

# ASCENT

A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS IN NEW ZEALAND

VOL 1 NO 2 JULY 1968

*The Caxton Press*



ONE DOLLAR FIFTY CENTS



THE CANTERBURY SOCIETY OF ARTS  
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*The Caxton Press*  
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND



EDITED BY LEO BENSEMANN ASSISTANT EDITOR BARBARA BROOKE



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# Imaginary Reefs and Floating Islands

*THE ROMANTIC IMAGE IN NEW ZEALAND PAINTING*

*A Lecture given to the Auckland Art Gallery Associates  
on 31 October 1967*



P. A. TOMORY

MY title comes from an essay by the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset—*The Dehumanisation of Art\**—where he describes metaphor as providing the imaginary reefs and floating islands between the realities. This is not only a phrase poetically expressive of New Zealand topography, but also conveys, so aptly, those mirage-like images which the romantic soul conjures up to lend both his physical environment and his personality some, at least, contemporaneous significance.

I would like, therefore, to apply this notion of metaphor to painting in this country and to examine some of those manifestations, which, in general, are critically held to be satisfying images of our physical and spiritual being. By so doing, I can give no assurance that I will be able to provide any more sound critical ground than can be found on an imaginary reef or a floating island.

The first theme I would like to discuss is that of the profile. The first satisfactory topographical portrait of New Zealand was rendered by the navigator, Captain James Cook, in his coastal profiles. These

were as functional then as they are now to the seaman making a landfall, but the contemporary seaman does not use Cook's profiles, but more recent, more accurate ones. The perforated rock in Mercury Bay, drawn by Spöring, commented on by Cook, had been washed away by the Coromandel seas by the 1840s—but, the landlubberly romantic will shun the modern, the accurate, to dwell on Cook's often tortured linear descriptions of New Zealand, for his profiles are the first figurative images of the sensation of discovery, and are not first impressions often the best! Sensation not fact is the stimulant of the true romantic. One can go further, Cook's profile drawings resemble, to me, in some instances those rather horrid hatched drawings of the human organs found in medical text books—but the romantic, substituting aesthetic realisation for repulsion, sees not only the anatomy but the very *heart* of New Zealand. Fact reveals, unfortunately, that uppermost in Cook's mind was not romantic imagery but the need for fresh water and antiscorbutics. Cook was not an artist, after all, but William Hodges, who accompanied the Captain on the

\* Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956, pp. 30-31.

VIEWS OF LANDS ON THE COAST OF NEW ZEALAND

A VIEW of the WATERING PLACE in QUEEN CHARLOTTE'S SOUND



A VIEW of the SNOWY MOUNTAINS distant 8 Leagues



A VIEW of the SOUTH CAPE taken when the *Tripe* bore SE at about 13 Leagues



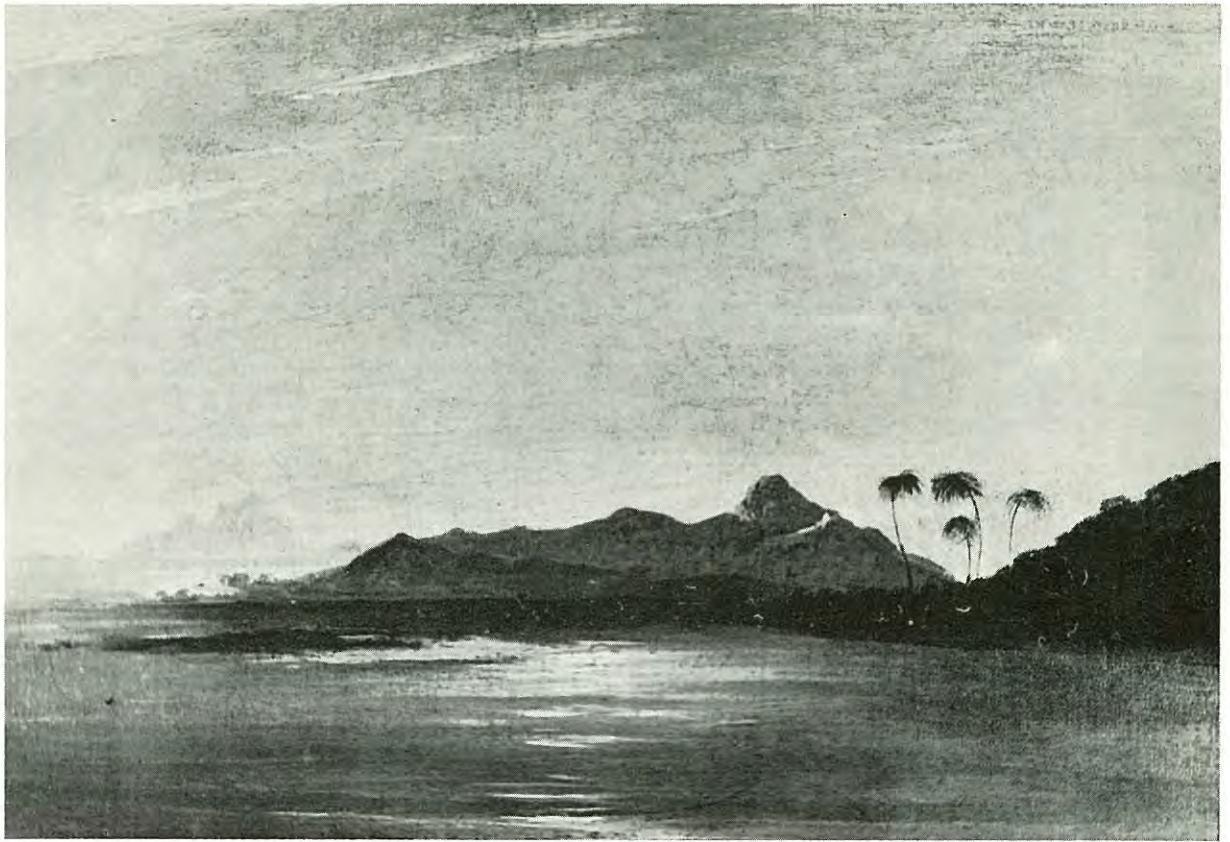
A VIEW of the Land on the SW Side of the SW BAY



A VIEW of FIVE FINGERS POINT leaving 400 Yards of Leagues







WILLIAM HODGES. The Island of Bora Bora. Oil. 13 x 19½ ins. (The British Admiralty).

Second Voyage, was. An important fact emerges from an examination of his work, for the paintings, which were done on the spot or rather on deck, are the most convincing and the most redolent of romantic sensation, from his view of the Cape of Good Hope to the views of the Society Islands. The tilted horizon, in some way, affording a feeling of ship-board veracity. Fundamentally, this romantic sensation is secured by the accuracy of the profile, the syncopated geology of Polynesia is translated into an expressive outline. Once the artist steps ashore, we are less convinced by his impressions, his Maori family posed before the waterfall in Dusky Bay could be Grand Tourists reposing before the falls of Tivoli, his Easter Island monuments the monumental ruins of a Doric Temple. His view in New Caledonia is credible only through the sight of *Resolution* anchored in the bay below. There is however a contradiction, for Hodges' studies of individual forms—for instance, the Poe Bird, or Tui—is accurate enough, but the weapon his Maori chief holds does not belong to Polynesia. The contradic-

tion is only apparent to us, for the Romantic artist of around 1800 it is generally true to say, did not confuse realistic particular and romantic sensation, whereas it is as generally true to say that some Romantic artists of this century have tended to confuse the two.

While many of Nature's phenomena, the grotto, the tunnel of trees and the waterfall were prime inductors for the Romantic spirit, the profile of landforms had a nobler association, namely, with the human face. The coin or medallion had preserved for centuries the energetic or thoughtful profiles of many manners of men. But not until the seventeenth century did the portrait painter explore fully the possibilities of the three-quarter view, that is to say half profile, half full face. Hardly in portraits, but nevertheless of great importance, did they also devise the 'lost' profile, the three-quarter back view, perhaps the most tantalising of all views, for so often one might have preferred the dream to the reality of the full face. It was F. H. Bradley in his book *Appearance and Reality*, of 1893, who declared

that reality had no absolute contours, thus providing one of the tenets of Cubism, but he also stated that the identity of a thing was the *view* we take of it.\* But this was not the notion of the Romantic movement, for Johann Caspar Lavater's, *Physiognomische Fragmente* (Essays on Physiognomy), of 1775-78 and translated into French and English by 1792, presented an infallible and absolute character reading for many varieties of the human profile. While we know very well that if we can identify a friend from his profile we may not read his character thereby, the Romantic, with his notion of the personification of nature was quite ready not only to read into the land profile its identity but also its character.

Now, whereas the seaman identified his coastal views by a compass bearing the Romantic artist drew from no 'fixed' point and arbitrarily revised reality to express his conception. That the result was often felicitous was due in no small part to the artist's topographic aptitude and experience, so that it comes with something like a shock to find, in so many cases, just how inaccurate those profiles are, how impossible the viewpoint. The Romantic artists issued no manifesto as to their intentions towards nature, but it may be expected that they shared Thomas Gray's belief that 'Not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry.'† Thus, mountains were the sublime works of the Creator, and the landscape profile could be rendered as the 'side face' of God. The eighteenth century reaction to such views was one of 'pleasurable horror', a contemplative experience which we still enjoy, although we might describe it differently.

Nevertheless with these early observers of New Zealand or of the Pacific Islands, we can never be sure of their sense of locale. The ambiguity remains; are their paintings and drawings only topographic approximations or are they sensuous and imaginative identifications? Doubts certainly arise when their titles and place names are considered. For surely in these the English capacity for poetic metaphor must emerge. But Hodges' most romantic painting of a Fiordland waterfall is prosaically titled 'A View of a Rock of Basalt in the Island of New Zealand'. May we suspect that Cook was but an insensitive materialist, when he could name one bay, Plenty, and another Poverty? Elsewhere he tended to the zoomorphically dull—Whale Island, the Hen

and Chickens. At least there are the Poor Knights, Three Kings and Cape Farewell, but this last is ambiguous, since we shall never know the tone of voice he used to christen it.

Thus we may accept these eighteenth century views as part of our visual pre-history, but hesitate to include them within our central iconology.

It was in 1940 that Dr Eric McCormick first published Buchanan's *Milford Sound* (1863) and Heaphy's *Mount Egmont* (c. 1841), coincident with the Centennial celebrations.\* There are certainly other Buchanans and other Heaphys of similar style and conception to them, but these alone have gained that sanctity accorded in the Northern Hemisphere to Giorgione's *Tempesta* and Constable's *Haywain*. The snowbound sway of Milford's profile vies with the icy symmetry of Egmont's outline. Although separated by twenty-two years, they both display an innocent wonder before majestic nature, and for their respective times are somewhat unique in so isolating the natural phenomenon; since both artists were professionally engaged in surveying and such imaginative compositions hardly fell within their terms of reference. So we might call them off-duty works, made for their own sake entirely, except that Heaphy's work was tidied up into a lithograph not surely to attract the settler—since when has the settler been attracted by forty miles of dense scrub and an economically inviable mountain? Only the armchair pioneer snug in his parlour could be uplifted by such a sight. As for New Zealand consumption, one has doubts, since even today it is only those living in Egmont's radius who admire its form—outsiders tend to use it as a surveyor's pole to measure distance. Did Buchanan intend to exhibit *his* work? For watercolours of New Zealand were exhibited at Dunedin as early as 1860, but this seems doubtful, for such economic use of colour would hardly find favour with Dunedin's colonial aesthetes. Fundamentally, Buchanan's view represents a segment of an extended coastal profile, expressively rendered perhaps, but nevertheless a coastal profile. Only the unfeeling iconoclast, of course, would suggest that it might be the discarded section from some official folio.

