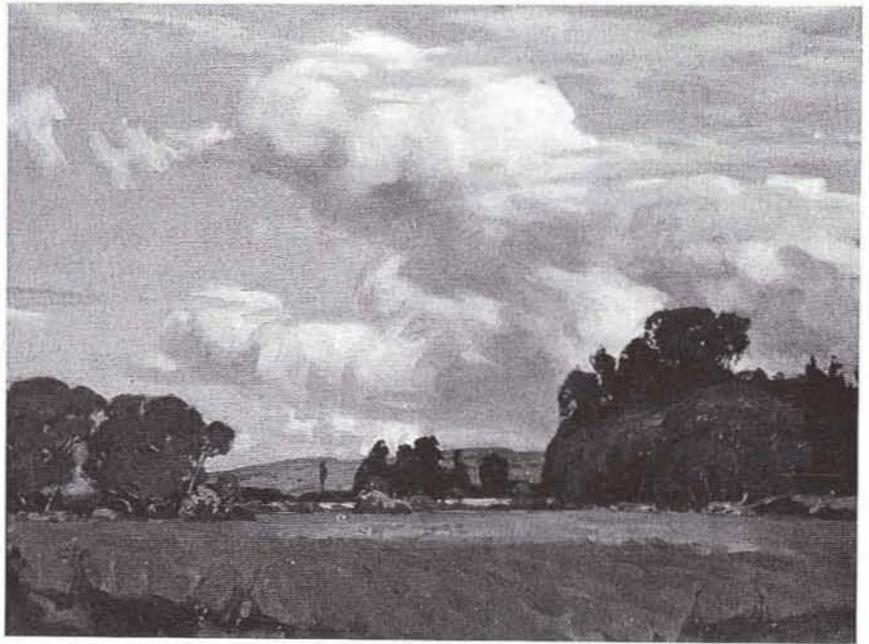
The still life class and certain outdoor landscape painting classes were taken by Cecil F. Kelly (1878–1958). Kelly, like Booth, was a product of his training at the School of Art late last century. However, unlike Booth, he had travelled overseas and studied in Paris and at the Royal College of Art in London. As an artist he was skilled and as an instructor effective, although according to his students not particularly imaginative.

In the still life class the student was taught to observe the effects of light and shade on objects. This understanding was then applied to the landscape. Outdoor painting classes were usually taken close to the School, although classes did visit the Canterbury Provincial Buildings and Christchurch Cathedral. Classes also made excursions further afield. A favourite place was at the foot of the Port Hills where the Heathcote River ran its course through Cashmere and Opawa.

Kelly taught his own approach to the landscape which relied on observation and with the effects of light paramount. Many of Evelyn Page's early landscapes show evidence of this teaching. Kelly's aim was to make his students use their eyes.

It was obvious from the outset that Evelyn Page was an exceptional student and this was confirmed by her constant examination successes. In

FIG. 25 Archibald F. Nicoll, *Looking towards Cashmere from Bryndwr* (c.1930). Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch



1919 she won the highest award of the School, the College medal.

In 1917 Herdman-Smith's problems with the Canterbury College Board of Governors came to a head and he was obliged to resign. As it was still wartime only a temporary appointment was made and Frederick Gurnsey became acting director. It was not until 1920 that a new permanent appointment was confirmed and Archibald F. Nicoll became director. Like Kelly and Booth he had been trained initially at Canterbury but he also introduced his students to principles of academic study modelled on the Royal Academy School in London. To him as to Kelly observation was a fundamental but he did structure his landscapes more firmly, giving greater attention to tonal contrasts. Such structuring was reinforced by strong, gestural brushwork. Nicoll took advanced landscape classes and certain early landscapes by Evelyn Page show evidence of Nicoll's method.

These tutors could only offer Evelyn Page and her contemporaries a basic training in skills. The rather rigid, almost closed attitudes meant there was limited stimulation at Canterbury for the more experimental and creative artist.

Canterbury College School of Art revealed a strong British influence and was rather restricted to Royal Academy principles. Students received only limited instruction in the history of art and nothing was taught of the modern movement until James Shelley, Professor of Education at Canterbury College, began his art lectures in 1921. Shelley had lectured in the history of art at the University of Manchester before coming to New Zealand and had a considerable knowledge of art and the philosophy of art.

The School of Art did have a library, but it was very limited. Most of its books and periodicals covered the Renaissance or the academic artists who took it as their model. *The Studio* did occasionally offer glimpses of more

recent French and European work but the emphasis was usually still on the Impressionists and their followers. A contemporary of Evelyn Page's remembered 'when I first got to know about English and French artists, when I first went to France at twenty, I didn't know a thing, I can remember the shock of the French art scene and how behind Christchurch was.'¹

1 Conversation, Lady Frankel and John Coley. Canberra, June 1985

The opportunity to exhibit was also limited but each year, usually two weeks prior to the start of the first term, an exhibition of student work was held. Evelyn Page was highly commended in several reviews of these exhibitions as were her close friends Ngaio Marsh and Ceridwen Thornton.

On 7 March 1922 at their monthly meeting, the Council of the CSA elected Evelyn Page a working member of the society. Her sister Alice Polson and Ceridwen Thornton also gained membership that night.

This was not Evelyn Page's earliest association with the CSA for she had participated in its student competitions on a number of occasions. She had also been awarded several of the Society's diplomas in 1918 and 1919. However, election as a working member of the CSA was no simple matter. Potential members were obliged to submit works for the scrutiny of the Council which then held a ballot. Evelyn Page's earlier success at the School of Art and the recent award of a gold medal by the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts (NZAFA) would have also helped their decision.

The CSA during the 1920s was just as conservative as the School of Art. Its model was the Royal Academy in London. The major benefit of belonging to young artists of Evelyn Page's generation was the opportunity to exhibit, not only in Christchurch, but also with other art societies. This was not, however, automatic. Work had to pass the scrutiny of the Hanging Committee which always consisted of at least three Council members. Exhibitors had to submit works at least twenty-one days in advance of selection and it was not unusual for upwards of 600 entries to be received. The Hanging Committee could be ruthless in its selection and rarely chose anything that did not fit the Royal Academy mould. In 1922 alone 250 works were rejected. The Committee was also wary of anything that might arouse controversy or did not absolutely abide by the rules of the constitution.

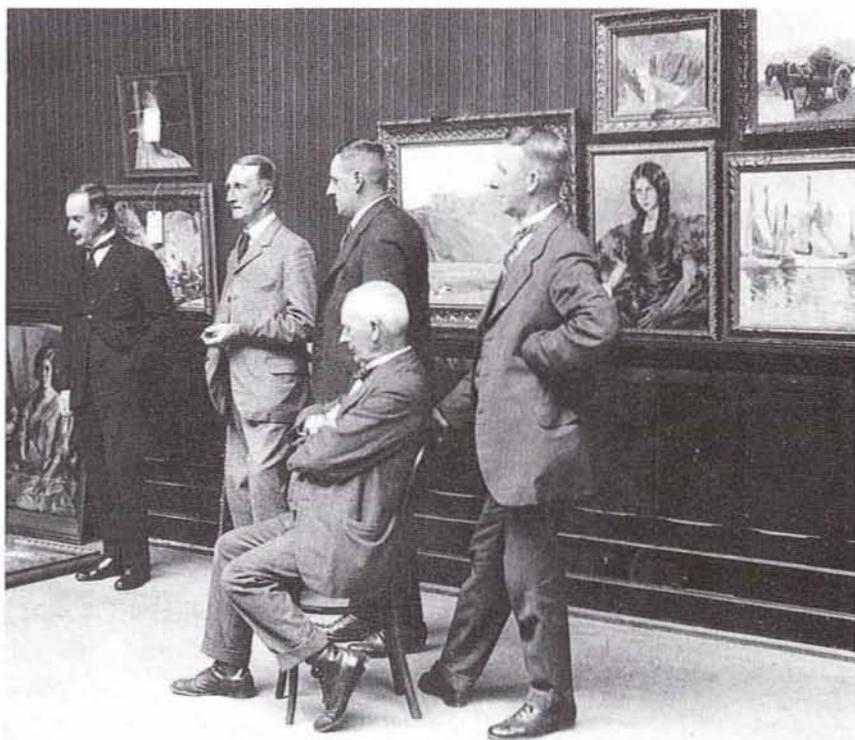
These were the years when the CSA was at the height of its power. Its membership increased and the *Annual* exhibition openings in March were social occasions at which the art was often upstaged by the sartorial elegance of the members. But rarely was work hung to good advantage and displays presented what Professor Shelley referred to as 'the old habit of patchwork quilt.'² Further, there was little evidence on the walls that much had changed since the nineteenth century.

Evelyn Page first showed in the 1922 *Annual* exhibition and it was apparent that she was doing what was expected, as five works were accepted. Most of these were student paintings. A nude out of doors titled *Melisande* reflected her strong interest in music. It showed a nude girl beside a rock pool under the shade of a tree and was considered to be 'a remarkable piece of work for so young an artist.'³

2 *Lyttelton Times* 22 April 1933 p. 10

3 *Press* (Christchurch) 8 April 1922 p. 9

FIG. 26 The hanging committee of the Canterbury Society of Arts, 1925. Standing, from left: Cecil Kelly, Dr Lester, Archibald Nicoll. Seated: William Menzies Gibb. Canterbury Society of Arts, Christchurch



4 *Sun* (Christchurch) 8 April 1922 p. 9

The reviewer for the Christchurch *Sun* was less enthusiastic and felt that whilst the figure in *Melisande* was 'nicely painted', she was isolated from her surroundings, which he considered to be almost an afterthought.⁴ This criticism possibly reflected Wallwork's approach to figure composition which set life room studies against an imaginary background.

The 1922 *Annual* exhibition of the Otago Art Society (OAS) in Dunedin was a special event as the Society had just merged with the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society. Evelyn Page sent several works among the more recent of which was *The old bookshop* (cat. no. 2). It clearly illustrates the influence of the still life room and how its lessons could be effectively used to structure an interior making the smallest element important within the whole composition.

The following year she began showing with the Auckland Society of Arts (ASA) where her work was noted by Auckland press critics. In Christchurch that same year she had six works selected for the CSA *Annual* exhibition, which was encouraging considering that 200 works were rejected.

Younger artists were still in the minority in the CSA, although among Evelyn Page's contemporaries showing that year were Ceridwen Thornton, Viola Macmillan Brown, Ngaio Marsh, James Cook, Rhona Haszard, Ronald McKenzie, Stephanie Vincent, John Weeks and Margaret Anderson. All their work closely reflected their years of study at the School of Art, although a few were starting to experiment, perhaps a little too much for the taste of Dr Lester, who wrote that 'one notices an increasing

tendency on the part of artists to copy eccentric styles of painters in vogue in England. It is a passing craze.⁷⁵

The CSA had established a clear hierarchy that kept younger artists firmly in their place. The reviews in Christchurch's principal dailies observed this structure. Both often printed as many as four or five notices of the *Annuals* but rarely did younger artists appear in the first notice which seemed to be reserved for a well-established and popular group that included Archibald Nicoll, Cecil and Elizabeth Kelly, Richard Wallwork and Sydney Thompson. Even older painters such as William Menzies Gibb and Margaret Stoddart were upstaged.

In November 1923 Sydney Thompson, regarded by CSA members as Canterbury's expatriate supreme, returned to Christchurch after twelve years of living and painting in France. Within a month he held a large exhibition of more than eighty works at the Durham Street Art Gallery. Thompson's bright impressionistic canvases, mostly painted out-of-doors, found immediate favour and he probably exerted a certain influence on some local artists. However, there is no strong evidence to suggest that his work aroused anything more than a passing interest for most. His treatment of both the figure and landscape in terms of light and colour was fresher and more direct than what had been seen before.

Sydney Thompson held classes in the garden of Mrs H.J. Beswick. Evelyn Page joined this group, painting the model out of doors for one or two sessions. It is unlikely that a developing painter of twenty-four would not have been curious about what Thompson was doing but, despite some superficial similarities, Evelyn Page was not strongly influenced by him. His declaration many years later that she was one of his best pupils has little foundation. Not only was he not in New Zealand when she was a student, she could have seen his works only infrequently. The important factor which is usually overlooked in concluding there was a direct influence is that Evelyn Page received a very similar early training to Sydney Thompson, even though some twenty years separated them. Had Thompson not travelled overseas, he would probably have been painting much like his contemporary Leonard Booth, or indeed like Evelyn Page in 1923.

However, Thompson's example probably did reinforce her interest in colour and concern with light. This should not be overstated though as many British Royal Academy painters were following a similar path. This brought her nude studies closer to that of artists such as Harry Watson and W.G. de Glehn who also explored the effects of light on flesh. Further, in portraiture Page's work showed a greater affinity with Sir John Lavery than Sydney Thompson. In summary, some Thompson influence should be recognised but it was never decisive.

In 1925 Evelyn Page's friend Margaret Anderson returned after two years travel full of enthusiasm for contemporary French and British painting. It is likely that Anderson had an effect for there is no question that the work exhibited by Evelyn Page in 1926 was generally lighter and more colourful than that of three years earlier.

Two of Page's major works of that year were *Figure out of doors*, for

6 *Sun* (Christchurch) 18
March 1926 p. 8

7 *Lyttelton Times* 17
March p. 9

8 *Press* (Christchurch) 20
March 1926 p. 17

9 *NZ Herald* 15 June
1926 p. 18

10 *Auckland Star* 22 June
1926 p. 18

11 *Auckland Star* 25 June
1926 p. 11

which a friend had posed in the summer sun, and an interior nude *The green slipper*. When shown in Christchurch *Figure out of doors* was referred to as being 'the plain unemotional title of a truly Joyous bit of work, by far the strongest effort of the younger painters.'⁶ This reviewer considered it a eulogy to youth and it stirred him to a lengthy outpouring. James Shelley was less poetic in his praise. He considered the work 'daring' with 'just a suspicion of over confidence' so that in her brushwork, she was determined in her own independent way to 'risk everything, rather than lose a vigorous statement.' He was impressed by her choice of subject which he considered was 'achieving what one rarely sees in New Zealand a relation between the figure and the open air.' He summed up that her work 'does much to add interest to the exhibition.'⁷

In his remarks for the *Press* Dr Lester felt that Sydney Thompson had some influence: 'Miss Polson in a striking group of large oils seems to have caught most successfully, the inspiration of Mr Sydney Thompson.'⁸ He was deeply impressed by *Figure out of doors*, *Sunlight and shadow* and *The green slipper*.

When these paintings were shown in Auckland during June the response from the reviewer for the *Herald* was equally complimentary. He described *Sunlight and shadow* as 'Luminous and convincing' and that in painting *Figure out of doors* she had surmounted very complicated light problems, but had also given 'life and delicate feeling to composition – raised to the plane of symbolism. . . . This is quite one of the most successful pictures of recent years.'⁹

All seemed to be well until 22 June when the following letter appeared in the *Star*.

Dear Sir,

I have been a visitor at Society Exhibitions for a number of years and until this year, have been impressed by the fact that the committee have seen fit to eliminate all pictures which have a tendency towards an immoral suggestion, but on this occasion, I must voice my indignation that a picture having such characteristics as the one entitled 'Figure Out of Doors' should have passed the hanging committee.

Simply there are enough doubtful pictures to be seen in the theatres without the Society of Arts having to enter for this class of support. They would be better without it.

I am – Purity¹⁰

One of the first to respond was the writer, broadcaster and artist A.R.D. Fairburn, whose letter extended for almost half-a-page column.

May I ask in what way he finds this picture suggestive? Is it the fact that it is a study in the nude which makes him shrink in horror? If we are to scrap pictures on this account, about one tenth (possibly the best tenth) of the great art of the world would have to be removed to the city destructor. Let us not stop with Miss Polson's picture, a clean sweep must be made. There is that lewd sculpture Venus de Milo. There are those paintings by that coarse fellow Rubens who might at least have had the decency to clothe his bacchanals in billycock hats and clawhammer coats. There must be hundreds of low pictures such as these in the galleries of Europe.¹¹

Fairburn then went on to refer to some of the works on display in the Auckland City Art Gallery with particular reference to *St Sebastian's martyrdom*.

When a man goes out to be martyred, he should have enough consideration for the feelings of onlookers to dress respectably. The picture would be infinitely more suitable for the gaze of 'Purity' and other art lovers who drop in to pass the time between a late lunch and the meeting of the Moral Uplift League at 3 o'clock, if the artist had supplied the saint with a nice blue serge suit and perhaps a heavy gold watch fob to give a note of distinction to the picture it could have been labelled 'Bertie the Sartorial Saint' and have given pleasure to thousands in a nice pure way. 'Purity' really brings up the old question of Art and Morals. Art is neither immoral nor moral it is unmoral – let us be thankful that the hanging committee of the Art Society are persons of taste and that there are artists among us that can paint the nude and give us sound artistic treatment of a difficult subject.¹²

¹² *ibid.*

A steady flow of correspondence to the editor continued until 17 July. Trevor Lloyd even alluded to the issue in a cartoon in the *Auckland Weekly*. On 12 July a member of the ASA Council, Mr A. J. Brown, eventually responded:

If purity finds 'Figure Out of Doors' suggestive in an inferior unwholesome sense, surely the fault lies with him and not the picture. As a friend remarked to me the other day apropos the recent bleating, to the pure all things are embarrassing.¹³

¹³ *Auckland Star* 12 July 1926 p. 14

What was a relatively minor matter had been blown up out of all proportion, but it still made an interesting statement about Victorian attitudes to the nude in art.

Evelyn Page's painting had clearly gained attention in Auckland and was also being talked about in Christchurch. The interest in her painting must have been high when the next CSA *Annual* exhibition came round in 1927. Professor Shelley for one was disappointed that 'Miss Polson is not very generous to us this year. We would like to see more of the bold work she showed last year in 'Green slipper' and 'Figure out of doors.'¹⁴

¹⁴ *Lyttelton Times* 22 March 1927 p. 5

By 1927 a few artists felt they needed the benefits of association they had had as art students. They considered that they would gain something out of this if they had a studio in which to work. Christchurch had had several informal artists' clubs since the days of the Palette Club in the 1890s, so the 1927 Club was no exception. In a sense it was very similar to that formed in Sydney Thompson's studio twenty years earlier. The main difference was that the later group largely consisted of women. Most were unmarried, had some means and were still living at home with their middle class families.

Evelyn Page was one of the younger members of this small group but, it must be remembered, not all were young. William Montgomery was over sixty and Cora Wilding was almost forty. It is a popular misconception that members of the 1927 Group were all young and adventurous artists, though some indeed were. The two exhibitions held during 1927 and 1928 were low-key events and in no way set out to challenge the establishment.

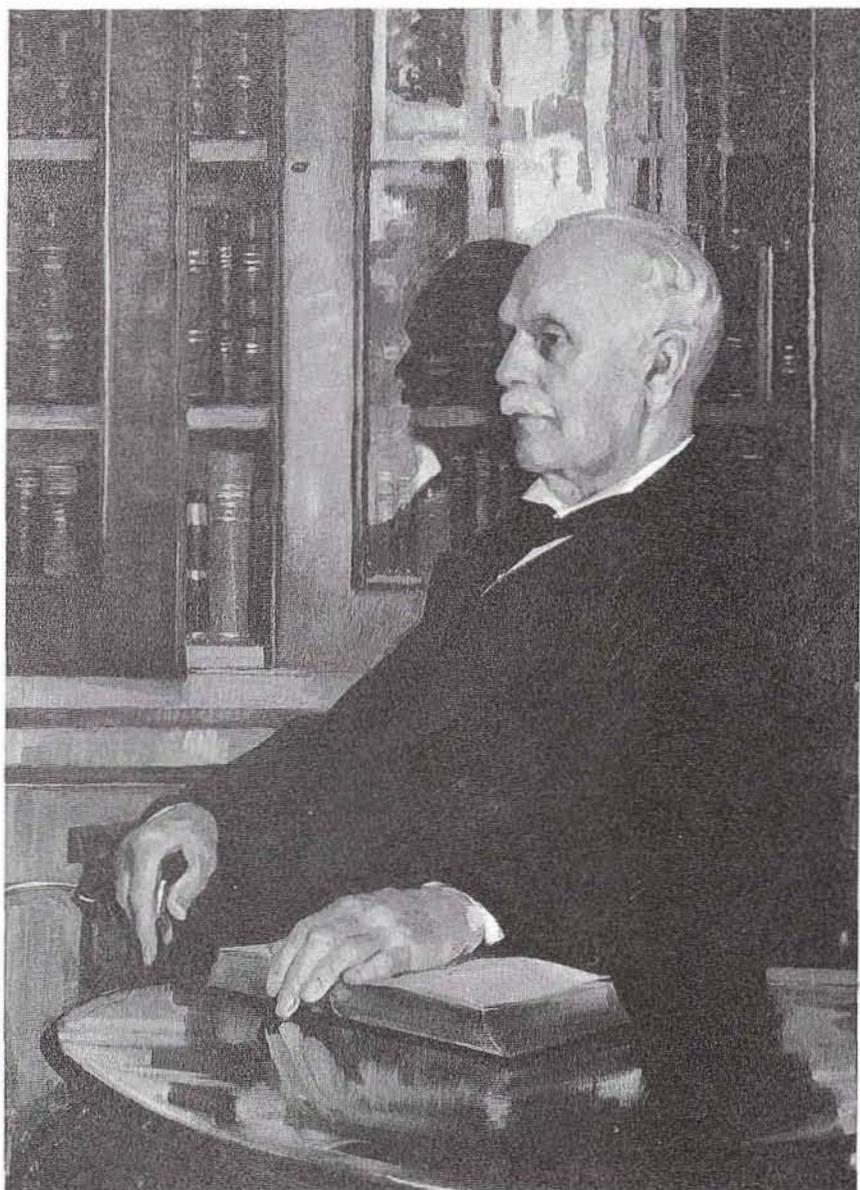


FIG. 27 *Portrait of John Sutherland Polson* (1926) (cat. no. 5). *Mr Sebastian Page, Wellington*

Although the Group provided an opportunity to exhibit outside the art society system, all members remained loyal to the CSA and in this Evelyn Page was no exception.

In 1928 Page had several works accepted for the *CSA Annual* including an impressive portrait of her father John Polson which, in its academic treatment, would have been a creditable work by a student of Orpen or Lavery, portrait painters who enjoyed much popularity at the Royal Academy at that time (cat. no. 5). Of the portrait of John Polson, the genial Dr Lester commended her for the 'vigour and dash' of brushwork. Although he was highly critical of some of the technical features of the

15 *Press* (Christchurch)
16 March 1928 p. 9

composition, he considered it to be 'a picture full of future promise'.¹⁵ James Shelley was also critical. He found that she had had technical difficulties setting her tones so that 'owing to values being too high, the book seems to be well above the table and to have no concrete relation to it'. In spite of his criticisms, Shelley gave her more space than any other artist that year. He went on to commend her for her approach to painting. He considered her to be one of the 'boldest spirits of the year's exhibition'. Of her brushwork he was less complimentary, complaining that 'She always attacks her work with commendable energy in fact one suspects at times, she is apt to make a fetish of vigorous brush work' - 'there are times when the suggestion of vigour comes perilously close to vulgarity' - 'Miss Polson does not always realise the relation between technical method and aesthetic purpose'.¹⁶

16 *Lyttelton Times* 3
April 1928 p. 6

Of the other works shown that year *Convent quiet*, though also criticised by Shelley, was praised as a 'fine piece of composition' by Lester. He felt that it was 'showing signs of the strenuous endeavours of the small group of artists that call themselves the 1927 club'.¹⁷

17 *Press* (Christchurch)
16 March 1928 p. 8

The portrait of Geraldine Anderson, Margaret Anderson's younger sister, was painted in an L. Campbell Taylor pose with a crinoline-costumed figure set in a Victorian interior. *Geraldine* had been painted in the 'passageway outside the bathroom door at Risingholme'.¹⁸ Evelyn Page in true Wallwork style had mounted a suitable background that did not quite mesh with the figure. Shelley considered it to be 'on the whole effective as a work' but he felt that it was over-weighted by what he termed 'the ugly bunch of curtain on the right'.¹⁹

18 *Lyttelton Times* 3
April 1928 p. 5

19 Conversation Mrs
W.E. Coates with Neil
Roberts. November
1985

It is noticeable how much of the criticism of Evelyn Page's work at this stage is technical. This is understandable even though she had left the School of Art almost six years earlier. As her style was still academic, it relied on accuracy of technical details and was assessed accordingly.

During July 1928, the first of the Murray Fuller exhibitions of contemporary British art visited Christchurch. It provided the younger painters with an opportunity to see first-hand some of the 'stars' of *The Studio* and *Royal Academy Illustrated*. The effect of this show was largely to endorse academic principles for although many of the painters would have been known to Christchurch artists unfortunately this selection of work did little to reveal the reality of the modern movement in Britain.

Evelyn Page's treatment of the figure out of doors reached an interesting point with *Summer morn* (cat. no. 6). Combining the nude with clothed figures made it different from *Melisande*, *Figure out of doors* or *Helen in long grass* where an individual figure was the focus with only a limited suggestion of a real environment. The use of the boat in *Summer morn* provided a sense of place and expanded the interest of the setting.

Even though *Summer morn* was bolder in colour and light, Evelyn Page still held to a traditional line unlike some of her contemporaries. Rhona Haszard and Edith Collier, in particular, appeared more adventurous since their travels overseas where they had assimilated something of the modern movement in both England and France. In 1929, at least three of the original 1927 Group members were still away with Rhona Haszard, Viola

FIG. 28 Leonard H. Booth, *Vanity*, 1929. Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch



Macmillan Brown and Ngaio Marsh all overseas trying to come to terms with new directions.

However academic Evelyn Page's painting may have seemed, it was still a long way from the Victorian manner of Leonard Booth. In March Booth had shown *Vanity*, influenced in part by Velasquez's *Rokeby Venus*. It was a typical late Victorian studio nude painted from two models over quite a long period of time. It contrasted strongly with the more immediate, airy treatment of Evelyn Page in *Summer morn*.

In his review of the Group exhibition James Shelley described *Summer morn* as 'the most interesting picture in the gallery. . . . It is a finely composed piece of decorative realism – real enough for us to enjoy the brilliant sunshine, and decorative enough to suggest that it might be called "Variations in Green and Pink".'²⁰

Summer morn was purchased by Mrs E. Rosa Sawtell (1865–1940). She was a contemporary of Margaret Stoddart and Frances Hodgkins and by 1929 was a leading figure in the Canterbury art world. Rosa Sawtell had always shown an interest in encouraging younger artists, but even as a CSA Council member, she was unable to sway the decision not to include *Summer morn* in the 1930 *Annual* exhibition because it had been previously exhibited with the Group. In 1940 it was bequeathed to the Robert McDougall Art Gallery by Mrs Sawtell.

In 1943 the model for the painting, on learning of its public exhibition, as a matter of personal conscience wished the work to be removed. Evelyn Page was approached for her feelings about the matter and responded warmly.

About the picture in the Art Gallery, yes my dear, do anything you think best about it. I do not mind at all if it is giving you peace of mind – if your lawyer knows of any way out of the dilemma, please go ahead, and I sincerely hope for your sake he does.²¹

This was particularly generous, considering *Summer morn* was the only work by Evelyn Page to have been acquired for a public collection up to that date. On 18 April 1944 the Gallery's custodian, following instructions from the Christchurch City Council, removed the work from display and it

20 *Art in NZ* 6 (December 1929) p. 141

21 Letter, Evelyn Page to the model for *December Morn*, 15 September 1943

was stored during the lifetime of the model.

During the 1920s Evelyn Page's figure painting had been the focus of attention for reviewers even though she exhibited works of other subjects. Until 1929 she had not shown still life except as one element among others in a composition so *Marigolds* was a departure from this course. It was, however, an isolated work and another two decades were to elapse before still life became a major concern in her painting. The painting of flowers was not a popular subject with younger painters in the late 1920s, even though it often provided an opportunity to use pure colour. Shelley regarded *Marigolds* highly: as 'the full body colour of "Marigolds" is instinctive with the burning zest for life that flowers have.'²² He also commended her on her skill, energy and aesthetic vision.

22 *Art in NZ* 6
(December 1929)
p. 141

In 1930 critical interest focused once more on nude compositions. When *Ivory into flesh* was shown Dr Lester gave it more space than any of her other six works. The following year, in an enthusiastic review, he once again focused on her figure painting, this time on *Pohutukawa Rina* (cat. no. 7) which he considered 'an inspiration to many painters.'²³ James Shelley, however, found it less than exciting and made few remarks about any of the exhibits, including *Pohutukawa Rina*. 'Painting can hardly be said to have "arrived" in New Zealand yet. The artists' job is to stimulate the community into spiritual wakefulness, not lull them into smug post-prandial slumber. Of course slumber pieces will always be popular.'²⁴

23 *Press* (Christchurch)
28 March 1931 p. 17

24 *Christchurch Times* 28
March 1931 p. 5

When shown in Auckland in May, A.J. Fisher, like Lester, was impressed by *Pohutukawa Rina*. 'Evelyn Polson gave us an open air study of nude figures. I am pleased to see anyone tackling the difficult problem of the nude in the open air.'²⁵ When the painting was shown at the NZAFA Annual exhibition in September, A. d'Auvergne Boxall, in his critical review of younger exhibitors, felt that 'almost without exception one finds them working along the lines of what might be termed the lighter side of the nineteenth century romantic tradition and stressing the importance of subject matter and handling of paint.'²⁶ He found *Pohutukawa Rina* acceptable mainly because 'One does not find many examples of the artist's reaction to the life of the people, and for that reason one welcomes such essays as "Pohutukawa Rina".'²⁷

25 *Art in NZ* 13
(September 1931)
p. 66

26 *Art in NZ* 12 (June
1931) p. 261

27 *ibid.*

In October, Evelyn Page had also shown other works in the Group exhibition. This exhibition was larger than it had been before, mainly because there were many more new male artist members including James Cook, recently returned from overseas, Francis Shurrock, Robert N. Field and the Australian Arthur d'Auvergne Boxall. The show was well received and Evelyn Page gained her share of attention.