But Romantic hindsight is an irrational process, at best, for no one can deny that both these natural wonders have slipped into the 'scenic attraction' category, in fact had slipped by 1900. Since then, for the serious artist, Mitre Peak and Milford

\* Quoted, Sypher, *Rococo to Cubism*, 1960 pp. 270-272.

† Correspondence of Gray, Walpole, West and Ash-ton, 1, p. 259.

\* *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, pp. 34, 102.



JOHN BUCHANAN. Milford Sound. Water-colour.  $8\frac{5}{8} \times 19\frac{3}{4}$  ins. (The Hocken Library).

Sound might not exist and Egmont has only appeared sporadically—in 1929 in a painting by Christopher Perkins and more recently, but not as a major image, in some paintings by Woollaston. So what occasioned the resurrection of these two works in 1940? Let me refer to Dr McCormick's own words about them. First his comments on Heaphy: 'Throughout the range of Heaphy's work you are aware of a man wrestling with the strange contours and colours of a new environment and moreover, attempting to define the peculiar quality of each part of New Zealand . . . . When he does get away from the conventions of his time . . . and treating a New Zealand subject freely in his own way, the result is a small masterpiece . . . . *Mt. Egmont from the Southward* remains one of the few satisfying paintings of that inspiration—and snare—for New Zealand artists.' Second, Dr McCormick's views on Buchanan: '. . . he dispensed with the prevailing naturalism and placed the chief stress on forms and contours . . . Buchanan was free from the nineteenth century Romantic conventions. This freedom was probably not of his own seeking and may have been due to the circumstances of his calling and his lack of formal training in the arts: but none the less it enabled him to escape the tyranny of an imported tradition and to achieve a degree of emancipation found only rarely even among later writers and artists.'

From these quotations we can, I think, pick out the essential requirements for pioneering the search for identity—'wrestling with the strange contours and colours', 'getting away from the conventions of his time', 'to escape from the tyranny of an imported tradition', 'to achieve a degree of emancipation'. The metaphoric content, in fact, was to be read in the artistic expression—in the naive renderings of Heaphy and Buchanan. For there was a widely held and often uncritical contention, within the Western European culture, that there was a natural correlation between the naive and honesty. Anyone, of course, who has experienced the shifty cunning of the simple peasant may have reason to question this. But in general terms, the search for identity was to be stimulated by the pioneer spirit. You will have noticed however, that Dr McCormick was reticent not only about the subject matter, but issued a warning that *Mt. Egmont* might be a 'snare' to the artist.

Early nineteenth century topography had a predilection for mountains, a carry-over from the eighteenth century, and in the Northern Hemisphere, Switzerland, Scotland and Wales provided the main arenas. J. M. W. Turner, grounded in this genre, made regular tours of these countries. So it is his example, certainly, as we know from W. M. Hodgkins, that occasioned this concentration on the West Coast and on Egmont. However, running counter to



CHARLES HEAPHY. Mt. Egmont from the Southward. Water-colour. 18 x 26ins. (The Alexander Turnbull Library).

this 'artistic' notion, was the stronger parochial interest in local topography. Hoyte's views of Auckland, those of Brees in Wellington and O'Brien in Dunedin were more in demand than the intangible and unfamiliar magic of more remote scenes. There is certainly no doubt that when Hoyte showed water-colours in Christchurch, few would be of Auckland, but there would be many of Governor's Bay and the Port Hills. Thus the isolated natural monument, by the middle of this century, had on the one hand become a pictorial cliché for the serious artist, and on the other a passionless effigy for the public. May I recall at this stage Bradley's observation that the identity of a thing is the *view* we take of it—the less familiar N.E. view of Rangitoto to an Aucklander might have him wildly guessing—and this applies as much to the two dimensional representation as to the three dimensional reality. Therefore the 1940 *view*, largely conditioned by the search for a *national* identity, experienced no serious aesthetic blockage to these pictorial clichés nor a parochial indifference to the remote monument; in fact, it was their remoteness, both geographical and historical, that permitted them to become super-real images. For an

important factor in the neo-Romanticism practised in Britain, the United States and Australasia in the thirties was the influence of Surrealism, particularly the conception of the isolated object lit by a hard, unnatural light. Further the teaching of Clive Bell and Roger Fry, inculcated the perception of 'significant form' and the elimination of the subject. Little effort was required, therefore, to recognize in the Buchanan and the Heaphy, not only surrealist manifestations but metaphorical animations of an elusive identity. For the Romantic, the principal motivation is in the search not in the finding, which, if discovered so often results in an ambiguity, so causing, in its turn, a rejuvenation of that initial motivation to search once more. In the Buchanan we cling to our first imaginary reef, in the Heaphy we sight our first floating island.

Gombrich in his study, *Physiognomic Perception*,\* remarked on ' . . . the value and the fallibility of physiognomic intuition'. Without it, he wrote, ' . . . we could never arrive at a hypothesis which we could subsequently modify and adjust to the evi-

\* *Physiognomic Perception*, Daedalus, 1960, p. 235.

dence provided by life or history. But we destroy the value of this instrument if we overrate that initial groping . . . The asymmetry of Milford Sound and the symmetry of Egmont, perhaps constituted the profile and full face of a groping intuited identity but, analogous to the police 'Identikit' system, the fitting of them together, resolved into a too distant image—an attractive ambiguity, but no more. There is, indeed, a fundamental fallacy in a physiognomic intuition gained solely from the human or natural profile, for it is the aspect most subject to change, physical change occasioned by age or violence. The imperious aquiline profile of a friend may, through years and indulgence, dissolve into a servile, flaccid outline, and Tarawera's profile now is only a gouged fragmentation of the one it had in 1887. This very fallacy itself has proved to be a 'pleasurable horror' for the Romantic, contemplating the future wreck of a beautiful face or the noble past of a ruin. It is therefore unnecessary to record here in detail a decade or two of close enquiry into other nineteenth century New Zealand topographers, engendered by the need for more information about them and their works, and the hope of perhaps finding the 'missing link' which would provide New Zealand painting with an historical past and a longer tradition. This enquiry was also engaged in in Australia, particularly by Dr Bernard Smith in his book *European Vision and the South Pacific*, where he stated in his preface that the origins of typical landscape may be traced to the topographic period. Here I would claim the indulgence of quoting from my review of the book in 1960,\* since it explains, in my opinion, why this 'missing link' would never be discovered. Substituting 'regional' for 'typical' I argued that ' . . . the artistic motives which lie behind the quasi-scientific art of topography are not those which propel the regional landscape painter. The serious artist is not diverted in his search for form or image by topographic considerations.'

This in some way explains also why there existed for nearly twenty years, 1940-1960, a 'credibility gap' between many commentators on painting and those artists who were intent on the search for the 'true' identity. Some writers and poets have difficulty in 'reading' the purely painterly metaphor. Guillaume Apollinaire, for instance, although he was a champion of the Cubists, preferred, initially, Delaunay's more colourful, dismembered images of the Eiffel

Tower and Paris. And he did, after all, invent the term 'Surrealism'—a conception in painting where the object had some *literary* significance.

In the decade 1940-1950, therefore, the main stream of interest lay in the work of the Romantic artists like Russell Clark, Lee-Johnson and Sutton. The progenitor of this trend is considered to be Christopher Perkins, an English art teacher, brought out under the Latrobe scheme to stimulate art in New Zealand. Since his influence is now being over exaggerated, it would be salutary, for some critics, to re-read what Dr McCormick had to say about him in 1940. However, Perkins and his compatriot Roland Hipkins, did much to foster a New Zealand Romanticism based on English precepts—the selecting out of significant objects, the dead tree, the colonial house, the ponga and the cabbage tree, and certain landscape forms, all of which could make clear the regional association. I fear, however, that there was as slender a connection between this 'romantic' selection and the real sensory perception of the New Zealander, as there is between the reconstructions of the pioneer museums and the real environment of the 1840s. These, by no means indifferent, paintings could provide a backdrop against which Harry could sing but an unreal territory for Arawata Bill.

These artists were, indeed, trapped between the Scylla of topographic allusion and the Charybdis of a tyrannical imported tradition, to paraphrase Dr McCormick, who, reproducing Heaphy's *Mt Egmont* and Perkins' painting of the same subject on the same page, made it quite clear which one he preferred. For it is very difficult to turn a topographical exactitude into a surrealist enigma. In fact, Perkins hardly got much further with his metaphor than Alexander Bathgate did with his on Mount Cook.\*

Majestic mountain monarch holding high  
 Thy ice-crowned summit hoar 'mid heavens blue

How much more telling is Fairburn's line, 'and there were islands floating in the wind-whipped blue.'†

It is perhaps worthwhile to reflect here on poetic and painterly metaphor, for if the couplet by Bathgate is read alongside Heaphy's *Mt Egmont*, there is a sympathetic correspondence, indicating the parity of poetic and painterly imagination achieved during the Romantic movement, but no such cor-

\* Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 1960. *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 1960, p. 417.

\* Allen Curnow, *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, 1960, p. 30.

† *The Cave*, Curnow, op. cit. p. 144.



CHRISTOPHER PERKINS. Taranaki. Oil. 20 x 36ins. (Auckland City Art Gallery).

respondence exists between either the Bathgate or Fairburn lines and the Perkins *Taranaki*. And if one were to translate the Fairburn line into painting, the result would be no more than an enticing tourist poster for the Hauraki Gulf.

The Surrealists attempted, in fact, to renew the relationship of poetry and painting against the entrenched view that the art of painting lay in the expressive brush stroke and the non-figurative image. Their best works resulted from an imaginative assemblage of objects, manipulated by traditional painterly methods, so achieving an enigmatic and emblematic whole. That is, a combination of poetic and painterly invention. This combination was implicit in medieval heraldry as it was in the emblem books of the sixteenth century, where for instance, a woman with a mirror was Vanity, while a woman standing on a globe was Fortune. In these and in others where a woman is figured, it is the linking of the general characteristics of the feminine temperament to a particular attribute, which allows us to construe the emblematic significance. A later age, however, its allegorical perception blunted, could re-title a woman with a mirror as 'Venus at her Toilet'. Now with these observations in mind, I would like to turn to two New Zealand paintings where this notion of the emblematic is present.