Dr Lester considered the Group to be quite revolutionary, and offered words of encouragement.

The work in this year's exhibition is representative of a definite attitude towards art of revolt and experiment. In a conservative city like Christchurch the words revolt and experiment may not seem to be a happy omen. If an artist loses the spirit of revolt against the conventions that he feels are fettering his art, then the end is in sight for him as a creative worker.

As for experiment, they realise that for an artist to paint simply what he sees, or what is demanded of him by the public is to condemn himself. The artist's ambition must primarily be to express himself, and not merely to achieve fame.

The question then arises, what do they revolt against? From their work it appears that it is against the whole body of conventions which have filled the Academy in England for seventy years, with such mediocre work, which have brought before the hanging committee of the Canterbury Society of Arts the problem of deciding whether or not to accept pretty woolly sentimental stuff, or turn it down and incur unpopularity.

They revolt against the literary conventions – the convention of the subject picture.²⁸

28 *Press* (Christchurch)
10 September 1931
p. 13

To Dr Lester some of the work of the 1931 Group may have appeared revolutionary, but for the most part it simply revealed a new interest in experimentation. Only R.N. Field's work with its distinctive Post-Impressionist style could be said to be firmly progressive. Many of the members, Evelyn Page included, were paying more attention to a compositional structure which simplified form, heightened colour and compacted the image. What was sacrificed was the gestural bravura of the brush work that by the 1930s had become a standard technique in Canterbury.

Interior shows Evelyn Page's change in this direction. It was described by Lester as 'the best picture in the exhibition – of exceptionally fine quality of form and colour'²⁹ and Shelley concurred with these remarks and contended that 'expert judges regard "Interior" as one of the best pictures in the exhibition.'³⁰ Both were equally impressed by her portraits, and such unanimity was unusual.

29 *ibid.*

30 *Art in NZ* 14
(December 1931)
p. 127

Although Evelyn Page was beginning to explore new approaches to her painting, like her contemporaries Stephanie Vincent, Viola Macmillan Brown and Margaret Anderson, she was not absolutely certain of her direction. Of the four paintings she showed at the 1932 CSA *Annual, Midsummer* gained most attention. Lester thought it in many ways 'a brilliant picture'. He was also enthusiastic about *Broken river*, a study of a nude beside a river, considering it 'a piece of masterly technique. Miss Polson is one of the moving spirits among younger Christchurch painters.'³¹

31 *Press* (Christchurch) 2
March 1932 p. 16

By 1932, Evelyn Page was teaching part-time, both at secondary and tertiary levels, and this made demands on her time. Still she was doing more graphic work, not etching as in the 1920s, but lino-block printing. This interest in linocuts and woodcuts was also greatly in evidence at the School of Art and among other Canterbury artists. Francis Shurrock, Russell Clark, Chrystabel Aitken, Olivia Spencer Bower, Rose Zeller and Louise Henderson were all active in this medium. The re-emergence of lino and woodblock in the graphic design of the 1920s, particularly in book illustration, had fostered this keen interest. Its clean, hard edges and flat planes were in tune with the current modern design approach. In addition, there was interest in the Orient and its art, including an awareness of Japanese woodblock design. When in September Evelyn Page showed

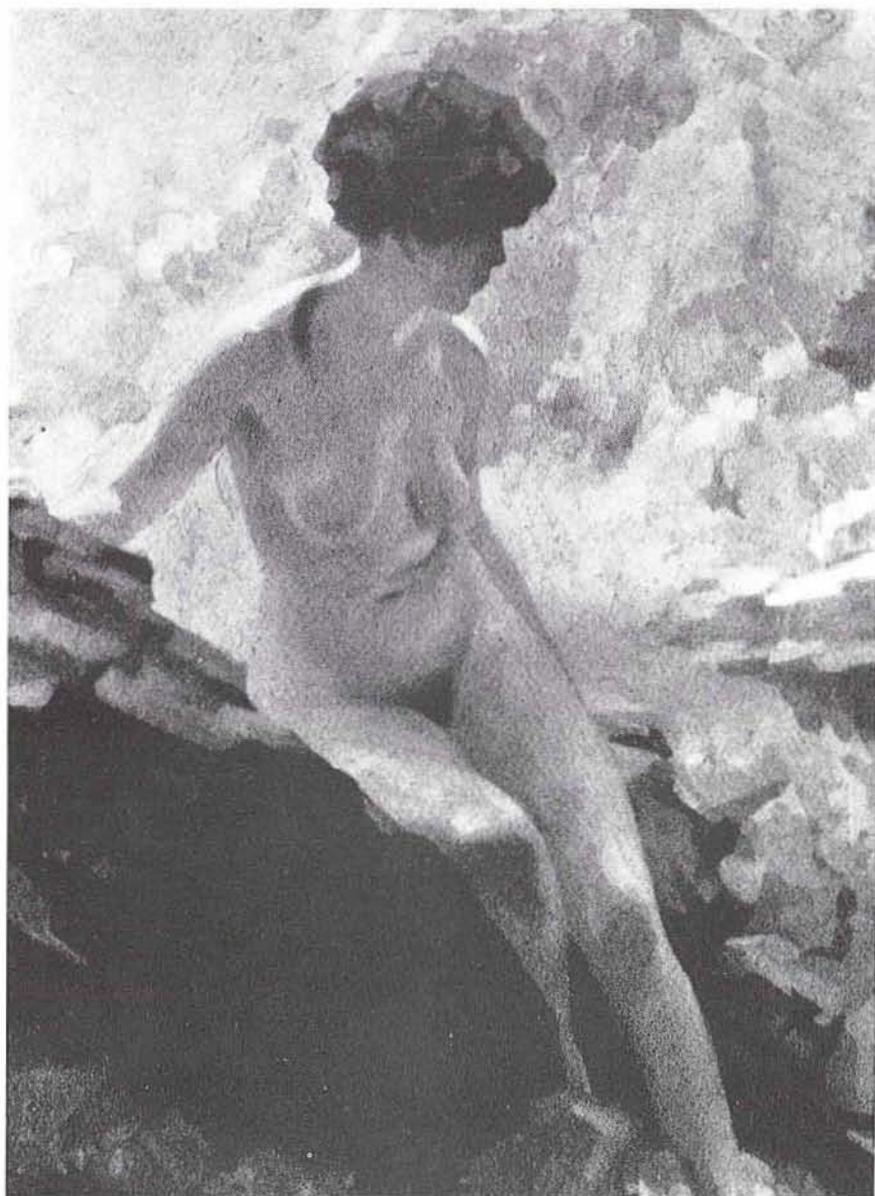


FIG. 29 *Figure out of doors*, 1926 (oil on canvas). Present location unknown

again with the Group her linocuts were very prominent. Of those shown *Winter pattern* was regarded as outstanding.

The so-called revolutionary body of young artists that Lester alluded to in 1931 seemed to become more of a reality with the formation of a new artists' club called the New Zealand Society of Artists (NZSA). The Society had quite a radical manifesto which included the aim to foster the unprejudiced study of what was termed modern art. This did not mean a rejection of window vision nor did it deny that the subject was more important than the design of a painting. There were few if any concessions to a move away from reality.

FIG. 30 *Winston Rhodes* (c.1934) (linocut). Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch



³² *Press* (Christchurch) 18 October 1933 p. 2

As an organisation the Society exhibited all the signs of becoming just a younger version of the CSA, an artists' club more concerned with discussing the club's functions than the art of its members. When they opened their Christchurch clubrooms on 15 October 1933 even Dr Lester had some reservations and observed 'there was lots of artistic energy but no community feeling.'³² This new group did attract most of the members of the 1927 Club. Evelyn Page was a prominent member and was elected to its council. However it only survived until 1935.

The NZSA failed for many reasons, but a few particularly contributed to its demise: some members of the earlier 1927 Group wanted to retain control of the new society and were opposed to forming branches in other cities – parochialism was always a restraining force in Canterbury; some members wanted to use the NZSA as a weapon against the conservatism of the CSA, but, above all, the NZSA quickly became overly bureaucratic.

Despite its problems during the two years that it operated the NZSA had many successes. There were numerous monthly lectures on topics that included the rise of Gothic, the art of France, art in the theatre, the art of etching, the art of the potter, philosophy in art and many others; there were radio broadcasts on 3YA and a successful major exhibition of contemporary British art was organised through the Empire Loan Society. This was held in Christchurch in June and July 1934 and was well-received. But without doubt it was the exhibitions held by members themselves in November 1933 and October 1934 that were most noteworthy.

Shelley described the 1933 exhibition as 'courageous and stimulating – this exhibition tries to strike and I think succeeds in striking a new note.'³³

³³ *Christchurch Times* 21 October 1933 p. 5

Over 300 works were exhibited, arranged on separate panels on the walls of the Durham Street Art Gallery. Evelyn Page exhibited five oils and four pencil portraits. Of these works Francis Shurrock commented that 'Eve Polson's panel is marked by great variety in subject and treatment. "Green Fields" no 247 is particularly good, and "Relief" No 248 comments cleverly on our present material situation.'³⁴

34 *Christchurch Times* 2
November 1933 p. 5

The 1934 exhibition was equally successful. Frederick Page, in his review, found it was not particularly revolutionary, but Evelyn Page's work made an impact on him. Her *Portrait of Madame Henry Piat* he described as being 'flower-like' and that it 'made all the other pictures on that wall, even some of her own, fade into insignificance.'³⁵ The NZSA's exhibitions had provided freedom, but Frederick Page lamented in the same review that the Society had not been able to exclude what he called distressingly feeble and bad pictures – 'paintings as dead as mutton.'

35 *Art in NZ* 26
(December 1934)
p. 87

By 1934 Evelyn Page had stopped painting the nude altogether to concentrate on landscape, with an occasional portrait. There was also an obvious change in technique that was noted of works shown at the 1935 CSA *Annual*. 'A small portrait head *Maud* by Eve Polson showed a development in the technique of this painter. Luxuriant brushwork and fat paint had been sacrificed to simplification and direct statement – an interesting experiment.'³⁶

36 *Art in NZ* 28 (June
1935) p. 182

With the collapse of the NZSA, the Group reformed. In October 1935, fourteen of its members held the largest Group show up to that time. Of Evelyn Page's landscapes *School by the sea* was described as 'a new departure for her in her use of flat decorative painting.'³⁷

37 *Art in NZ* 30
(December 1935)
p. 117

The following month when she exhibited works at the OAS *Annual*, R.N. Field and Marion Field felt that her portraiture was 'forging ahead' with its simplicity of tone and colour. They noted her portrait of Olivia Spencer Bower, *Olivia* (cat. no. 12), in particular was 'a spontaneous thought, glowingly expressed.'³⁸

38 *Art in NZ* 30
(December 1935)
p. 95

By far the most astonishing work of this time, and one that heralded what was to come over the next few decades, was the portrait of Valmai Moffett, then titled *Kaschenka* (cat. no. 11). It was first shown at the NZAFA *Annual* at which Roland Hipkins described it as a 'virile and colourful adventure in paint.'³⁹ When it was shown at the 1936 CSA *Annual*, *Kaschenka* was considered to be 'one of the surprises of the exhibition. It is the best work she has shown for some years.'⁴⁰

39 *Art in NZ* 30
(December 1935)
p. 70

40 *Press* (Christchurch)
21 March 1936 p. 18

Evelyn Page's first solo exhibition was opened on 14 December 1936 by J.H.E. Schroder. He commended her on what he described as the personal liberty of treatment shown in her work and on progress visible over a long period. 'Miss Polson has succeeded in exposing the beauty of the commonplace things and expressing in her work a great measure of happiness and enjoyment.'⁴¹

41 *Press* (Christchurch)
15 December 1936
p. 13

Evelyn Page left for England shortly after this show and during 1937 and part of 1938 produced landscapes and portraits there that revealed a greater concern for structure and colour. Like her contemporaries, Ceridwen Thornton, Margaret Anderson and Viola Macmillan Brown, firsthand experience of British and European painting was enlightening for an artist

from Canterbury. Evelyn Page, however, only assimilated what she wanted to and no single British artist was of consuming interest. The portraits by Augustus John were important to her at this time and one of her most successful works of 1937, *Portrait of Charles Brasch* (cat. no. 14), came close in treatment, though not in composition, to the remarkable 1926 portrait by Augustus John of Joseph Hone in the Tate Gallery. With this work for perhaps the first time she began to make a definite break with the academic portrait tradition of subject and background. In the Brasch portrait they merge with a new harmony, a harmony of surface that was to pervade much of her work from that point on. The key to this harmony was colour.

That the Brasch portrait was a turning point can be measured by the reaction it aroused following her return to Canterbury in 1938. When shown at the 1939 CSA *Annual* Leonard Booth was less than impressed and saw it as virtually a betrayal of the academic approach.

'Charles Brasch', by Evelyn Page, evoked in me much thought, in ways of conjecture, as to the future of this painter. In earlier days she gave to us pictures which, though painted in orthodox terms, revealed to us much of the artist within her. She went to Europe. Upon her return, she gave to us pictures which were painted in unorthodox terms and which revealed to us little of the artist within her. The picture under review is primarily a pattern in colour. The wall is yellow; the bands of the case are yellow-brown; the shadows below these are violet; the tie is red; the other raiment is blue-green. The pattern, it will be surmised, is strangely pleasing. It is strangely pleasing because pattern – mere pattern – is superficial, shallowly pleasing, I, and those who think with me, hope that this painter may turn her lately acquired means of expression to more profound account.⁴²

42 *Art in NZ* 44 (June 1939) p. 170

Fortunately Evelyn Page did not follow Booth's advice and from this point on, over the next five decades, her painting matured to establish its own identity. An identity that has been maintained up to the present.

Catalogue

Catalogue Explanation

This catalogue of seventy works was assembled for the exhibition *Seven Decades Evelyn Page* shown in 1986 at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery. A smaller exhibition of forty works is to be toured nationally during 1987 and 1988.

The catalogue is arranged in chronological order, in so far as dates can be determined, according to the seven decades of the artist's work. It should be noted that the titles and dates supplied by the artist in recent years do not always accord with the published record.

Title

Works have not been known consistently by the same title. Variations from that selected by the curators are listed under 'Exhibited'.

Date

In the few instances where dates are known from the artist's inscription on the work or from external evidence such as a commissioning date, they appear without brackets. Dates in brackets have been supplied by the curators. Where the inscribed date differs from that suggested by the curators a decisive piece of evidence such as an exhibition catalogue has taken precedence.