In 1942, Rita Angus painted the *Portrait of Mrs Betty Curnow*. There is no doubt at all that this is an

excellent likeness of the sitter, but this is a transitory value. The real value of the painting lies in its emblematic quality. When we examine the figure of the woman, we notice the work worn hands, the fine but not over feminine features, the hair, plainly dressed, and the exotic patterned blouse. A general identity is thus joined to a particular one. Further, because of the centralised position of the figure, we can read an hieratic inference—a matriarchal emblem. Turning to the attributes behind her, we notice a watercolour of a New Zealand landscape (perhaps by the artist herself) which provides a pictorial parallel to Dr McCormick's critical observations on Heaphy and Buchanan. To the sitter's right there is a print of Brueghel's painting of *Summer* and behind her a caseful of books. These not only convey a general idea of European culture, but the Brueghel is the Northern concept of fertility and regeneration. Offsetting the Brueghel is a cactus, a spiny, succulent plant, a hardy exotic capable of rich growth in the most infertile of soils. To counter any idea that this is too sophisticated a reading, I would refer you to the artist's statement in an interview: '... for me, New Zealand is, in essence, medieval.'<sup>\*</sup> She was, in fact, fully aware of the emblematic nature of medieval painting. She has, also, told me that she was inspired to

<sup>\*</sup> *Year Book of Arts in New Zealand*, No. 3, The Wingfield Press, 1947. p. 68.

paint this portrait after she had seen a portrait of a pioneer woman in the Turnbull Library. It is true that these objects could be personal to the sitter, or that they are but pictorial elements inserted for variety. But the fact that they may be read in these ways does not render the attributes ambiguous, for the three 'meanings' are integral to the artist's total interpretation. When we read Fairburn's line, we do not pause to confirm that 'islands floating' is derived from the optical phenomenon of the mirage or that 'the wind-whipped blue' refers to atmospheric turbulence on high altitude cirrus cloud and wind velocity on sea water. For it is not the realities which allow us to enhance this line with our own feelings and memories but the metaphors which 'lie between them.' As Professor Dugald Stewart, writing in 1814 on *The Pleasure Derived from Analogy*\* remarked, ' . . . The pleasure we receive even from those analogies which are the foundation of poetical metaphor and simile, may be found resolvable in part, into the satisfaction connected with the *supposed* discovery of truth, or the *supposed* acquisition of knowledge; the faculty of imagination giving to these illusions a momentary ascendant over the sober conclusions of experience'. Earlier in the same study, Professor Stewart suggested that ' . . . the contemplation of the analogy, considered merely as a *fact*, is pleasing to the mind; partly, from the mysterious wonder it excites, and partly from the convenient generalization of knowledge it affords.' I would like to relate this statement to W. A. Sutton's *Nor'-wester in the Cemetery*. If the subject here is a fact, then it is an assembled fact for the church belongs to one locality and the cemetery to another, thus the topographic allusion becomes general and illusive, not particular.

No one, I think, needs reminding of the Arcadian shepherds halted by a tomb and made melancholic and reflective by its inscription—'Et in Arcadia Ego'—I (Death) am also in Arcady. Nor to do more than recall Gray's famous *Elegy* to suggest the general European association with the sarcophagus and the sepulchre. But when we cast an eye over the particulars in this painting, there emerges, in my opinion, a different implication. The ugliness of the tombstones, the thick swathes of summer grass, the overall tonality and the focal length so adjusted, that the spectator is in the cemetery itself, all combine into a feeling of oppression; and is not the Canter-

bury nor'-wester in summer an oppressive wind? This is the emotional oppression suffered by a people with too short a past, an

Awareness of what great gloom  
Stands in a land of settlers  
With never a soul at home.

as Allen Curnow wrote in his poem, *House and Land*.

The more one contemplates in this cemetery the more super-real do the details become, for as Basil Dowling observed in *Canterbury Nor'-wester*,

The day is lit up like a theatre

so that every object takes on an emphatic significance like each prop in a stage set, essential to the unfolding of the drama. Hence to the generalization of the subject and its topography are joined the emblematic particulars. To recognize that neither the Angus nor the Sutton is any way 'literary' is to observe that it is the embroidery-like colours which give the *Portrait of Betty Curnow* its peculiar medieval or pioneer texture, and it is the physical scale of *Nor'-wester in the Cemetery* which enables the spectator to be enveloped in its mystery.

I would like to pause here to re-examine the meaning of my title in the light of what has been discussed so far. From time to time in this discourse, facts have raised, one might say, their ugly heads to hinder or even terminate the heroic adventure of the imagination, but is it not the reef which marks the deep-water channel and the island which determines our course? For 'the *supposed* discovery', through the imagination, of an identity, is, *in fact*, found to be a long accretive process, to be made only partially tangible by releasing from the past our imaginary reefs and floating islands, so that further acts of discovery may be made possible.

So far I have discussed the profile and emblem as characteristics of the Romantic image, but in each case I have indicated certain reservations about the continuity of their significance. In their very nature they are open to ambiguity. To borrow a title of Colin McCahon's for these two paintings, '*Tomorrow will be the same but not as this is*', since they depend on our point of view, our awareness of certain domestic familiarities. Certainly it was the effort during the late thirties and early forties to recover a lost pioneer innocence that revealed these familiarities, but may I be forgiven for quoting once more John Donne's famous line, 'No man is an island'. This fact was realised at the time, for Dr

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\* Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, vol. 11. (1814)



W. A. SUTTON. *Nor'-wester in the Cemetery*. Oil. 59 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 71 $\frac{3}{4}$ ins. (Auckland City Art Gallery).

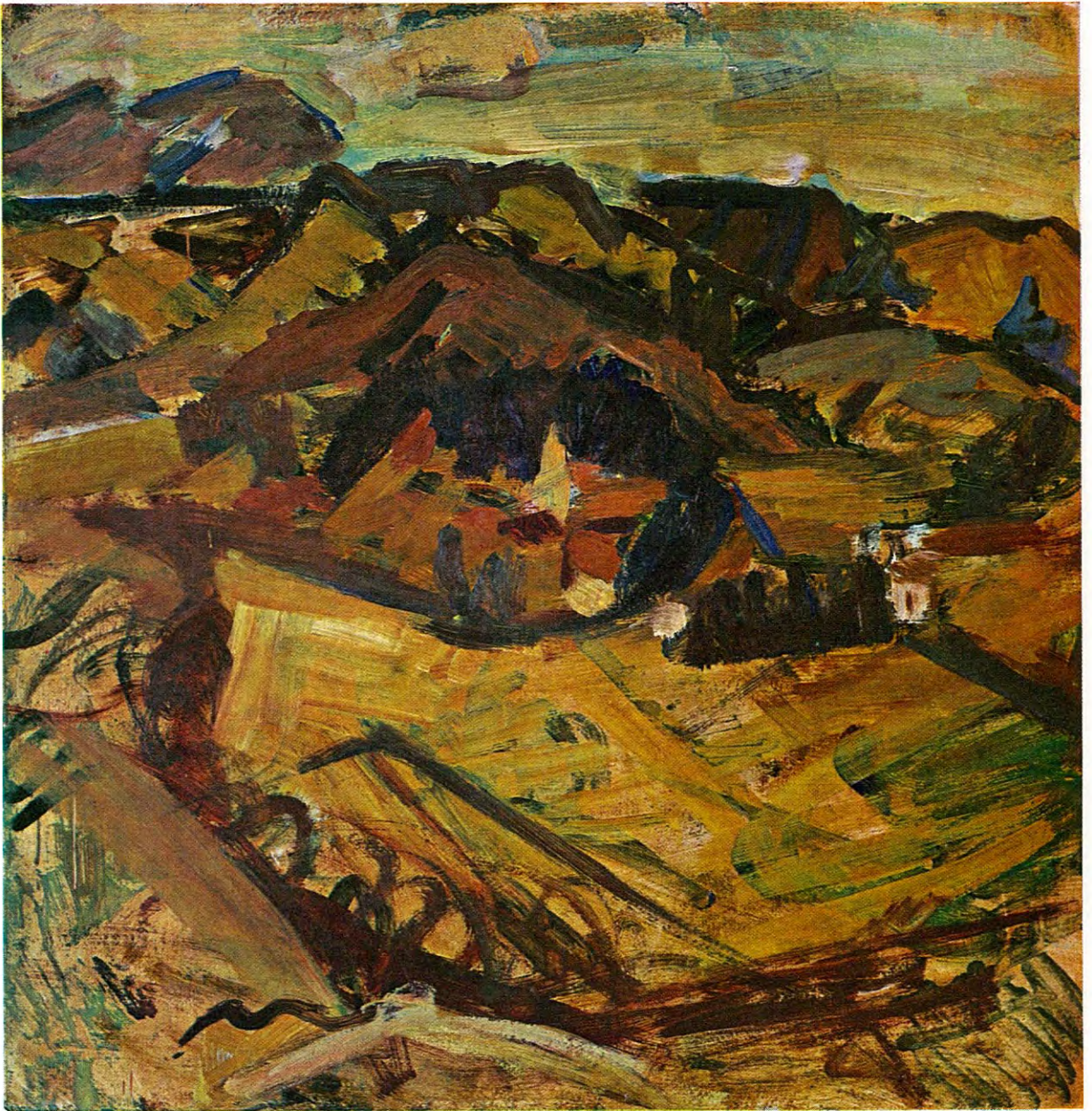
McCormick, while he complimented Buchanan on escaping 'the tyranny of an imported tradition' opined, a few pages further on, that artists like Woollaston, who were following the footsteps of Cézanne, were on the right track. To negate one's cultural attachments, as the old man in Allen Curnow's play *Moon Section* tried to do, by burying the family heirlooms in the garden, may put them out of sight, perhaps even out of mind, but not out of consciousness. For with every fresh tide of thought and feeling, they wash up on the beach of expression, like indestructible plastic bottles. Surely the only validity a regional art may claim is its capacity to seek out universals—to find generalisations in the particular. You may notice that this reverses the nature of the emblem, where the par-

ticular is applied to the generalisation. The former is a centrifugal, the latter a centripetal activity.