Measurements

All measurements are in millimetres, height before width.

Exhibited

Where possible catalogue numbers and exhibited titles where they differ from those used in this publication have been recorded. Abbreviated exhibition titles used are:

Annual: refers to the Annual exhibition of the relevant art society

Autumn: refers to the Autumn exhibition of the relevant art society

NZ painting 1920-40: 1975-77 Christchurch, Robert McDougall Art Gallery *New Zealand painting 1920-40: adaptation and nationalism*

NZ painting 1940-60: 1982-84 Christchurch, Robert McDougall Art Gallery *New Zealand painting 1940-60: conformity and dissension*

Retrospective: 1970 NAG/NZAF A *Evelyn Page retrospective exhibition*

Selected work: 1982 NZAF A *An exhibition of selected work by Evelyn Page*

References

Only substantive published comments about the particular work have been included.

Abbreviations

ACAG	Auckland City Art Gallery
ASA	Auckland Society of Arts
ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington
CSA	Canterbury Society of Arts, Christchurch
NAG	National Art Gallery, Wellington
NZAF A	New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington
NSA	Nelson Society of Arts
OAS	Otago Arts Society, Dunedin

The First Decade - 1926

- 1 *Self portrait (1916)*
Oil on canvas 610 × 380 mm
Not signed. Not dated

Notes: The artist dated this self portrait 1916. It would have been painted when she was seventeen. She made a copy in watercolour for a friend, Dorothy Kearne. The small version is dated 1921.

Collection: Evelyn Page, Wellington

Plate 2

- 2 *The old bookshop 1922*
Oil on canvas board 540 × 360 mm
Signed and dated lower right 'E Polson 18-7-22'. Inscribed verso '4 The Old Bookshop by Evelyn Polson c/- McCormick and Pugh Christchurch Price £9-9-0'

Exhibited: 1922 OAS *Annual* cat. no. 138
1923 CSA *Annual* cat. no. 238
1923 ASA *Annual* cat. no. 94

Notes: Evelyn Polson walking along Colombo Street to the School of Art from her home in Sydenham would have passed seven bookshops. She recalled 'I used to browse in an old bookshop - secondhand - smelling of musty books. I can remember starting the painting at art school - after that nothing at all!' From the date of its first exhibition it is possible that the

painting may have been begun as the artist thinks in 1917 but finished some years later.

Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch

Plate 3

- 3 Portrait of Mary Elizabeth Polson (1923)
Oil on canvas 910 × 650 mm
Signed lower right 'E. Polson'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1923 NZAFA *Annual* cat. no. 414 as 'Portrait of the Artist's Mother'
1923 ASA *Annual* cat. no. 112 as 'Portrait'
1982 NZAFA *Selected Work* cat. no. 33 as 'Portrait of the artist's mother - Mary Elizabeth Poulson' [sic]

Notes: Mary Elizabeth Polson (nee Renshaw) (1859-1926) had come to Christchurch as a young girl with her family from Lancashire. She married John Sutherland Polson in 1877 and they had seven children. Evelyn the youngest was born when her mother was forty. The artist described her mother as 'intensely musical with a beautiful singing voice and a great sense of theatre'.

Collection: Mrs A.C. Wilson, Christchurch

Figure 3

- 4 *Portrait of Lincoln Kearne* (1924-25)
Oil on canvas 655 × 457 mm
Signed lower left 'E. Polson'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1925 CSA cat. no. 188 as 'In the Sunlight'

Notes: Lincoln Kearne was an orchardist at Harewood, Christchurch whose daughter Dorothy was at the School of Art with Evelyn Polson. She painted the portrait outside in the summer sunlight.

Collection: Miss Dorothy Kearne, Christchurch

- 5 *Portrait of John Sutherland Polson* (1926)
Oil on canvas 980 × 820 mm
Signed lower right 'E. Polson'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1928 ASA *Annual* cat. no. 38 as 'Portrait of Father'
1928 NZAFA *Annual* cat. no. 44 as 'Portrait of the Painter's Father'
1928 CSA cat. no. 214 as 'Portrait of Father'

Notes: John Sutherland Polson (1851-1929) was born in Peebles, Scotland. He married Mary Elizabeth Renshaw in 1877 and they had seven children. He worked for nearly fifty years as accountant and later managing director of Suckling Brothers leather factory in Sydenham, Christchurch. An intensely musical man of wide ranging interests, he had a strong influence on his youngest daughter.

Collection: Mr Sebastian Page, Christchurch

Figure 27

The Second Decade 1927-36

- 6 *Summer Morn* (1929)
Oil on canvas 783 × 595 mm
Not signed. Inscribed on verso "Summer Morn" Evelyn Polson lent by Mrs Claude Sawtell'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1929 Christchurch *The Group show* cat. no. 31 as 'December Morn'

References: *Art in NZ* 6 (1929) p. 141
Robert McDougall Art Gallery *A profile* 1982 p. 17
Art NZ 26 (1983) pp. 23-25
NZ Painting 1920-60 p. 45

Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, gift of Mrs E. Rosa Sawtell, 1940

Plate 30

- 7 *Pohutukawa Rina* (1930)
Oil on canvas 915 × 640 mm
Signed lower right 'E. Polson'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1931 CSA *Annual* cat. no. 5
1931 ASA *Annual* cat. no. 13
1931 NZAFA *Annual* cat. no. 109
1975 New Zealand Painting exhibition 1920-1940 cat. no. 37

References: *Art in NZ* 14 (1931) p. 108
Art NZ 26 (1983) p. 23 (illus.)

Notes: Painted in the summer of 1930 when Evelyn Polson went to stay with her father's sister at Matahi Bay, two kilometres from Russell. There she met the model, a young Maori whose aunt, a friend of her own aunt Alice, was then the owner of Pompallier House.

Collection: Christchurch Polytechnic

Plate 4

8 *Tilli Frankel* (1930)
Oil on canvas 655 × 457 mm
Signed lower right 'E. Polson'. Inscribed verso 'Mechtildis' Group 1932'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1932 Christchurch *The Group show*
1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat. no. 8 as 'Portrait sketch: Tilli'

Notes: Tilli Aldrich and her first husband Dr Otto Frankel, a soil scientist, came to Christchurch from Vienna in 1929. Evelyn Polson took German lessons from her which she paid for with this portrait.

Collection: Mrs R. Aldrich, Waipukurau

9 *Castlehill Craigeiburn Range* (1931-32)
Oil on canvas board 311 × 405 mm
Signed lower left 'E. Polson'. Inscribed verso 'Castle Hill Craigeiburn Range N.Z. £6-6-0 Eve Polson Professor Lilburn'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1932 CSA *Annual* cat. no. 114 as 'Hills, Craigeiburn'

Notes: A typical landscape composition in which the painter avoids both detailed foreground and distant sky. This unusual rock formation 'like a solidified Circus' was at Castlehill Station in North Canterbury, originally owned by botanist painter John Enys.

Collection: National Art Gallery, Wellington

10 *Frederick Page* (1931)
Oil on canvas board 394 × 520 mm
Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1931 Christchurch *The Group show* as 'Portrait Sketch'
1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat. no. 6
1972 Auckland, John Leech Gallery *Evelyn Page* cat. no. 24

Notes: This first major portrait of Frederick Page (1905-1983) was done when he was studying music at Canterbury University College. It was painted in Gertrude Secretan's house in Cashel Street where the artist lived from 1931-36. In the background is the Polson family piano.

For a short biography of the artist's husband see cat. no. 64 *Frederick Page at the piano*.

Collection: Evelyn Page, Wellington

11 *Valmai Moffett* (1933)
Oil on canvas 953 × 660 mm
Signed lower right 'E.P.' Not dated

Exhibited: 1935 NZAFA *Annual* cat. no. 397a as 'Kashenka'
1936 CSA *Annual* cat. no. 197 as 'Kaschonka'
1936 ASA cat. no. 41 as 'Kashonka'
1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat. no. 9 as 'Portrait of Valmai Moffett'
1975 NZ *Painting 1920-40* cat. no. 53

References: *Art in NZ* 30 (1935) p. 70
Angela Meeson. Glimpse of the Gallery *Otago Daily Times* 8 November 1974

Notes: Valmai Moffett was born in Lyttelton and had gone to school with Frederick Page. Her marriage to a Dunedin journalist faltered and they parted. Evelyn Page knowing of this broken marriage saw Valmai Moffett as a romantic tragic figure and was reminded of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina. She titled this portrait of Valmai, wearing a metallic striped bridge coat, 'Kaschenka'

Collection: Dunedin Public Art Gallery, gift of Valmai Moffett in memory of her son, Donn Moffett, 1966

Plate 28

- 12 *Olivia* (1934)
Oil on canvas board 460 × 350 mm
Not signed. Not dated

Exhibited: 1935 OAS Annual cat. no. 110

Notes: Olivia Spencer-Bower (1908–1982) was a younger contemporary of Evelyn Page. A gifted watercolourist and a lively cultivated woman she was an early member of the Group. Following her studies at Canterbury College School of Art she travelled to London in 1929, enrolling at the Slade School in 1930. Subsequently she travelled frequently to Europe.

In 1943 she enrolled with A.J.C. Fisher at Elam School of Fine Arts to study form. Following a convalescence at Rawene with Dr Smith, she returned to Christchurch in 1946. Up until her death she was an active member of the Group and the CSA. Her works are held in most New Zealand public collections. The Robert McDougall Art Gallery mounted a retrospective exhibition of her work in 1977.

This portrait was painted while Evelyn Polson was staying with Olivia's family at Swannanoa near Christchurch. It was painted quickly in only one afternoon sitting. The background shows plates and brass spirit tea kettle, standing on the dining room dresser. The painting was signed in 1985 at the request of its present owner.

Collection: Mr and Mrs P. Jarvis, Auckland

Plate 29

- 13 *Governors Bay* (c.1935)
Oil on canvas board 320 × 450 mm
Signed lower left 'E Polson'. Not dated

Notes: In this view, looking down over the settlement of Governors Bay at the head of Lyttelton Harbour, trees and land forms fill the whole composition. It was done before the painter went to England.

Collection: Mrs R. Collins, Auckland

Figure 10

The Third Decade 1937–1946

- 14 *Charles Brasch* (1937)
Oil on canvas 600 × 482 mm

Signed lower middle 'Evelyn Page'. Not dated

- Exhibited:* 1938 Christchurch *The Group show* cat. no. 25
1938 NZAFA 50th Anniversary cat. no. 173
1939 CSA Annual cat. no. 188
1940 Wellington New Zealand Art – *A Centennial Exhibition* cat. no. 248
1947 Christchurch *The Group show* cat. no. 50
1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat. no. 12 as 'Charles Brasch, London'
1972 Auckland, John Leech Gallery *Evelyn Page* cat. no. 28
1974 Wellington, Bett-Duncan Studio Gallery *Painting since '72 and a few others* cat. no. 11

References: *Art NZ* 26 (1983) p. 26
Leonard Booth. *Art in NZ* 4 (1939) pp. 170–75 (illus.)
Charles Brasch. *Indirections*. Wellington: OUP, 1980. p. 252 and cover illus.

Notes: This portrait was painted at Horbury Crescent Bayswater, London, Evelyn Polson and Frederick Page lived there when Page was completing his studies at the Royal College of Music, London. It is composed against a background of Brasch's own cupboards and books which he had lent to them. 'I was sitting for her now, many long sessions, the portrait was gloomily like me and I told Eve it would finish my chances in the marriage market' (*Indirections* p. 252).

The artist made a further version of this portrait in 1981 for Anna Wilson to whom Charles Brasch was godfather.

Charles Brasch (1909–1973) was born in Dunedin. Poet, editor, patron and friend of artists, he made a lasting contribution to New Zealand's cultural life. Educated at Waitaki and Oxford, his early poems were published in the Auckland literary journal *Phoenix* in 1932. The following decade he spent travelling in Italy, Germany and Russia. In Egypt he was involved in archaeological digs at Akhenaton's capital,

Tell El Amara. He then taught in England at a small experimental school for disturbed children at the Abbey, Little Missenden. He returned briefly to New Zealand in 1938 and the Caxton Press, Christchurch published his first collection of poems *The land and the people*. During the war years Brasch worked in Intelligence for the Foreign Office in London and was a fire watcher. In 1945 he returned to New Zealand to found and edit the literary periodical *Landfall* from 1947-67.

Collection: University of Otago, gift of Charles Brasch

Plate 5

- 15 *Morten Hampstead* 1937
Oil on canvas board 540 × 630 mm
Signed lower left 'E. Polson' After this painting was cleaned in 1985 it was resigned lower right 'E. Page'. Inscribed verso 'Morten Hampstead Devon Evelyn Polson'

Exhibited: 1938 Christchurch *The Group* show cat. no. 22 as 'Moreton Hampstead'

Notes: This painting was done in Devon. By coincidence the foreground building was a tenant farm house belonging to the family of Peggy Hamilton (nee Wills) whom the Pages subsequently met in Christchurch.

Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch

Plate 6

- 16 *Exeter* 1937
Oil on canvas board 560 × 620 mm
Signed lower right 'EP'. Verso Label 'N.Z. Exhibition' 1840-1940'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1938 Christchurch 'The Group' cat. no. 29
1938 NZAFA 50th Anniversary cat. no. 174 as 'Outskirts of Exeter'
1939 CSA Annual cat. no. 189 as 'Outskirts of Exeter'
1940 Wellington, Dept of Internal Affairs *National Centennial Exhibition of NZ Art* cat. no. 249 as 'Outskirts of

Exeter'
1947 Christchurch *The Group* show cat. no. 55 as 'From Exeter'
1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat. no. 11

Notes: This work seems to be closer to the work of contemporary English painters such as John Nash or Roger Fry. It was bought by Ngaio Marsh.

Collection: Mr Dacre-Manning

- 17 *Elespie at Governors Bay* 1939
Oil on canvas 780 × 560 mm
Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'.
Inscribed verso 'Elespie at Governors Bay 1939 Evelyn Page'

Exhibited: 1940 CSA Annual cat. no. 176 as 'Elespie daughter of Mrs Forsyth'
1940 NZAFA Annual cat. no. 9 as 'Elespie, daughter of Mrs A.C. Forsyth'
1952 OAS *Paintings by Evelyn Page* cat. no. 20 as 'Miss Elespie Forsyth'
1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat. no. 13
1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat. no. 17

Notes: This portrait was painted in the two months before the birth of the artist's first child. Elespie Forsyth and her cousin Tim Thompson were staying with Evelyn and Frederick Page at Governors Bay.

Elespie Forsyth was a cousin of Charles Brasch who described her as 'Elespie, who was about nineteen, exuberant and lovely, with blue eyes, a head of waving fair hair, and a smile that seldom left her and made a warm light in which she seemed to float.' (*Indirections* p. 296)

Collection: Dr and Mrs I. Prior, Wellington

Plate 7

- 18 *The orchard in spring Governors Bay* (1940)
Oil on canvas board 340 × 480 mm
Not signed. Not dated

Exhibited: 1940 Christchurch *The Group*

show cat. no. 30 as 'The Orchard in Spring'
1941 CSA Annual cat. no. 61

Notes: This painting is a view of *Waitahuna*, the Pages' home for the first eight years of their marriage. The orchard ran down the right side of a long drive between road and house, so this view glimpses the back of the house.

Collection: Evelyn Page, Wellington

Figure 11

19 *Towards Eichardts* (1941 or 1942)
Oil on board 310 × 510 mm
Not signed. Inscribed verso 'Queenstown'.
Not dated

Exhibited: 1942 CSA cat. no. 178 as 'Queenstown'
1943 Christchurch *The Group* show cat. no. 30 as 'Queenstown'
1944 NZAFA Annual cat. no. 47 as 'Eichardt's, Queenstown'
1970 NZAFA Retrospective cat. no. 19 as 'Queenstown'

Notes: This painting was done when the artist was on holiday at Queenstown staying with Emily Forsyth, Charles Brasch's aunt. They frequently dined at Eichardt's Hotel on the left in this painting, which stood on the waterfront. On the right foreground is the oldest hotel in Queenstown, 'The Mountaineer'. The two figures holding one another up on the pavement beside it are Frederick Page and Douglas McDiarmid.

Collection: Dr and Mrs I. Prior, Wellington

Plate 10

20 *Winsome Schroder* 1941
Oil on canvas board 457 × 367 mm
Signed lower left 'Evelyn Page'. Inscribed verso: 'Evelyn Page 1942'

Exhibited: 1941 CSA Annual cat. no. 58 as 'Mrs J Schroder'
1947 Christchurch *The Group* show cat. no. 56 as 'Mrs J.H.E. Schroder'
1970 NZAFA Retrospective cat. no. 20

Notes: This portrait was first exhibited at the CSA Annual during March 1941, making the verso inscription incorrect.

Winsome Schroder was a Doctor of Science who married John Schroder in London. They lived in Christchurch when this portrait was painted at Governors Bay. John Schroder, later Assistant Director of Broadcasting, was at this time assistant editor of the Christchurch *Press*.

Collection: Dr M. Schroder, Hamilton

21 *Lake Ferry Queenstown* (1942)
Oil on canvas board 600 × 460 mm
Signed lower left 'Evelyn Page'. Inscribed verso '5 Lake Ferry Queenstown'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1942 CSA Annual cat. no. 179 as 'Lake Ferry'
1943 NZAFA Annual cat. no. 37
1944 CSA cat. no. 50

References: *Art in NZ* 64 (1944) p. 2

Notes: One of a group of paintings of Central Otago. The white boat moored at the jetty is the *Earnslaw*. 'A lovely shaped boat to paint – Queenstown was quite unsophisticated yet quite European in feeling in those days' the artist commented in 1985.

Collection: Mr R. Harding, Nelson

22 *New Year Holiday (Corsair Bay)* (1941)
Oil on hardboard 467 × 622 mm
Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'.
Inscribed verso 'Lyttelton Harbour Corsair Bay c 1942'

Exhibited: 1944 CSA Annual cat. no. 85 as 'New Year Holiday'
1944 NZAFA Annual cat. no. 45
1945 Christchurch *The Group* show cat. no. 62
1947 Christchurch *The Group* show cat. no. 52
1952 OAS *Paintings by Evelyn Page* cat. no. 11
1958 *Thirty-seven NZ paintings from the collection of Charles Brasch and Rodney Kennedy* cat. no. 10 as 'New Year Holiday'
1970 NZAFA Retrospective cat.

- no. 17
 1972 Auckland, John Leech
 Gallery *Evelyn Page* cat.
 no. 26
 1981 *NZ painting 1940-60* cat.
 no. 3 as 'New Year
 Holiday, Corsair Bay,
 Lyttelton Harbour'

Collection: Hocken Library, University of
 Otago, gift of Charles Brasch

- 23 *Sebastian and Anna Christian (1942-43)*
 Oil on canvas 965 × 635 mm
 Not signed. Not dated

- Exhibited:* 1944 *CSA Annual* cat. no. 38
NZAFAs Annual cat. no. 100
 as 'Sebastian and Alma
 Christian'
 1970 *NZAFAs Retrospective* cat.
 no. 22

Notes: This portrait of the artist's children
 was done at Governors Bay. Leo Sebastian
 Page, born 10 April 1939, stands beside the
 cradle of his sister Anna Christian Page born 5
 February 1942. The children were kept amused
 by the painter's sister, Caroline Clifford, while
 their mother worked.

Collection: Mrs A.C. Wilson, Christchurch

- 24 *The Campbell family (1942)*
 Oil on canvas board 520 × 597 mm
 Signed lower left 'Evelyn Page'. Inscribed
 verso 'No 1 Mr and Mrs W.O.
 Campbell and family cat. no. 15. Not
 dated

- Exhibited:* 1945 *CSA Annual* cat. no. 149 as
 'Group Portrait'
 1945 *NZAFAs Annual* cat. no. 15
 as 'Mr and Mrs W.O.
 Campbell and Family'
 1947 Christchurch *The Group*
show cat. no. 57 as 'Mr &
 Mrs W.O. Campbell and
 Family'
 1950 Christchurch *The living*
Canterbury artists' loan
exhibition cat. no. 114 as
 'Mr and Mrs W.O.
 Campbell and Family'
 1952 *OAS Paintings by Evelyn*

- Page* cat. no. 2
 1970 *NZAFAs Retrospective* cat.
 no. 21

Notes: The painting was done in the
 Campbells' garden at Fendalton. The figure in
 Air Force uniform, John Campbell, was killed
 in an air accident after the Second World War.

Collection: Mrs P. Graham, Timaru

Figure 14

- 25 *Lyttelton Harbour (1944)*
 Oil on canvas board 340 × 420 mm
 Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'.
 Inscribed verso 'Purchased from London
 1967 formerly collection of Mr Dinnage,
 Mrs Dinnage's father.' Not dated

- Exhibited:* 1944 *NZAFAs Annual* cat. no. 48
 1945 *CSA Annual* cat. no. 119 as
 'Inner Boat Harbour'
 1950 *CSA Living Canterbury*
artists' loan exhibition cat.
 no. 115 as 'Boat Harbour
 Lyttelton'
 1952 *OAS Paintings by Evelyn*
Page cat. no. 20 as
 'Lyttelton'
 1982 *NZAFAs Selected work* cat.
 no. 39 as 'Lyttelton
 Harbour'

References: Gil Docking. *Two hundred years of
 NZ painting*. Wellington: A.H. &
 A.W. Reed, 1971 pp. 160 pl. 114

Notes: A different view of Lyttelton is shown
 in *Point of departure Norwich Quay Lyttelton*
 cat. no. 29

Collection: Dunedin Public Art Gallery

- 26 *Nora Walton (1945)*
 Oil on canvas 500 × 430 mm
 Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'. Not
 dated

- Exhibited:* 1945 *NZAFAs Annual* cat. no. 16
 as 'Miss Nora Walton'
 1970 *NZAFAs Retrospective* cat.
 no. 25

Reference: *NZ Listener*, 30 November
 1945, pp. 6-7

Notes: Nora Walton, sister of the English composer William Walton, came to New Zealand in 1941 as Lady-in-Waiting to Lady Newall, wife of the then Governor General Sir C.L. Norton Newall. Following her marriage to Hawkes Bay farmer Mr G.P. Donnelly she moved to live at Flaxmere near Hastings where she spent her married life up until her death in 1985.

Collection: Mr G.P. Donnelly, Hastings

- 27 *Christchurch Railway Station* (1944-45)
Oil on canvas board 425 × 625 mm
Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'.
Inscribed verso 'Railway Station 1940'.
Not dated

- Exhibited:* 1945 CSA *Annual* cat. no. 136 as
'Christchurch Gothic'
1945 Christchurch *The Group*
show cat. no. 61 as
'Christchurch Gothic'
1946 NZAFA *Annual* cat. no. 16
1959 ACAG *Eight NZ painters III*
cat. no. 25
1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat.
no. 16
1972 Auckland, John Leech
Gallery *Evelyn Page* cat.
no. 27
1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat.
no. 5

Notes: In the early 1940s Evelyn Page worked on city subjects and crowd scenes. To do this painting she set up her easel on the first floor of Storey's Hotel opposite the Christchurch Railway Station. The artist made a copy of *Christchurch Railway Station* in 1975 which is now in a private collection in Wellington. The vitality of the moving mass of people and the colonial gothic rhythm of the architecture make this painting much more than the valuable historic record it has become since the Christchurch Station building was replaced. Built of brick with white stone facings in 1876-77, Christchurch Railway Station was considered to be the finest in 'Venetian Gothic' of its day. Designed by J.C. Warner, Railway engineer for the Canterbury Provincial Government, it was much altered by the addition of a glass and wood booking hall in 1906 and an accumulation of structures that

drastically marred its original design. It was demolished in 1959 to make way for the present building.

Collection: Mr J. Bristed, Wellington

Plate 8

- 28 *Post Office Cathedral Square* (c.1945)
Oil on board 404 × 692 mm
Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'.
Inscribed verso 'Christchurch Post Office
Evelyn Page'. Not dated

- Exhibited:* 1946 NZAFA *Annual* cat. no. 60
as 'Cathedral Square,
Christchurch'
1952 OAS *Paintings by Evelyn*
Page cat. no. 15 as 'Square,
Christchurch'.
1958 ACAG *Thirty-seven NZ*
paintings from the collection
of Charles Brasch and
Rodney Kennedy cat. no. 11
as 'Cathedral Square,
Christchurch'
1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat.
no. 26 as 'Post Office,
Cathedral Square,
Christchurch'
1974 Dunedin, Otago Museum
Charles Brasch Memorial
1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat.
no. 37 as 'Christchurch Post
Office'

Notes: The red brick Post Office is depicted through bare branches of plane trees growing in the Cathedral precincts. The Christchurch Post Office was designed by Colonial architect William Henry Clayton in 1876.

Although uncertain of the exact date the artist recalls that this painting was done soon after *Christchurch Railway Station* cat. no. 27.

Collection: Hocken Library, University of Otago, gift of Charles Brasch, 1983

Plate 9

- 29 *Point of Departure Norwich Quay Lyttelton*
(1944-45)
Oil on canvas 425 × 765 mm
Signed lower left 'Evelyn Page'. Inscribed
verso 'Nos 182 and 73'. Not dated

- Exhibited:* 1945 CSA Annual cat. no. 112 as 'Norwich Quay Lyttelton'
 1969 Dunedin Public Art Gallery *Mona Edgar Collection* cat. no. 182 as 'Point of departure'
 1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat. no. 55 as 'Point of Departure'
 1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat. no. 38

Note: Painted on the steep hill above Norwich Quay, Lyttelton.

Collection: Hocken Library, University of Otago, gift of Mona Edgar, 1961

Figure 18

- 30 *The house and family Governors Bay* (c.1946)
 Oil on canvas board 400 × 500 mm
 Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'. Not dated

- Exhibited:* 1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat. no. 27, as 'The Painter's Home Governor's Bay.'
 1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat. no. 24 as 'The house, Governors Bay'

Notes: Although the painting has been supplied with an earlier date, the artist recalls that it was possibly the last she did at Governors Bay after Frederick Page had already moved to Wellington. This painting was done in front of *Waitahuna* which faces the sea over a circular lawn. Frederick Page and his daughter Anna are seated on the deckchair in the foreground.

Collection: Evelyn Page, Wellington

Figure 15

Fourth Decade 1947-1956

- 31 *Admiral Byrd's flagship and sailors playing* 1947
 Oil on canvas board 413 × 530 mm
 Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'. Signed verso and dated '1947'. Inscribed verso 'Admiral Byrd Operation High Jump 1947 Sailors Playing'

- Exhibited:* 1947 NZAFA Annual cat. no. 94 as 'The "Mount Olympus" at Dusk, Sailors Playing'
 1949 Christchurch *The Group show* cat. no. 84 as "'Mt Olympus" at dusk and sailors playing'
 1952 OAS *Paintings by Evelyn Page* cat. no. 12 as 'American Sailors'
 1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat. no. 30

Notes: American sailors on Admiral Byrd's 'Operation High Jump' are playing on the wharf beside the flagship *Mount Olympus* before leaving for the Antarctic.

Collection: Mrs June Pottinger, Wellington

Plate 11

- 32 *Lambton Quay* (1949)
 Oil on canvas board 635 × 580 mm
 Signed lower right 'E. Page'. Not dated

- Exhibited:* 1950 Christchurch *Living Canterbury artists loan exhibition* cat. no. 113
 1952 OAS *Paintings by Evelyn Page* cat. no. 1
 1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat. no. 31

Notes: There are two paintings entitled '*Lambton Quay*' of this same scene. This slightly larger 1949 painting shows the whole curve of Lambton Quay while the other, in the Dunedin Public Art Gallery dates from the early 1950s. They were painted from inside the artist's car on Lambton Quay, which she parked outside the French Maid Coffee shop. A friend had arranged that she be given a letter from the Public Service Commission to show any traffic officer who might object.

Collection: Canterbury Society of Arts, Christchurch

Plate 13

- 33 *Grey Street* (1949)
 Oil on canvas board 400 × 240 mm
 Signed lower right 'E. Page'. Inscribed verso 'Evelyn Page Grey Street No 2'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1949 NZAFA *Autumn* cat. no. 114

Notes: This painting was done from The Terrace, Wellington, looking through a narrow gorge between buildings to the Harbour.

Collection: Mr J. Pottinger, Masterton

- 34 *Sir Thomas Hunter 1949*
Oil on canvas 1010 × 870 mm
Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page' and dated '1949'

Exhibited: 1949 NZAFA *Annual* cat. no. 147
1956 ACAG-ASA *NZ Painting*
cat. no. 77

References: J.C. Beaglehole. A note on the paintings of Evelyn Page. *Landfall* (December 1958) pp. 361-62 illus.

Notes: Commissioned through the instigation of Dr J.C. Beaglehole by Victoria University of Wellington in 1949.

Sir Thomas Alexander Hunter K.B.E. (1876-1953) was Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy at Victoria University College and its first full-time principal from 1938 until his retirement in 1950. He was born in London in 1876 and educated at Port Chalmers and Otago University. He was a fellow of the University Senate from 1912 and Vice-Chancellor of the New Zealand University from 1929-47. Thomas Hunter was knighted in 1939 for his services to education and received an honorary doctorate in literature in 1950.

Collection: Victoria University of Wellington

Plate 16

- 35 *Dr Ralph Vaughan Williams (1950)*
Oil on canvas board 500 × 410 mm
Not signed. Not dated

Exhibited: 1954 NZAFA *Annual* cat. no. 146
1956 *CSA Annual* cat. no. 68
1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat.
no. 39
1972 Auckland, John Leech
Gallery *Evelyn Page*

References: J.C. Beaglehole. A note on the paintings of Evelyn Page. *Landfall* (December 1958) p. 362 (illus.)