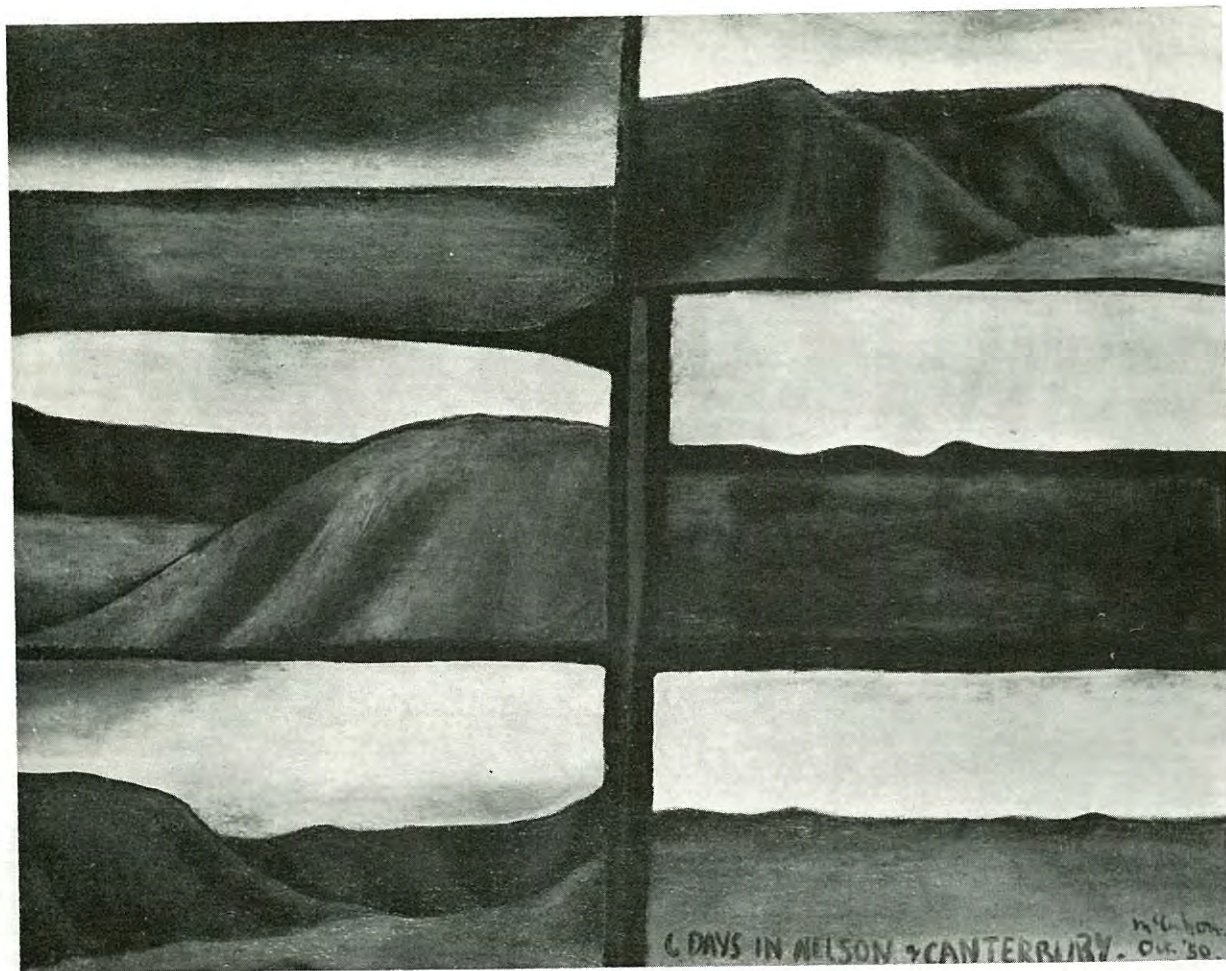
Artists like Woollaston and McCahon did not turn away from the land to find the horizon, for it is given to few men to discover Utopia by spelling Nowhere backwards. Woollaston is perhaps the most universal artist of his generation, and a great deal more is owed to him than is generally admitted or realised, since the emblem-focussed eye finds his 'floating islands' too difficult to fix. Yet, paradoxically, his titles are topographically exact and particular — *Mapua — Upper Moutere — Looking towards Hokitika*—but there is a difference, for as he has written of Mapua,\* 'The landscape was not an easy

\* *The Far-Away Hills*, M. T. Woollaston, *Auckland Art Gallery Associates (Inc.)* 1960. p. 41.





M. T. WOOLLASTON. Upper Moutere. Oil. 23 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$  ins. (Auckland City Art Gallery).



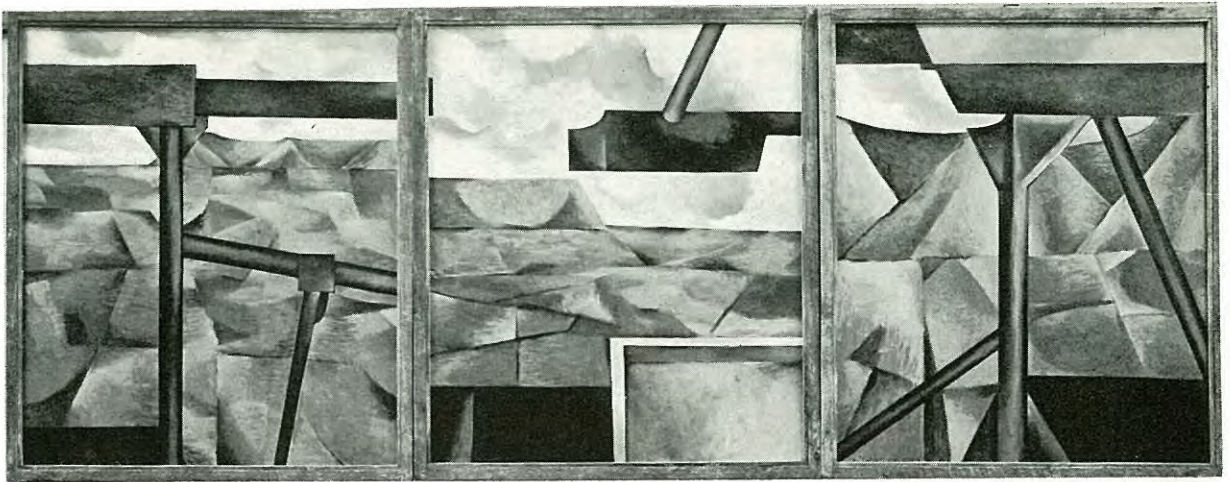
COLIN McCAHON. Six Days in Nelson and Canterbury. Oil. 35 x 46ins. (The artist).

one, its attraction wasn't readily noticed by a casual visitor. . . . This is not Mount Egmont from the Southward. Woollaston's emphasis is on the hyphenations between the eye blinding scenic attractions of the tourist pamphlet—on the metaphors between the realities. Although no one admits to being a tourist in his own country, there is preserved in the terminology of the New Zealand trumper something of the escapism which Woollaston attempts to head off. I refer, of course, to those pregnant phrases—'Going in' and 'Coming out'—whatever Elysium lies in there, no paradise exists out here, seems to be the implication, but this is a reversal of the proper order of enquiry—as Gauguin titled his great Tahitian painting *What are we—Whence do we come—Whither are we going*. 'Whence do we come' is Woollaston's reiterated enquiry in his landscapes and his portraits. This was also Cézanne's enquiry at the Bibiemus Quarry, before Mt St Victoire, in the

Valley of the Arc, for this was the landscape which had shaped *him*. The pines and chestnuts, which became the spare vertical architecture of his paintings, were the same ones under which he and Emile Zola had run as youths shouting out lines from romantic verse. Woollaston also dwells on the *shape* of his landscapes and his people and very rarely accents the profiles. Cézanne's two words—*le motif* and *la sensation*—connects the painterly theme to the human emotion. Through this will to express his own region, the artist helps us to know ours and ourselves within it. Taking time for reflection we may find that our 'floating island' can provide us with a security which is universal.

McCahon makes this same point in a note to his present exhibition\* of north Otago Landscapes—'These paintings are most certainly about my long love affair with North Otago . . . they are also

\* October 1967, Barry Lett Gallery, Auckland.



COLIN McCAHON. *On Building Bridges*. Oil. Each panel 42 x 36ins. (Auckland City Art Gallery).

about where I am now and where I have been. . . .  
It is in McCahon's work that a conjunction of the profile, the emblem and the universal metaphor may be observed, sometimes singly at other times married to gain greater effect.

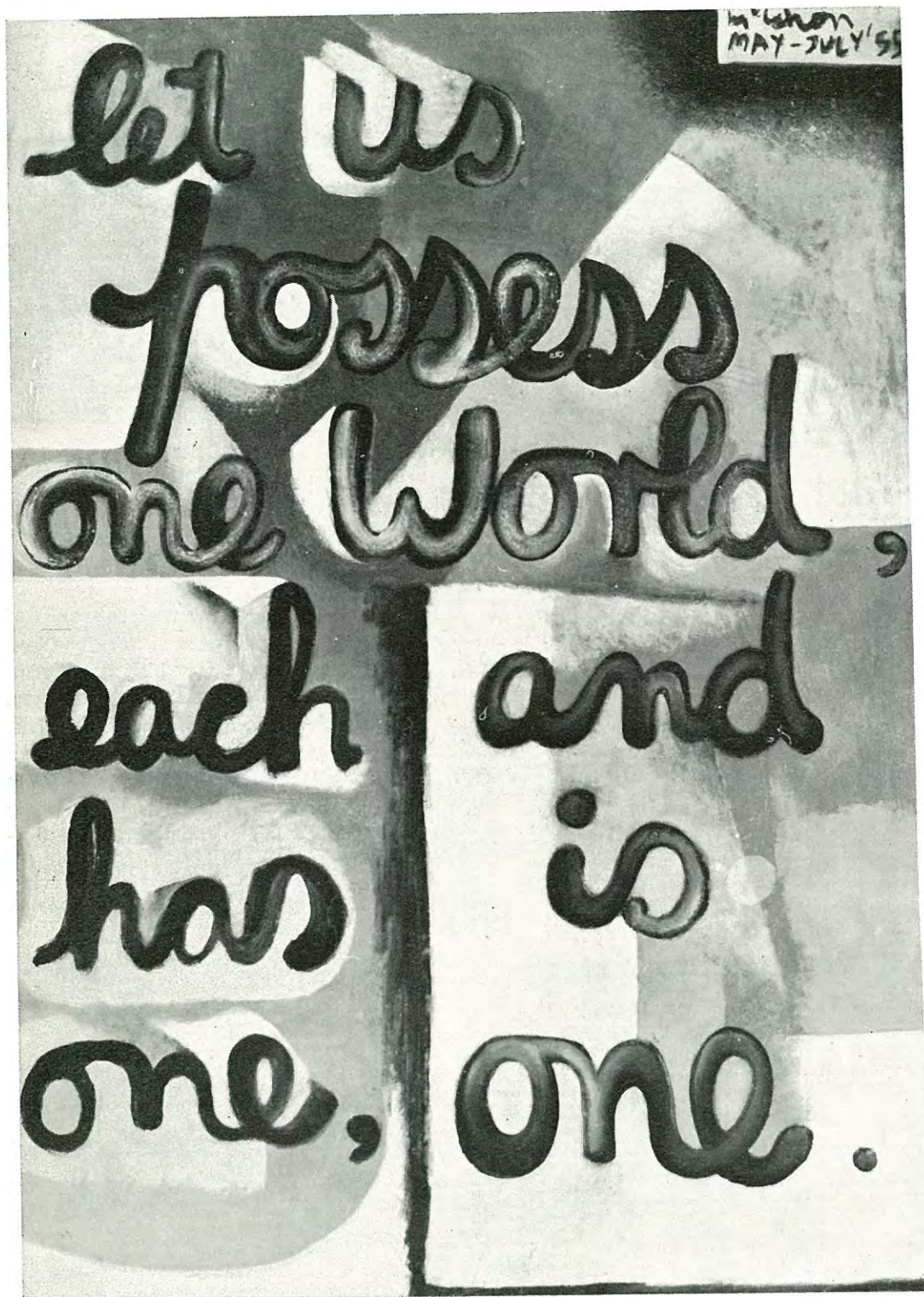
I started this address by referring to coastal profiles. On one sheet, twenty-six inches by twenty-five, Captain Cook drew profiles of Queen Charlotte Sound, the Kaikouras, South Cape Stewart Island, Te Wae Wae Bay and Resolution Island, Dusky Sound, a kind of three-quarter round profile of the South Island. In 1950, McCahon painted his picture *Six Days in Nelson and Canterbury*, which might be described as the 'lost' segment of Cook's profile, the 'shape' of the land Cook never knew. In a portrait involving the lost profile, it is the shape of the head

and the tenuous outline of temple and cheek which allows us, sometimes intuitively, to 'know' the face on the other side. We cannot do this unless the fundamental structure of the head is put down for us. So, in this painting, the fundamental structure of the land is portrayed through the artist's 'long love affair' and again the assertive fact, his study of Cotton's *Geomorphology of New Zealand*.<sup>\*</sup> In this way, we are informed about the motivation of these land forms. By invoking the 'pathetic fallacy', it is not difficult to translate geophysical character into metaphysical speculation—Whence do we come—Whither are we going. The continuity (in the film-making sense) of our speculation is assisted by the

<sup>\*</sup> *Geomorphology of New Zealand*, C. A. Cotton, Dominion Museum, 1922.