Notes: Ralph Vaughan Williams O.M.

(1872-1958) was an English composer and leading figure in the renaissance of English music which began in the last years of the nineteenth century. His vision and integrity influenced students from New Zealand, particularly Frederick Page and Douglas Lilburn. In 1950 Evelyn Page went with her husband to Dorking to visit the composer and asked if she might do a portrait. He gave his permission to five sittings and requested that Frederick Page bring music to play to him, particularly that of Douglas Lilburn.

Collection: Evelyn Page, Wellington

Figure 16

- 36 *St Paul's London (1950)*
Oil on canvas board 420 × 370 mm
Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1952 NZAFA *Annual* cat. no. 63
1952 OAS *Paintings by Evelyn Page* cat. no. 5

Note: Related paintings from this time are held in private collections in Christchurch.

Collection: Dr and Mrs J.T. Campbell, Nelson

- 37 *Dahlias (1953)*
Oil on canvas board 520 × 415 mm
Signed lower right centre 'Evelyn Page'
Inscribed verso 'Evelyn Page £26-5-0'.
Not dated

Exhibited: 1954 NZAFA *Autumn* cat. no. 139

Notes: Another *Dahlias*, painted about 1950, was included in Evelyn Page's retrospective exhibition in 1970 as cat. no. 34. It is now in the collection of the Hawkes Bay Museum and Art Gallery. The Pages' neighbour at Waikanae was a dahlia fancier. His unwanted single flower tubers he used to throw out on the wide grass verge of the road to the subsequent delight of the painter.

Collection: Suter Art Gallery, Nelson, gift of Nelson Art Society, 1958

Plate 14

- 38 *City Harbour and Tower (c.1953)*
Oil on canvas board 396 × 658 mm

Signed lower left 'Evelyn Page'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1954 NZAFA *Annual* cat. no. 20
1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat.
no. 45

Notes: This painting was done from the University Senate building in Bowen Street. Right foreground is the roof of the Lutheran Church soon after demolished from its site on the corner of Bowen Street and the Terrace. Below lies the roof of Bowen Hospital and the slate roof and red brick of the Alexander Turnbull Library, flanked by the white vertical of the Cenotaph. The red roofed wooden building which holds the centre of the picture is the familiar Government Building designed by William Clayton and completed in 1876. The façade of the Wellington Railway Station provides another row of vertical columns.

The top third of the painting is a wild pattern of cranes, derricks, funnels on either side of the Hotel Waterloo and lacing above the built up slopes of Mount Victoria.

A small, more distant view of Parliament, shipping and Point Halswell is held in a private collection in Auckland. It is possibly the painting exhibited as 'City and Harbour' at the NZAFA in 1955 as cat. no. 17, and again in Christchurch at the CSA 1956 *Annual* as cat. no. 69.

Collection: National Art Gallery, Wellington

39 *St Peters Church and Wellington* (c.1954)
Oil on canvas board 648 × 908 mm
Signed lower right 'E Page'. Inscribed
verso 'Evelyn Page'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat.
no. 54 as 'Wellington
Harbour with St Peter's'

Notes: This is one of two related works painted from the lower end of the Terrace looking down Ghuznee Street. A similar prospect, entitled *Wellington Harbour*, was dated from the artist's memory 'about 1952.' In that painting the tower of Saint Peter's Church rises above low surrounding buildings and cuts across the harbour obscuring the end of Oriental Bay.

Collection: Victoria University of Wellington.

Plate 12

40 *Pot of flowers in a window* (1957)
Oil on canvas board 420 × 310 mm
Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'.
Inscribed verso 'No 1 Pot of Flowers in a
Window Evelyn Page April 1960'. Not
dated

Exhibited: 1960 NSA cat. no. 1
1960 NZAFA cat. no. 9

Notes: Although inscribed 1960, the present owner is sure that this work dates from 1957-58. It was painted at the artist's house at Waikanae.

Collection: Dr and Mrs. J.T. Campbell,
Nelson

Fifth Decade 1957-1966

41 *Luncheon under the ash tree* (1960)
Oil on canvas 597 × 883 mm
Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'. Not
dated

Exhibited: 1961 NZAFA *Annual* cat. no. 36
as 'Mrs Ian Prior and Her
Daughters, Bettina, Susan
and Ione'
1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat.
no. 60 as 'The Prior family'
1972 Auckland, John Leech
Gallery *Evelyn Page* cat.
no. 23 as 'The Prior Family'
1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat.
no. 14 as 'Mrs Ian Prior
and Family.'

Notes: Elespie Prior (*née* Forsyth) was also the model for cat. no. 17. Here she is seated at the head of the table with her youngest daughter on her knee. She wears a wide straw hat supplied by the painter (also used in *Objects in shade* cat. no. 46). They are sitting under a golden ash tree in the painter's garden at Waikanae.

While this painting has been titled for a number of exhibitions with some reference to the Prior family, the models and the painter have always called it *Luncheon under the ash tree*.

Collection: Dr and Mrs I. Prior, Wellington

Plate 18

42 *Nude (bathing)* 1960
Oil on canvas 790 × 930 mm

Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'.
Inscribed verso 'No 26, Nude, March
1960.

- Exhibited:* 1960 NZAFA *Autumn* cat. no. 8 as
'Nude'
1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat.
no. 58 as 'Nude'
1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat.
no. 26 as 'Nude'

Notes: This is the second major nude composition since *Summer morn* and *Pohutukawa Rina*. The first was one exhibited in the ACAG *Eight NZ painters III* in 1959.

In the intervening years the artist looked closely at European painting particularly that of the Post-Impressionists. This painting was done in the artist's house at Waikanae.

Collection: Dr and Mrs I. Prior, Wellington

Plate 17

- 43 *Nude with fruit* (1961-62)
Oil on canvas 724 × 915 mm
Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'.
Inscribed verso 'Evelyn Page No 1 Nude
with Fruit 100 gns'. Not dated

- Exhibited:* 1962 ACAG *Contemporary NZ
painting and Sculpture* cat.
no. 62
1962 NZAFA *Autumn* cat. no. 17
1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat.
no. 69
1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat.
no. 27

Notes: Painted in the dining room at 20 Hobson Street. Although dated 1963 in the 1970 retrospective exhibition, this work was shown twice in 1962. It would have been completed in the summer of 1961-62.

Collection: Dr and Mrs I. Prior, Wellington

- 44 *Sir William Hamilton* 1961
Oil on canvas board 915 × 712 mm
Not signed. Not dated

- Exhibited:* 1961 NZAFA *Annual* cat. no. 22
as 'C.W.F. Hamilton,
O.B.E., of Irishman Creek
Station'

- 1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat.
no. 66 as 'Bill Hamilton'
1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat.
no. 48

Notes: Charles William Feilden Hamilton was born 26 July 1899 at Ashwick Station, Fairlie. Educated at Christ's College, Christchurch, he married Margery Wills in 1923. He had taken over Irishman's Creek Station in the Mackenzie Country by 1921 and in 1936 developed marine engineering there. He was the New Zealand inventor of marine jet propulsion. In 1945 he established his engineering works at Middleton in Christchurch. This portrait of an old friend was commissioned by the C.W.F. Hamilton Engineering Company.

In the 1982 NZAFA exhibition this work was misdated 1946.

Collection: C.W.F. Hamilton & Co Ltd,
Christchurch

Plate 15

- 45 *Wellington Park* (1962)
Oil on canvas board 710 × 910 mm
Signed lower left 'E Page'. Inscribed verso
'Wellington Street Scene'. Not dated

Notes: This painting was commissioned by the Dunedin Public Art Gallery to commemorate the centenary of Charles Begg Ltd Dunedin.

The artist worked from inside her car parked at the lower end of Molesworth Street. The little park with two large oak trees was at its junction with Lambton Quay. The Law Courts are in the middle distance. The buildings on Lambton Quay rise above metal light standards at the entrance to Parliament Grounds.

Collection: Dunedin Public Art Gallery

- 46 *Objects in shade* (1964)
Oil on canvas board 514 × 594 mm
Signed lower right 'E Page'. Inscribed
verso 'Objects in Shade Evelyn Page
\$140'. Not dated

- Exhibited:* 1965 NZAFA *Annual* cat. no. 52
1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat.
no. 71

Notes: This still life was set up in the garden at Waikanae. It is slightly autobiographical

similar in intent to *Self portrait still life* (1941) by Frances Hodgkins or the watercolour of objects, flowers and her own head painted by Rita Angus in her garden Sydney Street in 1960-61. The painter has put together her props - vases, fruit and flowers - on the white-painted table where they so frequently ate alfresco meals. The wide panama hat with black velvet trim is the artist's garden hat and the trees are lime trees planted last century.

Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch

Plate 19

Sixth Decade 1967-1976

47 *St Giles Oxford 1967*
Oil on canvas board 395 × 536 mm
Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'.
Inscribed verso 'England Oxford St Giles
1967'

Exhibited: 1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat.
no. 80
1974 Dunedin, Otago Museum
Charles Brasch Memorial

Collection: Hocken Library, University of Otago, gift of Charles Brasch

48 *The Thames Bablock Hythe* (1968)
Oil on canvas board 360 × 550 mm
Not signed. Not dated

Exhibited: 1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat.
no. 84
1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat.
no. 3

Notes: At Bablock Hythe an old Roman ford is still intact and in use. Evelyn Page painted this when she was living at Eynsham out of Oxford.

Collection: Mrs A.C. Wilson, Christchurch

49 *Portrait of Denis Glover 1968*
Oil on canvas board 701 × 432 mm
Signed lower left 'Evelyn Page'. Inscribed
verso 'Denis Glover Poet May 1968
Evelyn Page'

Exhibited: 1970 NZAFA *Retrospective* cat.
no. 92

1970 Queen Elizabeth II Arts
Council NZ *art of the
sixties* cat. no. 29
1972 Auckland, John Leech
Gallery *Evelyn Page* cat.
no. 20

Notes: Denis James Mathews Glover (1912-1980) sailor, lyric poet, satirist, printer and typographer of great distinction, drinker and wit. In this portrait of Glover with a beard (only an intermittent adornment) the painter has caught the Irish belligerent honesty, the alert assurance of a man who as a naval officer commanded a small naval vessel at Dunkirk and ran the difficult passage from England to Murmansk with a gallantry which was recognised by the DSC and later the award of the Medal of the Soviet War Veterans. The painting was done at Glover's house at Paekakariki.

Collection: Auckland City Art Gallery

Plate 20

50 *Girl at a coffee bar* (1971)
Oil on canvas board 889 × 705 mm
Signed lower centre 'Evelyn Page'. Not
dated

Exhibited: 1971 NZAFA *Annual* cat. no. 54
1972 Auckland, John Leech
Gallery *Evelyn Page* cat.
no. 1
1974 Wellington, Bett-Duncan
Studio Gallery *Paintings
since '72 and a few others*
cat. no. 1

Notes: The painter's husband rigged up a coffee bar in the sitting room with tables and a coffee machine. He brought colleagues and students from Victoria University Music Department to act as models. The central figure is Fiona Wylie, on the left are David and Raydia Farquhar and on the far left Robert Love. Evelyn Page had seen the subject at her friend Mary Seddon's coffee bar in Majoribanks Street on Mount Victoria. She had started the painting but the models were too busy and too allusive. She abandoned the attempt. John Drawbridge saw the unfinished work and persuaded her to complete it by asking 'Have

you a bag of coloured rags anywhere? What part don't you like?' He covered the troublesome area with dark blue cloth. Evelyn Page told this story and added 'I really owe that painting to John Drawbridge.'

Collection: Bank of New Zealand, Wellington

Plate 21

- 51 *The Island Waikanae* (1971)
Oil on board 380 × 520 mm
Signed lower right 'E. Page'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1972 Auckland, John Leech
Gallery *Evelyn Page*
cat. no. 6

Notes: One of the last landscape paintings done before arthritis made working outdoors too difficult.

Collection: Mrs V. McKinnon, Auckland

- 52 *Girl at a window* (1971)
Oil on canvas board 763 × 105 mm
Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page 1974'.
Inscribed verso 'Girl at a Window 1971'.

Exhibited: 1974 Wellington Bett-Duncan
Studio Gallery *Paintings*
since '72 and a few others
cat. no. 3

Notes: There is a discrepancy in dating and the inscription but the earlier date appears to be more accurate. A smaller painting with initially the same title and later called *Seated nude* was shown in Wellington in 1971. The same model was used for both works. They were painted in the 'Cubby Hole' at 20 Hobson Street. The model was an attractive, plump girl doing housework whom the artist asked to pose. She was also the model for *Nude in a garden* cat. no. 53

Collection: Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt

Plate 22

- 53 *Nude in a garden* (1971)
Oil on canvas board 655 × 610 mm
Signed lower left 'E. Page'. Not dated

Notes: Painted in the garden at Waikanae. The hat was added for the sake of the model's modesty.

Collection: Victoria University of Wellington

- 54 *Recumbent nude* (1972)
Oil on canvas board 700 × 910 mm
Signed lower centre 'Evelyn Page'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1972 Auckland, John Leech
Gallery *Evelyn Page* cat.
no. 2
1974 Wellington, Bett-Duncan
Studio Gallery *Paintings*
since '72 and a few others
cat. no. 4

Notes: Painted on the terrace of the artist's house at Waikanae.

Collection: Dr N.C. Baskett, Auckland

Plate 31

- 55 *Conversation piece* 1972
Oil on board 450 × 550 mm
Signed lower left 'E. Page'. Inscribed verso
'Conversation 1972, Evelyn Page'

Exhibited: 1975 Christchurch, Robert
McDougall Art Gallery
New painting and weaving
cat. no. 107 as
'Conversation'
1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat.
no. 6

Notes: In this painting Pamela Beaglehole, right foreground, talks to the daughter of the next-door neighbour over lunch on the terrace at Waikanae.

Collection: Mrs N. Hewson, Christchurch

- 56 *Anniversary Day* 1973
Oil on canvas board 390 × 600 mm
Signed lower right 'E. Page'. Inscribed
verso 'Anniversary Day January 1973'

Exhibited: 1974 Wellington, Bett-Duncan
Studio Gallery *Paintings*
since '72 and a few others
cat. no. 18
1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat.
no. 31

Notes: This painting, also called *Anniversary Day opening of the boating season*, was painted at Evans Bay, Wellington.

Collection: Dr and Mrs H.P. Lachmann,
Wellington

- 57 *Wellington tug* 1973
Oil on canvas board 310 × 510 mm
Signed lower right 'E Page'. Inscribed
verso: 'Point of Departure Old
Wellington Tug August 1973 No 5'

Exhibited: 1974 Wellington, Bett-Duncan
Studio Gallery *Paintings
since '72 and a few others*
cat. no. 14

Notes: This painting was done from the Slip,
Evans Bay, when tugs and pilot boats were
anchored at the long jetty.

Collection: Wellington

- 58 *Plate of apples* 1974
Oil on canvas board 370 × 280 mm
Signed lower right 'E Page'. Inscribed
verso 'Plate of Apples Sept 1974'

Exhibited: 1974 Wellington, Bett-Duncan
Studio Gallery *Paintings
since '72 and a few others*
cat. no. 7 as 'Still Life with
Apples'

Collection: Dr T.H. Beaglehole, Wellington

- 59 *John Cawte Beaglehole OM* (1974)
Oil on canvas 710 × 485 mm
Signed lower right 'E Page'. Not dated

Notes: This portrait, commissioned by the
Alexander Turnbull Library, was painted from
drawings, photographs and the artist's memory
three years after John Beaglehole's death.

John Cawte Beaglehole (1901-71) was born
and lived in Wellington. He was Professor of
Commonwealth History at Victoria University, a
distinguished scholar, writer, historian of Pacific
explorations, editor of the *Journals of Captain
James Cook* and *The Endeavour Journal of
Joseph Banks* and President of the New Zealand
Council of Civil Liberties. In 1966 he was
awarded an honorary doctorate in Literature
from Oxford and received similar honours from
numerous other universities in Australia and
New Zealand. He and Ernest Lord Rutherford
are the only New Zealanders to have been
awarded the Order of Merit.

Collection: Alexander Turnbull Library,
Wellington

Figure 21

- 60 *Nude in a doorway* (1974)
Oil on canvas board 600 × 410 mm
Signed lower left 'Evelyn Page'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1974 Wellington, Bett-Duncan
Studio Gallery *Paintings
since '72 and a few others*
cat. no. 9
1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat.
no. 45

Notes: This work painted at the artist's house
at Waikanae.

Collection: Dr D. Mason, Wellington

Plate 24

- 61 *Breakfast at Hobson Street* (1975)
Oil on canvas board 600 × 810 mm
Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'.
Inscribed verso 'No 1 Breakfast Hobson
Street Evelyn Page \$1200'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1975 Christchurch, Robert
McDougall Art Gallery
New painting and weaving
cat. no. 109
1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat.
no. 46

Notes: The figure seated reading a newspaper
is Frederick Page. The breakfast is set out in
the Pages' dining room with its familiar blue
and white patterned wallpaper, Windsor chairs,
and round table. The great bunch of daffodils
came from the Pages' garden at Waikanae. On
the left a light shade is reflected in the glass
doors of a cupboard. The whole makes for one
of the painter's favourite compositions.

Collection: Mrs M. McAlpine, Christchurch

Plate 32

Seventh Decade 1977-1986

- 62 *Luncheon At Nandis* 1977-1985
Oil on canvas board 760 × 630 mm
Not signed. Not dated

Exhibited: 1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat.
no. 7

Notes: The child in this painting is Charlotte Wilson. Anna Wilson – the painter's daughter – is seated by the door onto the terrace at Waikanae. The background was not finished until 1985.

Collection: Evelyn Page, Wellington

- 63 *Grapes fruit and wine* 1980
Oil on canvas board 760 × 610 mm
Signed lower left 'Evelyn Page'. Inscribed verso 'Grapes Fruit and Wine 1980'

Exhibited: 1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat. no. 34

Notes: Painted in the dining room, Hobson Street.

Collection: Mr and Mrs N.R. Anderson, Wellington

Plate 1

- 64 *Frederick Page at the piano* (1981)
Oil on canvas board 640 × 760 mm
Signed lower left 'Evelyn Page'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1982 NZAFA *Selected work* cat. no. 13 as 'Music at Hobson Street'

Notes: This work was painted in the music room where Frederick Page practised for two to three hours each morning.

Collection: Evelyn Page, Wellington

Plate 23

- 65 *Pears on a plate* (1981)
Oil on canvas board 480 × 450 mm
Signed lower left 'E. Page'. Not dated

Exhibited: 1982 NZAFA *Annual*

Collection: Mrs A.C. Wilson, Christchurch

- 66 *Woman at a window* 1982
Oil on canvas board 650 × 420 mm
Not signed. Not dated

Notes: This painting done in the living room at Hobson Street is similar in subject to several works with similar titles painted in the 1970s (see also cat. no. 52).

Collection: Dr D. Farquhar, Wellington

- 67 *Portrait of Edith Campion* 1983

Oil on canvas board 760 × 640 mm
Signed lower right 'E. Page'. Not dated

Notes: Edith Campion, actress and writer. She was co-founder with Richard Campion of the New Zealand Players who, from the early fifties, kept the lights on in professional theatre in New Zealand.

Collection: Mr M.R. Campion, Wellington

Plate 27

- 68 *The Right Honourable Sir Alexander Turner* KBE 1985
Oil on canvas 620 × 760 mm
Signed lower right 'Evelyn Page'

Notes: This portrait was commissioned by Butterworth, Law Publishers Limited of London for Butterworth of New Zealand.

Sir Alexander Turner graduated Bachelor of Law, University of Auckland in 1922. His special field was Common Law. In 1951 he took silk and eighteen months later was appointed to the High Court Bench. In 1962 he became Senior Judge of the Land Court and was President of the Court of Appeal 1971–73. Since his retirement Sir Alexander has directed the publication of the *New Zealand Commentary on Halsbury's Laws of England*, a formidable assignment which took twelve years.

Collection: Butterworth of New Zealand, Wellington

- 69 *Still life with apricots* 1985
Oil on canvas board 356 × 457 mm
Signed lower right 'E. Page'

Notes: This painting was inspired by a gift of apricots. Evelyn Page recalled the rich luscious fruit growing at Governors Bay and the difficulty of expressing that in paint. She looked carefully for days, and painted while the fruit disintegrated.

Collection: Mr P.L. Condon, Christchurch

Plate 26

- 70 *Nude with magnolias* 1985–86
Oil on canvas board 630 × 760 mm
Signed

Notes: The model for this painting is a friend who had already posed for the artist in her

garden at Waikanae. This painting was begun in January 1985 and finished in January 1986.

Collection: Evelyn Page, Wellington

Plate 25

Chronology and List of Works

Explanation: During the research for this exhibition, many works by the artist have been traced. These have been listed in the chronology alphabetically from 1912. Since the artist dated few paintings, many have been listed under the year of their first exhibition. All works listed are in the oil medium unless otherwise stated.

- 1899 Evelyn is born at the family home in East Belt (Fitzgerald Avenue), Christchurch.
- 1900 The family moves to the corner of North Belt (Bealey Avenue) and London Street.
- 1901 The family is living at the corner of Cadagon and Hastings Streets, Sydenham, Christchurch.
- 1906 Enrolled at Sydenham Public School.
- 1907 Evelyn's sister Alice Polson enrolled at Canterbury College School of Art.
- 1908 Evelyn begins piano lessons.
- 1910 Evelyn gains considerable scholastic success at Sydenham Public School and is greatly encouraged in her drawing by her teacher Mary Morrison.
- 1913 Enrols in a commercial course at Christchurch Technical College.
- 1915 Commences morning and afternoon classes in Canterbury College School of Art as a free place student.
- 1916 *Self portrait*. Gains first class awards in College of Art examinations. Spends December and January 1917 with her sister Caroline in Central Otago.
- 1917 *Head of a girl* (roundel); *Woman in a kimono* (watercolour). Gains first class awards in the College of Art examinations and excellence for Still Life Advanced Prize for four studies from the antique.
- 1918 No works identified. Awarded CSA Diploma for drawing from the antique. No examinations held because of the influenza epidemic. Awarded Advanced Scholarship and Prize for three still life studies.
- 1919 *The old prospector*. Awarded Canterbury College School of Art Medal, Advanced Art Scholarship and the Canterbury College School of Art Prize for the best set of six landscapes in colour. Awarded CSA Diplomas for head from life, still life and drawing from the antique. Visits her sister Caroline in Tapanui during December through to January 1922.
- 1920-21 Continues at art school.
- 1922 *A summer's day; Babbie; Barbara; The deserted cottage; Interior of Christchurch Cathedral; Melisande; Near Hagley Park; Pastorale blue mountains; The old bookshop*. On 7 March elected a working member of the CSA. Exhibits five works at the CSA *Annual*, three works at the NZAFA and seven at the OAS.
- 1923 *Devotional; Evening light; Glenkenich; Grey day Tapanui; Medlar tree; Old farmyard; The old road, Heathcote; Portrait; Portrait of Mary Elizabeth Polson; Sand drift New Brighton; Waimakariri at Cora Lynn; Wet evening Cathedral Square*. Holidays during January with relatives, the Stewart family, at Glenkenich, Tapanui, Southland. Paints and etches with Cora Wilding. Begins studying music with Ernest Empson. Exhibits during June for the first time at the ASA.
- 1924 *Girl with humorous eyes; Karamea* (pencil); *New Brighton beach; Old man's head* (etching); *The peep o' blue; Portrait of Lincoln Kearne; Portrait of Mrs H.R. Hamilton; Prudence Pottinger*. Visits Ceridwen Thornton in Westport. They walk to Karamea. Sydney Thompson holds a solo exhibition at the CSA Gallery, Durham Street. His paintings arouse much comment from younger artists.
- 1925 *Arthur's Pass Otira; Con McDavitts Cora Lynn; Lighthouse Godley Head;*

- The old stone gateway; Otira Gorge; Rolleston Creek; Tauranga Bay; Waimakariri at Cora Lynn; Waimakariri upper reaches.* Paints during January at Cora Lynn, Arthur's Pass and Otira with Mrs Baird Frieberg. Exhibits at Art Society exhibitions in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin and also Wanganui. Sydney Thompson holds an exhibition at his studio, 92 Cambridge Terrace. During December visits Tauranga Bay near Westport.
- 1926 *Babbie and little minister; Figure out of doors; The green slipper; Man in shadows* (etching); *Marguerita de Valors; Mary Hamilton; The old auction yard; Portrait of John Sutherland Polson; Springtime of life; Sunlight and shadow; Ursula* (etching). *Figure out of doors* and *The green slipper* cause some controversy when exhibited with the ASA during June. 30 August, Mary Elizabeth Polson, aged sixty-seven, dies. Evelyn qualifies for the Diploma in Music.
- 1927 *Bringing of Irma to Wolfram; Cinderella* (pencil); *Geraldine; Marigolds; The old medlar tree* (etching); *Nude; Portrait sketch of Captain Rhodes; Sunshine and winter; The two friends.* Exhibits seven works at the CSA *Annual* in March. In July with other young artists forms the Group. They hold their first exhibition in the Weekly Press building, Cashel Street, Christchurch. Living at Hastings Street, Sydenham, with her father. Paints *The two friends* in Mrs Alley's orchard at Avonhead. Exhibits during the year with various art societies. Frederick Page enrolls as a music student at Canterbury College.
- 1928 *Convent quiet; Helen in long grass; Jim; Miss Annette Smith; The peaceful hour; Prudence Pottinger* (pencil); *Wuthering heights.* Exhibits eight works at CSA *Annual* in March. Continues to study piano with Ernest Empson and singing with Annette Chapman. Exhibits in the second Group show. December visits
- Jane Pottinger and does a pencil portrait of Prudence.
- 1929 *Bush scene Nelson; Bush trees Karamea; The cliffs Karamea; Dark forest; Ivory into flesh; Karamea River; Little Taylors Mistake; Matai Valley; Nude; Old barn; Opara River Karamea; River flat Karamea; The rocks Little Wanganui; Storm clouds Karamea; Summer morn.* Spends January at Karamea where *Summer morn* is painted. Also paints in Nelson. *Summer morn* refused as an exhibit in the CSA *Annual*. It was subsequently shown during September in the third Group show at the Durham Street Art Gallery. 19 November, John Sutherland Polson dies, aged seventy-eight. Evelyn visits her aunt Alice at Russell in the Bay of Islands. A colour plate of *Summer morn* illustrates an early issue of *Art in New Zealand*.
- 1930 *John Pottinger son of G.M. Pottinger; Pohutukawa Rina; Tilli Frankel.* During January paints *Pohutukawa Rina* near Russell. Moves from Sydenham to live with her sister Mrs Winifred McLaren at 77 Innes Road. Commences teaching part-time at Avonside and Christchurch Girls' High Schools. Can only paint at weekends. Takes German lessons with Mrs Tilli Frankel. Meets Frederick Page at a party given by Dr Otto and Mrs Frankel. During September exhibits with the Group. Joins the part-time staff of Canterbury College School of Art.
- 1931 *Castlehill Craigieburn Range; Frederick Page; The god child; Interior.* Exhibits only one work at CSA in March. Shows four oils and several pencil portrait sketches with the Group in September. Spends summer painting in North Canterbury.
- 1932 *Broken River Castle Hill; Group; House with green shutters; Imperiol; Midsummer; Noah's Ark Farm; Starshine; Winter pattern* (lino block). Exhibits at CSA, NZAFA and OAS

- Annuals* and with the Group. In July the Canterbury College School of Art celebrates its jubilee and she participates in a large exhibition of past and present student work.
- 1933 *Enys; Green fields; Portrait of Frederick Page* (pencil); *Relief; Shirley; Study; Terraces Broken River; Valmai Moffett*. A foundation member of the NZ Society of Artists and is elected a council member at the first AGM 11 August. Exhibits nine works at the NZSA exhibition but no other exhibitions during the year. Frederick Page leaves for London.
- 1934 *Henry Piat; Madame Henry Piat; Museum Auckland; Olivia; Summer morning; Trees Ilam; The valley; Weekend review; Winston Rhodes* (lino block). Visits her aunt Alice in January and paints whilst in Auckland. In March exhibits one work at the CSA *Annual*. Shows eight works at the second NZ Society of Artists exhibition. Moves from Innes Road and rents a room in an upstairs flat which she shares with Sophie and Winston Rhodes in Gertrude Secretan's house.
- 1935 *Farm by the Sea; Frances; Governors Bay; House by the sea; Joe with master; Maud; New Zealand winter; Dr Otto Frankel; School by the sea; Sunlight and shadows; Woman's head* (pencil). Exhibits at CSA, NZAFA, OAS and ASA *Annuals*. Exhibits with the ASA for the last time.
- 1936 *November morn*. Teaches art part-time at Craighead, a private school for girls in Christchurch. In March exhibits four works at CSA *Annual*. From 14-19 December holds her first solo exhibition at the Durham Street Art Gallery. The exhibition realises £300.
- 1937 *An alley at Nottinghill Gate; Boat race; Charles Brasch; Exeter; Grodig near Salzburg; Morten Hampstead; Near Salzburg; Turkey farm Great Missenden; Wythcome Elms*. Leaves for Britain in January, visiting Australia and Colombo en route. Frederick Page meets her on her arrival, but he is very ill. Nurses him at a cottage on the Devon coast. Frederick Page undergoes surgery at Exeter hospital. Charles Brasch visits them during Frederick Page's convalescence. Evelyn and Frederick Page find a flat at Nottinghill Gate, and she paints his portrait there. In September visits the Paris exhibition and takes a camping journey to Austria.
- 1938 *Coal barge Lyttelton; Interior Governors Bay; Lyttelton Harbour*. Leaves for New Zealand in January. Travels via Ceylon where she stays with Eunoë and Henry north of Kandy. Marries Frederick Page in April at Saint Cuthbert's Church, Governors Bay. Moves into *Waitahuna*. Shows ten works in August and seven at the NZAFA.
- 1939 *Elespie at Governors Bay*. In January Elespie Forsyth stays at Governors Bay and Evelyn paints her portrait. In March shows five works painted the previous year at the CSA *Annual*. At the end of April Evelyn's first child, Sebastian, is born. Frederick Page begins teaching piano in Christchurch and acts as a music critic for the *Press*. He also gives radio recitals for the New Zealand Broadcasting Service. He has a serious motor accident on the Summit Road. Has works selected for the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition, Wellington.
- 1940 *Allendale; The church in the valley; Drive in autumn; The orchard in spring; Governors Bay*. Exhibits one work at the CSA in March. Paints at Arrowtown during May. Ernst Plishke sends her a postcard of Bonnard's *Breakfast table*. Many guests come to stay at Governors Bay including Douglas Lilburn, Douglas McDiarmid, and Otto and Margaret Frankel. In October *Summer morn* is bequeathed by Rosa Sawtell to the Robert