COLIN McCAHON. *Takaka Night and Day*. Oil. 35 x 83ins. (Auckland City Art Gallery).



COLIN McCAHON. Let us possess one world . . . Oil. 30 x 22ins. (Auckland University Students' Association).

successive 'frame' of each day's image, resolving into a kinetic unity of time, space, force and motion. Sequentially, I can pass to another painting by McCahon *On Building Bridges*, of 1952. Here I would like to lean on another poetic staff. In Charles Brasch's poem *Waianakarua*—where the poet, in a railway carriage, muses on a past association—the last three lines read:

Until the recollected train  
Moves on, past the landmarks, past the fallen years,  
The passing land, the lives.

Earlier in the poem there are these lines:

Knowledge ends thus with the traveller's glimpse;  
But there imagination wakes  
Vivid with an alternative creation  
But near-related, complementary,  
Later attainable; . . .

I am not sure that if poetic and painterly metaphors may 'intermingled be', lucidity is preserved, nor by quoting a poet's verses backwards, I am not disrupting his sense, but if the two sets of lines are applied to McCahon's painting, then the emblematic interpolation of the bridge girders between us and the landscape, might, ambiguously, suggest the melancholic reflection of the first lines quoted, or the optimistic note struck in the second, when we glimpse the landscape in 'near-related' vignettes, vividly framed by the steel work. Although, I feel, there is a sympathetic liaison between poem and painting, to dwell on it is to ignore some important painterly factors. If we consider the format—it is a triptych, and traditionally, the centre panel of a triptych is the most important, the wing panels are but 'near-related', 'complementary'. Concentrating on the centre panel then is to find the most unimpeded view of the landscape; while the bridge structure is present it is not a barrier, in fact when the overhanging shape is examined it is found to be complementary to the landscape form to the left. Looking then at either wing panel, we find the theme restated with variations. The theme being the interpenetration of man-made and natural structures, from which many a metaphoric allusion may be drawn off; apart from it being a particular visual corrective to the over-romantic view of New Zealand as an 'Eden undefiled'. Thus the liaison between poet and painter is a similarity of emblem. For both train and bridge are means of communication and indicators of the passing of time.

I hope that my own gentle corrective will have

been noted, that paintings may not, necessarily, be read like poems—from left to right! I have not expanded on the universalisms to be derived from *On Building Bridges*, since McCahon wrote-painted his own inscription to it three years later, '*Let us possess one World, each has one and is one.*' There are structural affinities between the two paintings, besides the metaphoric allusions they share. For the dark toned tubular calligraphy is akin to the bridge girders, but where these *appear* to interpenetrate the natural forms, the inscription *is* interpenetrated with the abstracted cloud and land forms. There is another difference. In the painting *On Building Bridges*, it is the landscape that stresses the organic, in the later work the calligraphy takes over the organic, while the natural forms assume the structural role. To see McCahon's universality of interpretation whole, we have to go back to a painting of 1948, *Takaka—Night and Day*. Translating Night and Day into colour, we get black and white, then into tones, dark and light. Through its gyration, our physical world is dark then light, Time is split into Night and Day, the human races into black and white, the moods of each man's personality are dark and light. While these two aspects appear in opposition, they are in fact complementary—for does not the black silhouette of the profile presuppose its white obverse?

In this, avowedly, romantic excursus, I have tried to steer as steady a course as one may between the realities. But as I suggested at the beginning, I am not sure whether I have found a secure critical anchorage, nevertheless I, for one, have been content enough to drift among these imaginary reefs and floating islands.



**SHAY DOCKING.** Painting on left NIKAU PALMS WITH CRATER LAKE. Oil, tempera and PVA on hardboard, 1967. 60 x 48ins.

# A Conversation with Shay Docking



GIL DOCKING

**T**o fly from Sydney to Auckland is to experience a rapid visual demonstration of the great contrasts between the two countries bordering the Tasman Sea. As the aircraft sets course Sydney's massive sandstone cliffs tilt against the sea. If the morning sky and sea are silver-grey Ben Buckler headland at North Bondi points eastward like a suspended fossilized bone.

The plane makes its New Zealand landfall over the black sands of Piha, the blue-olive-green Waitakere mountains and Auckland's isthmus set between the two great mirrors of Waitemata and Manukau Harbours.

This conversation deals with some observations as seen by a painter who has worked in Australia before becoming resident in New Zealand. The artist also states her credo and affirmation of faith as a painter. The painter is Shay Docking, my wife. Surely an interview with one's wife is a rare phenomenon!

Shay Docking's childhood was spent in Victoria's Western District—an old volcanic region of open grassy plains with rounded isolated hills—not unlike

the hills in the Auckland province. So the difference between the two countries can be overstressed! In fact it was the similarities of these hills which provided her transfer from one environment to another with a line of association going back to her formative years when she lived in a small town sited on the slopes of Tower Hill—an ancient collapsed, extinct volcano with crater, cone and lake.

Her formal art training was in Melbourne and in 1953 she began painting seriously. Since 1961 she has held twelve one-man exhibitions in Australia and New Zealand. From these exhibitions works have been acquired for many public and private collections:

G.D. I should say that one of the first things a painter notices on arrival in New Zealand is the quality of light in this country. You are not using light as *the subject* in your work. But even so, as a painter you are constantly assessing the values and characteristics of light wherever you happen to be working—or just looking. As an environmental painter, you were working for eight years on the



TOTEM. Oil, tempera and PVA on hardboard, 1962.  
36 x 24ins.

east coast of New South Wales in an area which is roughly on the same latitude as the northern parts of New Zealand—perhaps you would expect the quality of light to be much the same in these two regions?

**SHAY DOCKING** When I first arrived in New Zealand I thought the light was less harsh than it is in Australia but with familiarity I realized this wasn't so. In fact the light in New Zealand and Australia is equally intense but different effects are created in certain ways. New Zealand is bounded by a huge expanse of water, with hundreds of indentations along the coast—an interpenetration of sea and land; and perhaps, it is reflected light coming back from the often cloudy sky, which causes a kind of alchemy. The effect of this all-pervading light, is to make objects seem sharply defined as though they are drawn with a very black pencil or charcoal. This quality can be very attractive to anyone interested in plastic expression of the landscape.

Another aspect the New Zealand light creates is

that it forms a dramatic tonal chiaroscuro. This doesn't happen in Australia, where the light, often refracted from suspended dust, shimmers and vibrates, flooding through the spindly finely foliated bush, suffusing distant objects in haze.

In New Zealand forms and shadows have a clarity and deep tonality which remind one of the Barbizon School of painting. This extra dimension of light here gives objects a certain hard-edged look.

**G.D.** This could be the reason why people see a 'hard-edged' look in areas of New Zealand painting. Not in the context of American reaction against Abstract Expressionism, but a cool sharp quality which some feel could be native to New Zealand painting. But let us look at the two environments again. The land forms have their characteristic shapes, both countries have a great variety of landscape, from alpine ranges to open plains; even so, there are certain generalities which could be made about the kind of configuration or organic shapes of each land.

**SHAY DOCKING** To begin with one observes that New Zealand and Australia are geologically quite different. It's fascinating that although geographically close they are immensely unlike physically.

Australia is ancient and worn down; whereas New Zealand is comparatively young, volcanic and still in the process of being formed. In some areas it is still being thrown up by a violent tumult of the inner earth. Australia was formed in a very distant geological period—the main changes taking place there are through slow erosion. From central Australia to the coastal country you see the result of the action of the elements on the land—of great monolithic rocks showing through the soil. They appear as the bones of an ancient land. In terms of geological time the action of the elements on the land in New Zealand is relatively brief. The picturesque snow-clad mountain peak is a common overseas image of New Zealand.

**G.D.** It is surprising to fly from Auckland to Dunedin for the first time—to travel the length of the country and from 20,000 feet see unfolding below the fantastic variations in land forms. The North and South Islands are separated by only a few miles of sea but looking at them together they are by no means identical twins. As a painter, certain areas would naturally draw your interest more than other areas. Which regions affect you most strongly?

**SHAY DOCKING** I am not attracted by the picture-postcard kind of subject—but rather to forms





TOWARDS THE SEA. Oil, tempera and PVA on hardboard, 1962. 36 x 48ins. Collection Melbourne University.

which are organic in appearance and feeling. The parts of the North Island I have taken material from already are the coastline of Northland, near Tutukaka, and from Coromandel Peninsula.

Recently I travelled across the volcanic plateau to the West Coast—from there to the Manawatu Valley and Gorge and on through the Hawke's Bay country. I did a large number of drawings during the trip which I am working from now.

I found a distinctive feature to be the great crouching hills—in fact I came to think of this kind of hill as a quite symbolic thing. It has been used many times of course by artists in New Zealand but in different ways and with different interpretations.