- McDougall Art Gallery, the first work to be acquired for a public collection.
- 1941 *Mrs H. Stammers Smith; New Year holiday (Corsair Bay); Road through Arrowtown; Towards Eichardts; Wallaces Valley Lyttelton Harbour; Winsome Schroder.* Frederick Page made locum tenens for Dr Bradshaw as lecturer in music at the University of Canterbury College. Holidays in Queenstown from December to January 1942. Visits Ursula Bethell.
- 1942 *The Campbell family; Lake Ferry Queenstown; Sebastian and Anna Christian; Stables at Thurlby; Towards Eichardts (second version); Trench digging Hagley Park; Willi Fells (pencil); Window at Thurlby.* Evelyn's second child, Anna Christian, is born on 2 February at Waitahuna, Governors Bay. Three works are exhibited at the CSA including *Road through Arrowtown*, which is purchased by the Society. Frederick Page is temporary lecturer in charge of the Department of Music until the end of the second term. During November exhibits for the last time at OSA Annual.
- 1943 *Allendale Valley; Colombo Street from Cathedral Square; Flowers on the table; Governors Bay; Leo Sebastian; Mrs Leicester Webb; Portrait (pencil); Thames Street Oamaru.* Evelyn and Frederick Page continue an active social life at Governors Bay. Shows no works at the CSA Annual but five are shown with the NZAFA. During November six works are shown with the Group at Ballantyne & Co.
- 1944 *Christchurch Railway Station; Doorway Governors Bay; Leo Sebastian and Anna Christian; Lyttelton Harbour; Old Queenstown; Point of departure Norwich Quay Lyttelton.* Exhibits six works at the CSA Annual. *Summer morn* is removed from display at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery during the lifetime of the model.
- 1945 *Anna Christian; At the piano (Peg Hamilton); From Irishman's Creek; Hyacinths; Nora Walton; Norwich Quay Lyttelton; Post Office Cathedral Square; VE Day 1945.* Stays with the children at Peg and Bill Hamilton's Irishman's Creek Station. Holidays with Jane Pottinger in Wellington.
- 1946 *Boats Lyttelton; The house and family Governors Bay; Portrait of Eunoe; Portrait of Peg Hamilton in Highland Dress.* Visits Irishman's Creek to paint portraits. Frederick Page appointed lecturer in music to establish the new music department at Victoria University of Wellington. Evelyn and the children stay at Governors Bay for a year.
- 1947 *Admiral Byrd's flagship and sailors playing; DIC Wellington; Jimmy son of Mr and Mrs McIntosh; St Peters Ghuznee Street.* Frederick Page lives in Wellington. Because of accommodation difficulties Evelyn and the children live in a rented cottage at Plimmerton.
- 1948 *Featherston Street.*
- 1949 *Grey Street; Lambton Quay (large version); Portrait group Eliza and Sam Williams and their children; Sir Thomas Hunter; Union Bank.* Family moves to a bach at Waikanae. Buys old house at 20 Hobson Street and plans renovations.
- 1950 *Chipping Camden; Coast Deal; Dr Ralph Vaughan Williams; Fleet St London; Hyde Park autumn; Hyde Park Gate Kensington; Hyde Park Knightsbridge; London roofs the Embankment, St Paul's; Ludgate Hill; Near Salzburg; St Mary Vedast of All Angels; St Pauls London; Waikanae.* Visits England with Frederick Page. Paints in London and also does a portrait of the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams. Visits Salzburg.
- 1951 *Camellias; Rachael and Catherine daughters of Mrs Leicester Webb.* Her sister Caroline Clifford dies in

- Christchurch. Works on paintings begun in England. Buys land at Waikanae and Ernst Plishke designs a holiday house.
- 1952 *Bowen St; Canterbury Gate; Flower study; The Hutt; Queenstown; Shipping Wellington Harbour; St Peter's tower and Oriental Bay; Wellington Harbour.* Second solo exhibition held in Dunedin at the OAS. She and Frederick stay with Charles Brasch and Emily Forsyth at Queenstown.
- 1953 *Dahlias; City harbour and tower; Still life.* Teaching part-time at Wellington Girls College. Lays out the garden at Waikanae.
- 1954 *Church condemned; Dish of fruit; St Peter's church and Wellington.* Continues teaching part-time.
- 1955 *City and harbour; Lady with a lamp; Still life.*
- 1956 *Chinese pavillions Beijing; Courtyard Ming tomb; Great Wall of China Beijing; Hannah Donnelly; Michael Donnelly; Nude; Portrait of a Havelock North physician (Dr Antony W Reeve?); Portrait of Mr G.P. Donnelly (charcoal); Professor Watson Munro.* During August guest exhibitor at CSA Annual. Visits China with the New Zealand Cultural Mission. A selection of her letters from China published in *Landfall*. Goes to Hawkes Bay to paint some commissioned portraits. Stays with the Donnelly family at Flaxmere.
- 1957 *Flowers; Nude under trees; Plums in shade; Portrait of Diana Mason; Pot of flowers in a window; Table in shade; Trumpets and daffodils.* Paints at Waikanae.
- 1958 *Autumn group; Hutt Valley from St Johns Wellington; Wellington Harbour with St Peter's.* Has her first severe attack of arthritis. Her sister Winifred McLaren dies in Christchurch. During September Frederick Page travels to London. Her work included in a collection of one hundred paintings and drawings selected by Eric McCormick and S.B. MacLennan for exhibition in Russia. Four paintings shown at ACAG in *A private collection* of New Zealand paintings.
- 1959 *Head; Nude; Still life.* During April Frederick Page returns. Exhibits with the Manawatu Art Society *Annual* in September and October. Included in *Eight New Zealand painters* held at the ACAG through October and November and toured in 1960.
- 1960 *Luncheon under the ash tree; Nude (bathing); Orchard spring and island Waikanae; Still life; Still life with fruit.* Begins to use her garden at Waikanae as the setting for many outdoor studies, nudes and figure groups. Exhibits at the Suter Art Gallery, Nelson, on the invitation of the Nelson Art Society.
- 1961 *Blue jug and fruit; Esplanade Oriental Bay; Harbour and civic block; Nude with fruit; Oaro Kaikoura; Remarkables; Sir William Hamilton; Still life; Still life at Waikanae; Waikanae hills.* Visits Cora Wilding at Kaikoura on the way to Irishman's Creek and Queenstown.
- 1962 *Hutt Valley from the Esplanade; Otaki hills from Waikanae; Peggy Hamilton; Portrait of Dr Galway; Seated figure; Wellington park; Woman at table.* Frederick Page in hospital following a heart attack early in May. Uses Indian Yellow which proves to be unstable, becoming grey. Elespie Prior poses at Hobson Street. Sir Herbert Read and his wife come to dinner at Hobson Street and he is impressed by her painting.
- 1963 *Lambton Quay and the Law Courts; Poseidon chaos and nox; Rt Honourable Sir Walter Nash; Still life.* Paints a portrait of Sir Walter Nash in his office. *Wellington park* commissioned by the Dunedin Public Art Gallery to commemorate the centenary of Charles Begg & Co. Ltd. Holidays at

- Queenstown during December through to January 1964.
- 1964 *Eichardts on the lake; Fruit on a plate; Girl at a window; Objects in shade; Paradise; Still life No. 1; View from Paradise Queenstown.* Young home help models in the 'cubby' at Hobson Street.
- 1965 *Evans Bay; Harbour from Oriental Bay; Kate's garden.*
- 1966 *Aix-en-Provence; Avenue Mirabeau; Nude studies (gouache); Platz Mirabelle Salzburg; Still life No. 1 1966; Still life No. 2 1966.* Receives a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council grant to travel and study overseas. Travels to England with a friend and lives for a time in London. Attends the Kokoschka school at Salzburg. Visits the Festival at Aix-en-Provence.
- 1967 *Burford Oxfordshire; Chartres 1-4 (drawings); Interior; Interior reflections; Landscape Oxfordshire; Salzburg; St Giles Oxford; The Thames from the Terrace (Richmond); Windrush Valley Oxford.* Frederick Page is made Professor of Music at Victoria University of Wellington. He has sabbatical leave and meets his wife and daughter in Europe. Buys a Dormibus and paints from the van. Joins her daughter, Anna, who is working for the United Nations Bureau and they journey through France. Returns to England and stays in a cottage belonging to Peggy Garland with Sylvia Fox.
- 1968 *Portrait of Denis Glover; Fruit and wine; Grapes on a dish; The Park Blenheim; Still life; The Thames Bablock Hythe; The Vanbrugh Bridge Blenheim.* Returns to New Zealand. The marriage of her daughter Anna takes place at Hobson Street. Two works included in ASA, *New Zealand women painters 1845-1968.*
- 1969 *The Harbour Wellington; The head of the Dart; Nude in a garden; On The Terrace; Queenstown; Thurlby Stables Speargrass Flat.* Paints in her garden at Waikanae using her home help as a model. Nude in a garden begun with Margaret Fleischl as the model and completed using Jenny McLeod. Frederick Page spends time in hospital because of his heart condition.
- 1970 *Courtenay Place older Wellington; Friends in her garden; Lottie Turnovsky; Seated nude; Still life.* Commissioned to paint the Law Courts, Wellington. Frederick Page retires. A major retrospective exhibition of her work is held by the NZAFA and opened on 7 December by Ngaio Marsh.
- 1971 *Breakfast on the terrace; Garden in autumn Waikanae; Girl at a window; Girl at a coffee bar; The island Waikanae. Last of the country Waikanae; Nude in a garden; Girl at a coffee bar* commenced at Majoribanks Street but completed at Hobson Street with university staff and students as models.
- 1972 *Breakfast at Hobson Street; Conversation piece; Frances; Harvest; Mulberry tree in autumn; No. 1 Gouache; No. 2 Gouache; Recumbent nude.* Spends time in hospital during June and July. Exhibition at the John Leech Gallery, Auckland, opened by Colin McCahon 27 October.
- 1973 *Anniversary Day; Boat Evans Bay; Figure in shade; Fiona Wylie; Interior with two friends; Still life No. 3; Wellington rocks Evans Bay Massey Point; Wellington tug.* In January Erin Criscillo poses as model dressed in a pareu for *Figure in shade*, a work that is a favourite of the artist. Ngaio Marsh unable to sit for a portrait. Included in the University of Canterbury's Centennial Exhibition, 4-11 May.
- 1974 *Boat harbour Wellington; David Farquhar; Dr John Beaglehole OM; Dr A.J.W. Taylor; Flower study; Fruit and flowers; Kapiti and southern hills; Lake Hayes and Remarkables; Mulberry tree with figures; Nude in a doorway; Nude*

- in shade; Plate of apples; Table with ash tree.* Exhibition of recent works with the Bett-Duncan Studio Gallery, Wellington, opened by Frank Corner in October. Exhibits in CSA Commonwealth Games Exhibition.
- 1975 *Breakfast at Hobson Street.* Increasingly crippled by arthritis. Two works included in the Hohepa *Art and Craft* exhibition held at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery.
- 1976 *Portrait of James Bertram* (charcoal). Has acute sciatica and is in hospital with bronchitis.
- 1977 *Luncheon at Nandis.* Visited by her daughter Anna and granddaughter Charlotte, who stay at Waikanae.
- 1978 *Interior with figure.* Uses a walking frame.
- 1979 *Camellias; Still life.* During March falls and is in hospital with fractures. Re-enters hospital for three weeks in August.
- 1980 *Grapes fruit and wine; Portrait of Bruce Mason; Portrait of Ian Fraser; Portrait of Ormond Wilson; Portrait of Roger Woodward; The strand at Raumati.* Attends Ewart hospital as an outpatient. Makes charcoal drawings of her friends.
- 1981 *Bruce Greenfield; The island from Paekakariki; Pears on a plate; Frederick Page at the piano.* Begins to use a wheelchair.
- 1982 *Country bunch; Flowers fruit and honesty; Woman at a window.* A solo retrospective exhibition held at the NZAFA opened 7 April by Bruce Mason. Included in the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts centennial exhibition during June, held at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery.
- 1983 *Portrait of Edith Campion; That bloody wallpaper again.* Made a fellow of the NZAFA and is the first recipient of the Governor General's award. The award is presented at the NZAFA Annual on 23 July by Sir David Beattie. Enters hospital on 8 October following a fall, but returns home to convalesce. Frederick Page dies at Hobson Street, 29 November.
- 1984 *Portrait of Jenny McLeod* (pencil). Begins a still life during March. Enters Calvary Hospital in May for a total hip replacement operation.
- 1985 *Bottles fruit and reflections; Nude with magnolias; Oriental Bay; The Rt Honourable Sir Alexander Turner; Still life with apricots.* Begins *Nude with magnolias* in January (completed January 1986). In February enters hospital. Over March and April works on the portrait of Sir Alexander Turner and in May and June completes *Still life with apricots* and *Bottles fruit and reflections*. Retouches old paintings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

There has been very little published on the work of Evelyn Page. A detailed listing of newspapers reviews and references, in addition to those quoted in the footnotes, is held at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch. The Gallery also holds details of her School of Art career. A summary of review mentions and illustrations in *Art in New Zealand* is included at the end of this bibliography.

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Evelyn Page began to draw before she went to school; today, in her eighties, she is still painting. These seven decades have left a rich collection of paintings, noted for their use of 'pure colour,' for their strength and intensity. This book, published to coincide with a major retrospective exhibition of the artist's work, reproduces thirty-two paintings in full colour, and photographs of many more. It includes a short biography by artist Janet Paul and an essay by Neil Roberts of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

Evelyn Page: Seven Decades records the life and work of a striking painter — and a remarkable woman.

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Cover painting: *Girl at a Coffee Bar* by Evelyn Page

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