The country changes very distinctly as one travels through it. From the rolling pastoral countryside between Auckland and Taupo one enters the volcanic area and the part referred to as desert country—flung out scoria and ash, eaten into by the wind and rain; clad with gorse and brush. Then the tussocky land which is marvellous to see—richly coloured with reddish brown coarse grass; sweeping horizontal planes with stands of native beech in huge scooped-out hollows: rhythmic with high contours, and then those extraordinary mountains! For me, it is incredible to see Mt Ngauruhoe so perfectly symmetrical with its recent lava flows, black against the brown side of the mountain and white snow. All of



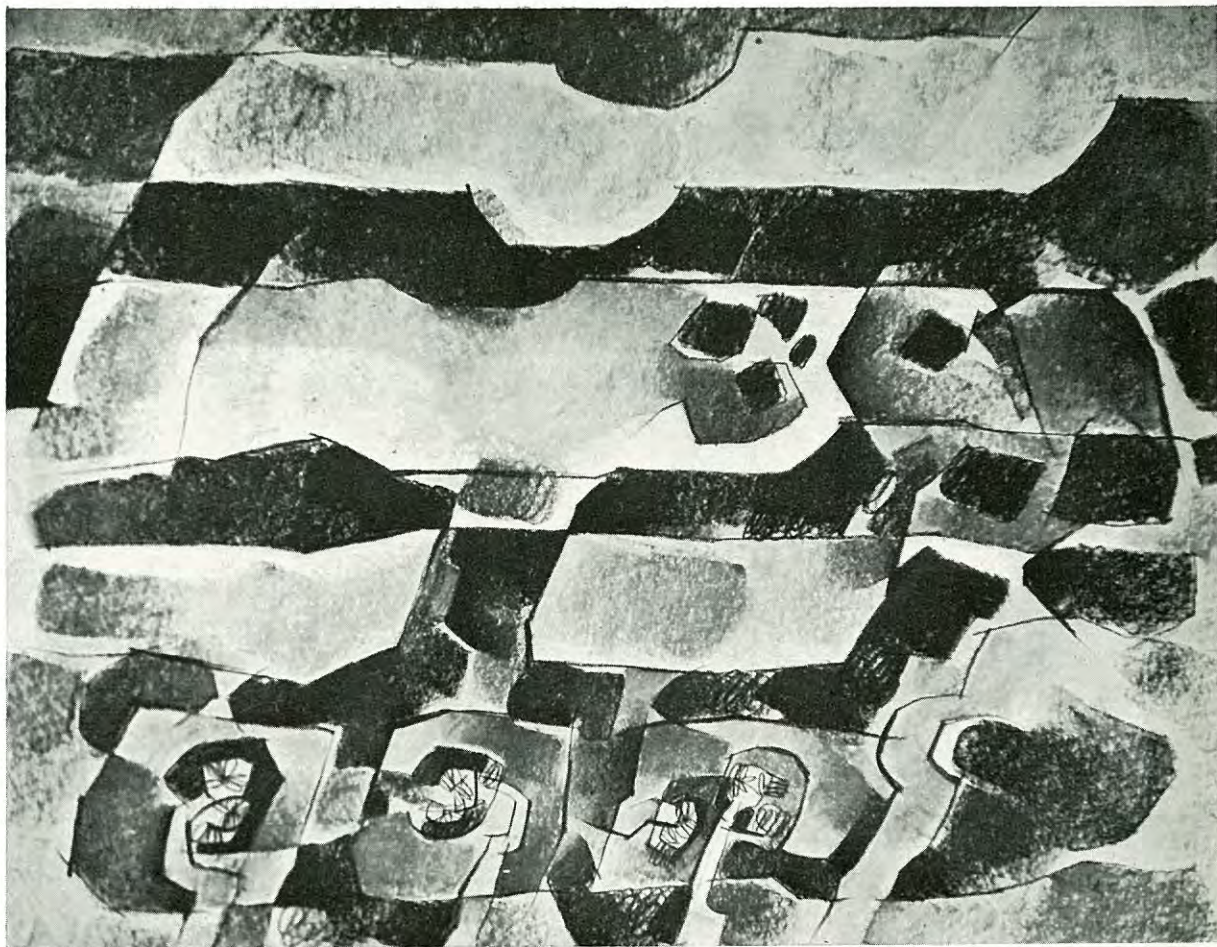
HARBOUR I. Oil, tempera  
and PVA on hardboard,  
1963. 48 x 36ins.

this is very organic. In the King Country one finds the kind of hill which is so typical—even archetypal—a plateau which has rapidly eroded down into deep gorges while the tops of the hills are flat. In the late afternoon everything comes alive. The shadows cause the hills to become enormously sculptured. The horizontal sheep tracks contour the hillsides and further define the shapes. They look solid and eternal—yet not far away a great volcano is rearing up and the earth shakes with thermal activity. There is something sinister in this.

G.D. It is certainly strange to the uninitiated and soon a feeling of foreboding is created—to see quiet fields and pasture lands on one hand and yet just across the road the air roars with steam and the ground thumps with suppressed energy.

Within the North Island landscape are there other elements of particular significance to your eye and mind?

SHAY DOCKING As well as continuing to find material on the theme of the harbour, which I have worked on in Australia for some time, and which has universal characteristics wherever one goes in the world, I have been drawn particularly to certain plant forms, here. At Bethels on the West Coast of Auckland there is a grove of nikau palms. I became interested in these palms and subsequently did a number of drawings of nikaus at Tutukaka and have made a theme of this palm in landscape. To me it is a very powerful symbol—especially in ways in which it relates perhaps to the unconscious. To begin with it is an extremely wonderful form—classical and architectural. Its slender trunk is marked with horizontal rings; the fronds are simply shaped and grow from a form rather like the capital of an Egyptian temple column—it is quite the most beautiful palm I have seen. There is also the historical significance which applies to the palm tree. It has a particular



LANDSCAPE WITH SLOW SHADOWS. Pastel on paper on hardboard, 1967. 30 x 38ins.

place in Christian symbolism as an emblem of victory.

G.D. I believe this symbol was taken from pagan times when it also had this meaning—though of course not in the Christian sense of victory. You have also worked on plant forms seen on Coromandel Peninsula—which is obviously a rich source of material for you.

SHAY DOCKING I find it an enormously romantic place, mountainous, thickly forested and bounded by the sea. For instance, the kauri pine has all sorts of poetic associations—and is the archetypal tree of New Zealand, perhaps.

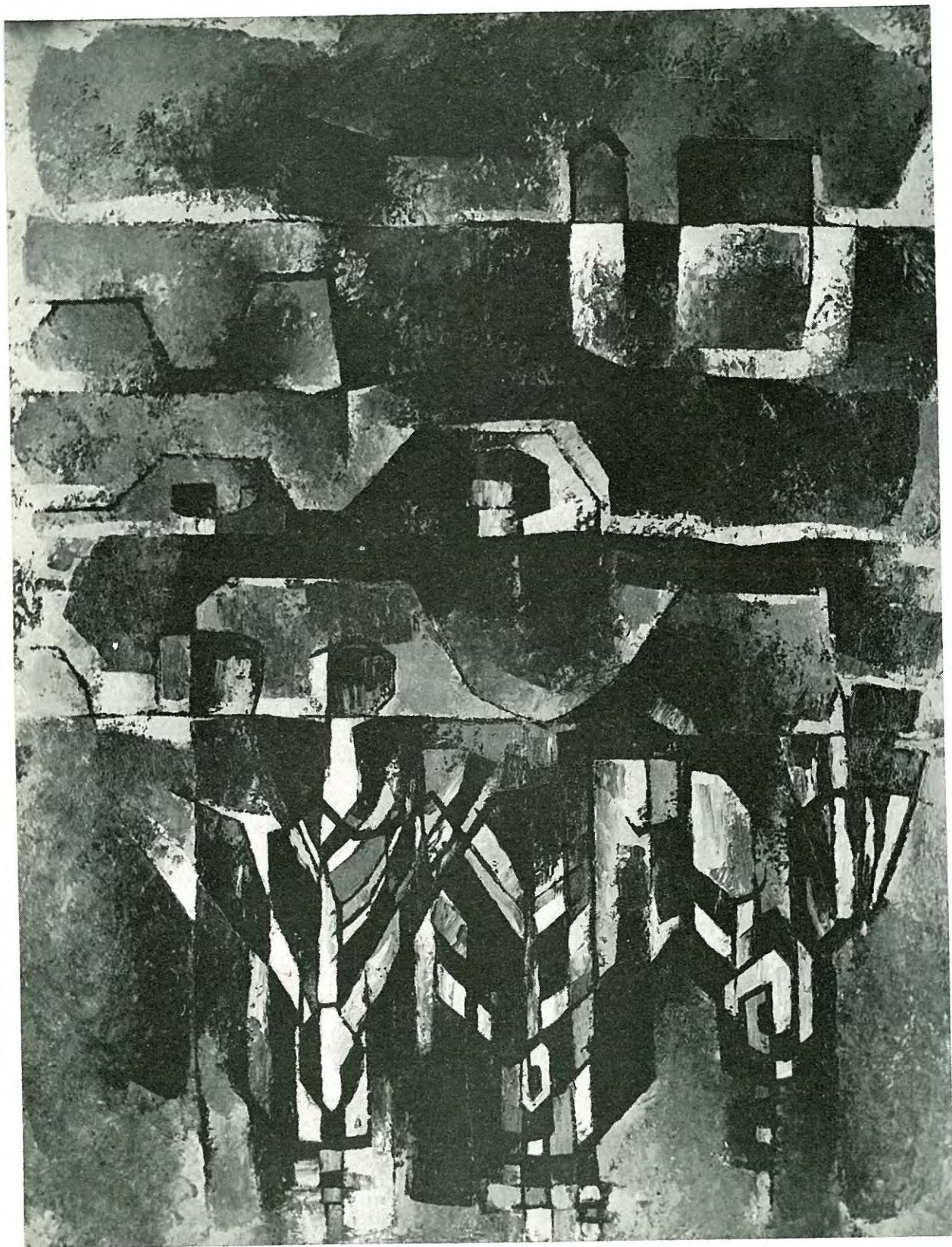
G.D. It seems that the mature kauri not only attracts interest because of its height and girth and its beautiful quality as timber, but has a powerful appeal to the imagination—perhaps it has a mystical quality?

SHAY DOCKING Along with its great strength of

appearance it also becomes a symbol of grace and proliferation. Of course the vertical tree form has very ancient significance in history—a sign of aspiration and growth.

G.D. Surely one of the most awe-inspiring and stimulating functions of the painter is to succeed in creating meaningful symbols! The processes whereby this is achieved are mysterious in themselves. The painter observes nature and, after a time, takes one aspect or element and endows it with a special meaning. This seems to be achieved by repeating the element in certain contexts, by enlarging it or by somehow giving it a special place of honour or emphasis. You were talking about the symbol of the tree, could you expand further on the use of the symbol in your work?

SHAY DOCKING It looks as though the tree form has been important to me since I first began to paint. As a child I was using the single tree form



LANDSCAPE WITH OFFSHORE ISLANDS. Oil, tempera and PVA on hardboard, 1967. 73 x 56ins.

in watercolour paintings and later, after my art school studies, I worked on images of trees based on the eucalypt. At one stage I was quite obsessed by the burnt and dead tree form which in the Australian bush takes on a monumental quality. It looks like sculpture made by nature. Perhaps this is because of the dry conditions and hard timbers—a dead tree does not rot and return to nature as quickly as it does in the wet soft-wood forests of New Zealand. One walks through the grey-green bush and suddenly comes upon one of these great pieces of sculpture—they are magnificent, quite superb.

G.D. You must have painted a hundred or more works including many large paintings, based on this single image.

SHAY DOCKING Perhaps at that stage I was being caught up with ideas which were forming philosophic overtones in my painting. Working intuitively one doesn't consciously think in terms of the psychological and philosophical implications or meanings. Later, one sees them clearly. This symbol of the dessicated tree form gradually gave way to multiple forms which were derived from the living coastal bush of New South Wales. In this coastal bush the trees are attacked by elements from the sea. They take on fantastically rhythmic and twisted forms which look like strange hieroglyphs in ancient writings. They are incised as it were on a tablet of hills and sea. These luminously trunked trees looked as though they were *flowering with foliage*. It is this bursting forth which became the symbol.

G.D. Since coming to New Zealand your work is again concerned with the tree and I notice that in every case there is the exuberant state of flowering—or 'bursting forth' as you say. The fact that so many native trees in New Zealand do flower must be a cause of great personal pleasure as it ties in so exactly with your Australian period of painting natural forms in a state of renewal—regenerating with growth and energy. It would be of interest to put down your working method of transcribing from nature to the final oil painting—the techniques used in the process of unfolding from the first brief notes to the final work.

SHAY DOCKING Each work is conceived and developed perhaps as an architect plans a building. Rather than start into a large painting with no pre-conceived ideas (as many expressionist and action painters do) I work out things from small drawings—partly conceptual and considered, but basically in an intuitive way.

The drawings are usually made in front of nature—they are tiny and done with a pencil.

G.D. That sounds simple yet it seems in some ways to be the most important stage in the sense that the drawing should contain an embryo idea.

SHAY DOCKING Yes! If it doesn't contain that seed form it in fact never becomes a painting. Confronted with particular forms in the landscape and working on an intuitive level—even drawing as though it were an automatic activity (in the sense of becoming completely absorbed as a whole person by the landscape—physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually)—this response becomes channelled into a simple line drawings. The simplest drawings can achieve the essence which one is after. More complicated drawings fail to get this.

Back in the studio I look at the drawings frequently and ideas begin to grow concerning them. Using pastel as a medium, I develop small paintings. Some of these demand to be carried further into larger works—usually in oil, tempera and PVA on hardboard.

G.D. I see that you first produce a rough, textured ground on the hardboard, using polyvinyl acetate, over which is painted a wash of tempera paint, in a colour which relates to the painting you are intending to do. The texture equates the surface one finds on weathered rocks or the trunk of a tree. Here again a sort of symbolism comes in.

SHAY DOCKING I arrived at the use of this medium through experimentation in a desire to evoke just this textured nature of objects in the landscape—to simulate the appearance of an ancient natural surface.

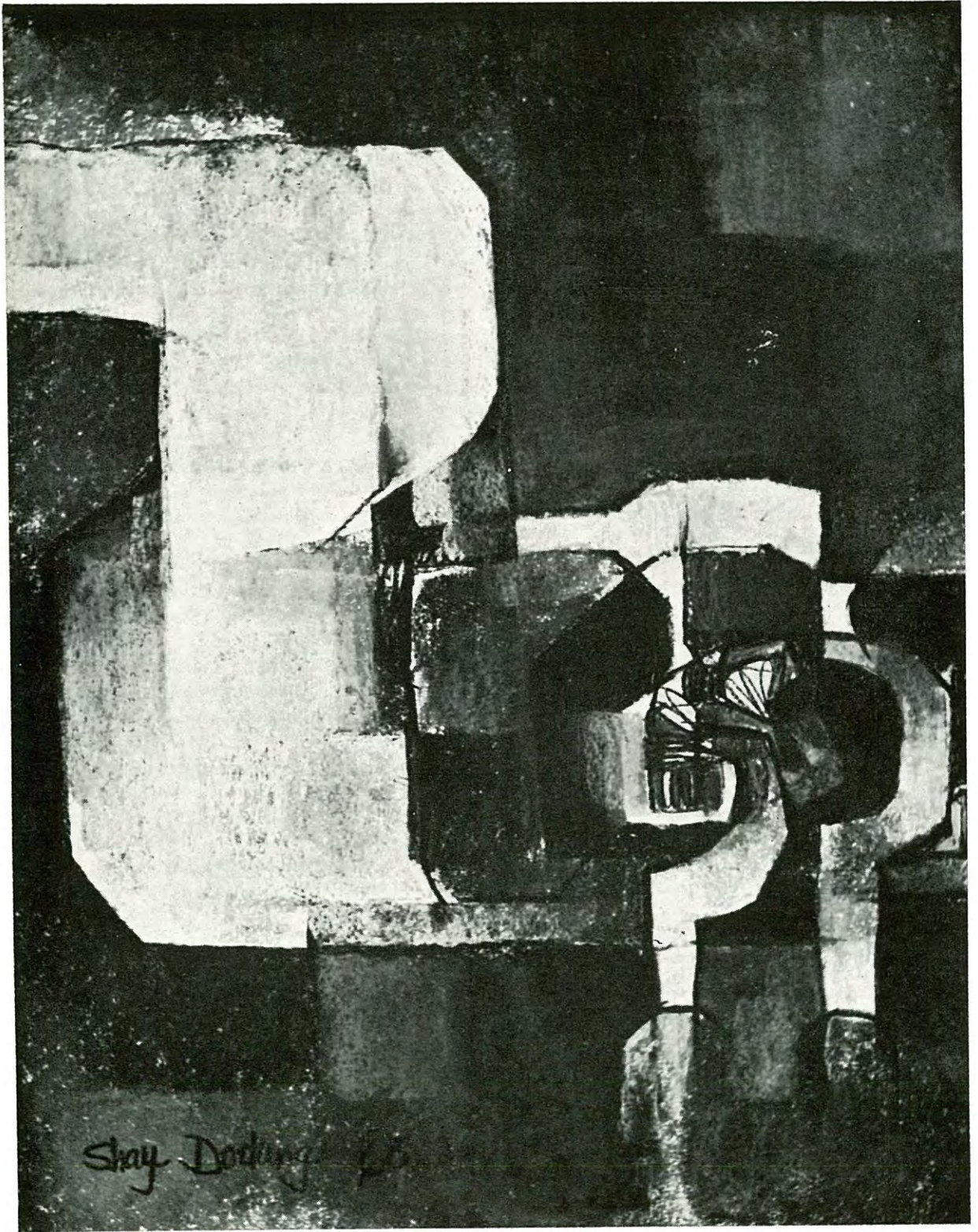
It also provides a very attractive 'ground' to paint on, with oil paint. I have horrors of painting on a white surface.

The luminosity of oil paint, the thickness of it, the relationship between one colour and another, all take on their full value because of this unifying base. It gives coherence to the whole work.

G.D. So as you progress with the painting you retain this underlying orchestration of the textured ground which shows through the finished surface!

SHAY DOCKING In fact, sometimes I leave large areas of ground showing. I feel that expressing the idea in one's work is paramount in importance and I've used whichever medium suits this purpose best.

G.D. For this reason then, rather than throw overboard traditional mediums, you're using oil paint and tempera, which have come from the past, along with polyvinyl acetate, which is a new medium. The



RIVER 2. Pastel on paper on hardboard, 1968. 21 x 17ins.

resultant depth of tone, colour and luminosity give the results you want. If it suited you to use encaustic or fresco, or any other medium from the past or present, would you do so?

SHAY DOCKING Yes. I feel that whatever materials achieve the purpose of the artist best, are the ones to use.

G.D. Judging by the themes you have been concerned with—burnt trees and coastal bush, towns on harbours, hill forms—you are deeply involved with the indigenous qualities of environment. That it is the landscapes you have lived in and as it were, been embraced by, which trigger you off, so that your work has evolved rather of its own accord in rapport with natural forms.

SHAY DOCKING Yes! But it is *through* a concern for the particular that one moves towards universal values. One works in the context of twentieth century art. However I have no inclination to be confined in what I feel is the 'cage' of quickly changing avant-garde art. One hopes also to transcend nationalist confines. While being very much an Australian painter, I'm really mostly concerned with developing personally in my own way. Naturally many aspects of my work must reflect the influence of my Australian background, which I certainly have no desire to shed. I feel that in turn, living and working in New Zealand is giving me a new dimension—and I hope will add to my painting, not just arbitrarily change it.

G.D. Speaking of Australian art, it seems that the day of 'Australianism' as a narrowly conscious objective has given way to a concern with more universal values—and in fact, the finest artists of Australia—as of New Zealand and any other country—have always embodied qualities which go beyond the local in significance.

SHAY DOCKING We surely need to disregard the limitations and parochialism of tight national outlooks, while preserving the indigenous flavour of each place as something infinitely worthwhile and valuable.

G.D. This concern with a universal concept of life perhaps reflects in the formal values of your paintings, which to my eye are architecturally structured; shaped and controlled evocations of landscape aiming at a synthesis of forms, techniques, ideas? An affirmation of life?

SHAY DOCKING I'd say that the idea of synthesis is a key to understanding what I'm trying to do. I believe in and am greatly awed by a oneness, a relation of all things, a pattern—the rightness and in-

evitability of each facet of life. The poetry inherent in all matter.

G.D. This takes the form of relating perceived images (in landscape for instance) to each other, using abstraction as a kind of unifying and welding force. It does not seem unconnected to this that you have such a great love of music and poetry.

SHAY DOCKING For me, painting is concerned with imagery. Abstraction is an enormously important element but only an element, along with colour, tone, texture, line and so on. I just can't feel that making a sole end of any one of these elements, is adequate—although often very beautiful, very satisfying in its own sphere.

Sociologically, aren't these pre-occupations necessary manifestations in the process of reassessment, purification of ideas and taking fresh direction? They interest me, but I can't get 'hooked' on them. Art taken to extremes of abstraction is iconoclastic, and to my mind equates puritanism with its denial of life. One feels the need to move further on.

Emerging theological thought sees matter as the vehicle of the spirit—all life is charged with generative power which energizes everything. Looking beyond the seeming complexity of society one begins to comprehend.

In a way, we are returned (in order to go on) to the concept of animistic nature, which the iconoclasm of so much in Christian civilization destroyed—to its own tragic loss. For me, as a painter, this means that landscape seen, experienced and painted becomes 'spiritualized matter', a proclamation of the splendour and beauty of nature; an act of worship.

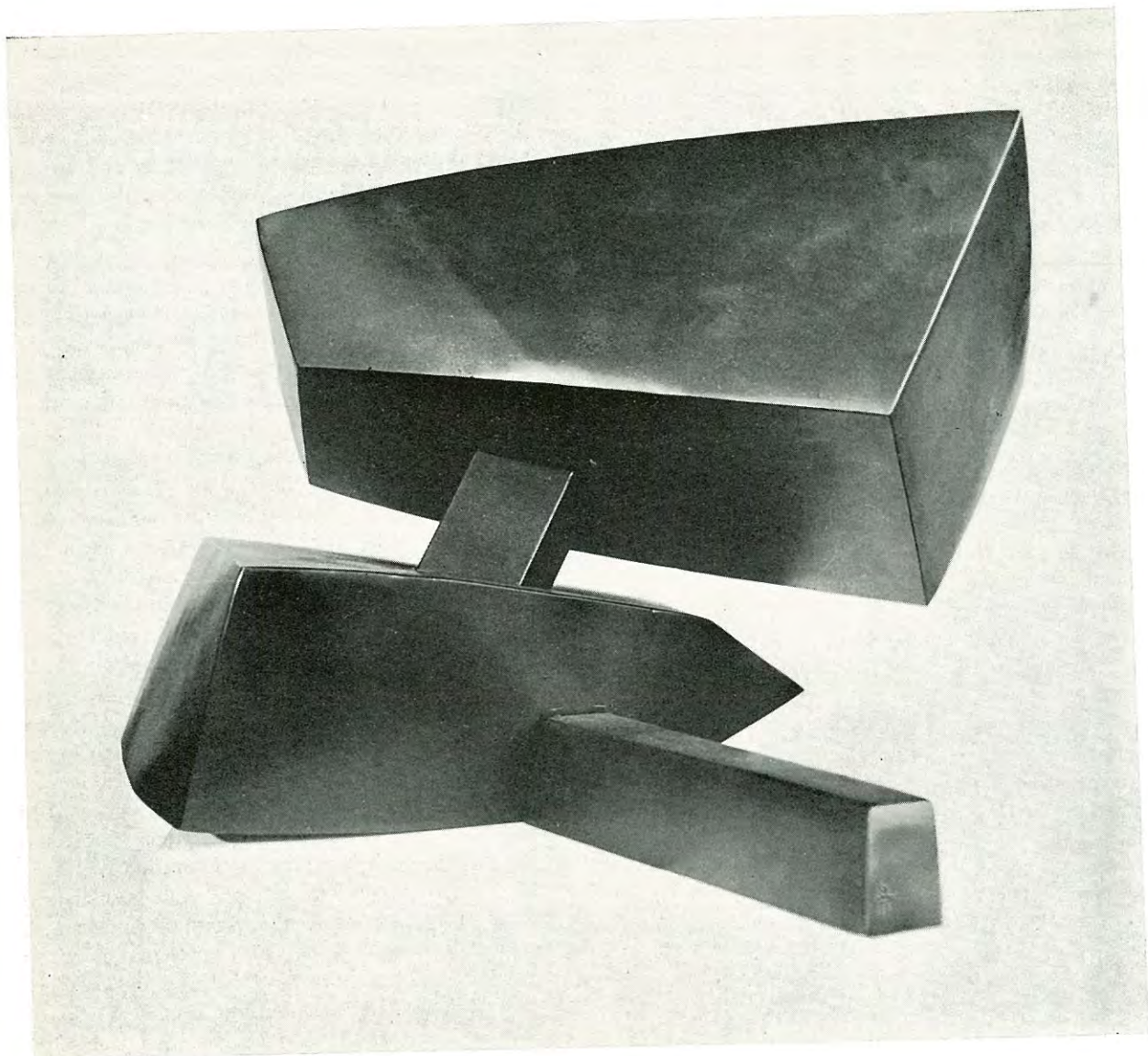
All the creative arts become more and more enormously important as a channel of communication. Only the creative idea, act, manifestation—can make us aware.

This is a tremendous destiny for the artist who surely is a priest showing us, subjectively or objectively, the sacramental character of all life.

Shay Docking was born at Warrnambool, Victoria and studied in Melbourne. She is represented in the State Galleries of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, West Australia and the City Galleries of Newcastle, Hamilton (Vic.), Auckland and Dunedin.

She has participated in many definitive group shows of major Australian painting and has held thirteen one-man shows since 1961 in Australia and New Zealand.

An exhibition tour of her N.Z. paintings commenced at Rudy Komon Gallery, Sydney in May 1968, sponsored by Air New Zealand.



TUARAU. Steel, 1967-8. 18 x 15 x 15ins.

## Tom Taylor: Recent Sculpture

Tom Taylor was born in Christchurch and trained at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts where for the last seven years he has been lecturer in sculpture. He exhibited with the Group in 1963, 1965 and 1966 and with the 20/20 exhibitions in 1966 and 1967. In 1966 he was awarded the Guthrey Travel Award.

Of his present work he says: 'For some time I entertained the idea of a possible synthesis of sculpture and architecture and accepted commissions for

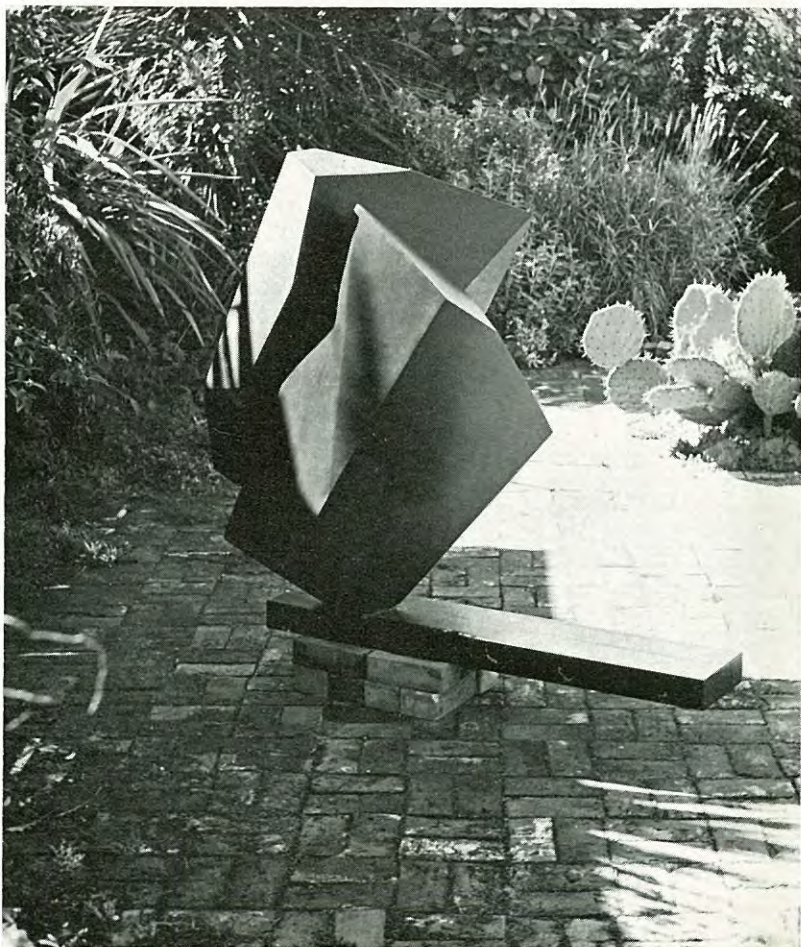
a variety of architectural situations. These resulted mainly in conformist, large scale applications from which I primarily gained experience in media and techniques. Portrait modelling occasionally provided an escape to a direct if complex problem not solely related to sculpture, with pleasure in the revelation of personality. The inherent duality disclosed the egocentric in the modeller.

'It was a later architectural sculpture in the sketch model stage and a rethinking in a minor sort of



“Damascus road” situation coupled with seeing Clement Meadmore’s work in Australia that set me in the direction shown in my present work. Here, in the physical sense, forms may be distinguished by their energy conditions — contact, tension, thrust, shear and poise — and, variously implied in related volumes, produce be-setting objects. There are still random factors in the work illustrated, for the formulation, not here wholly objective, is in my later work closer to precise structure where radial curved planes and thrust bars with the use of double curve have a baroque quality and may lead to a reverse synthesis.’

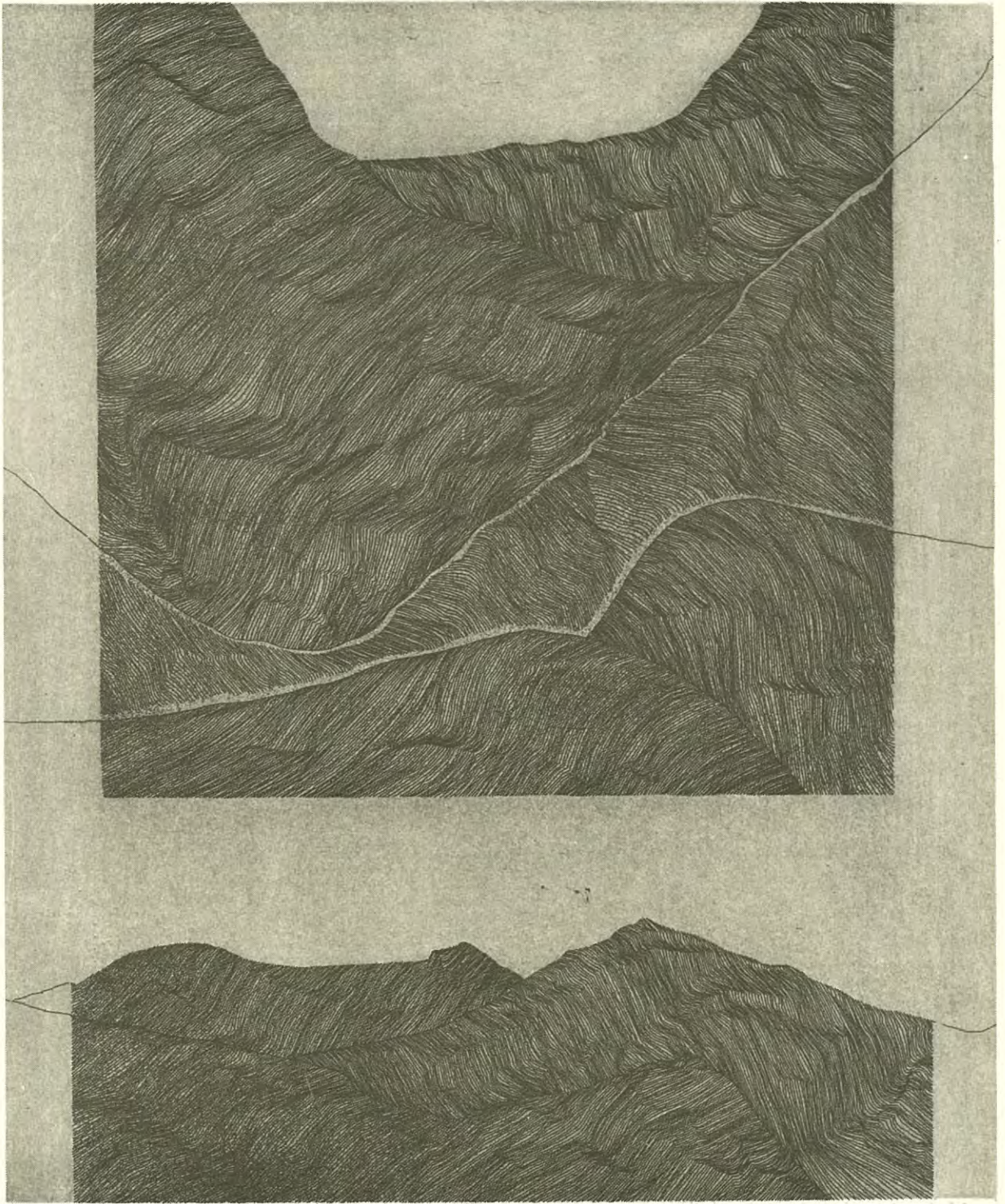
THE SUM OF THE SQUARES.  
Steel, 1968. 3' 7" x 2' 2" x 2' 9".



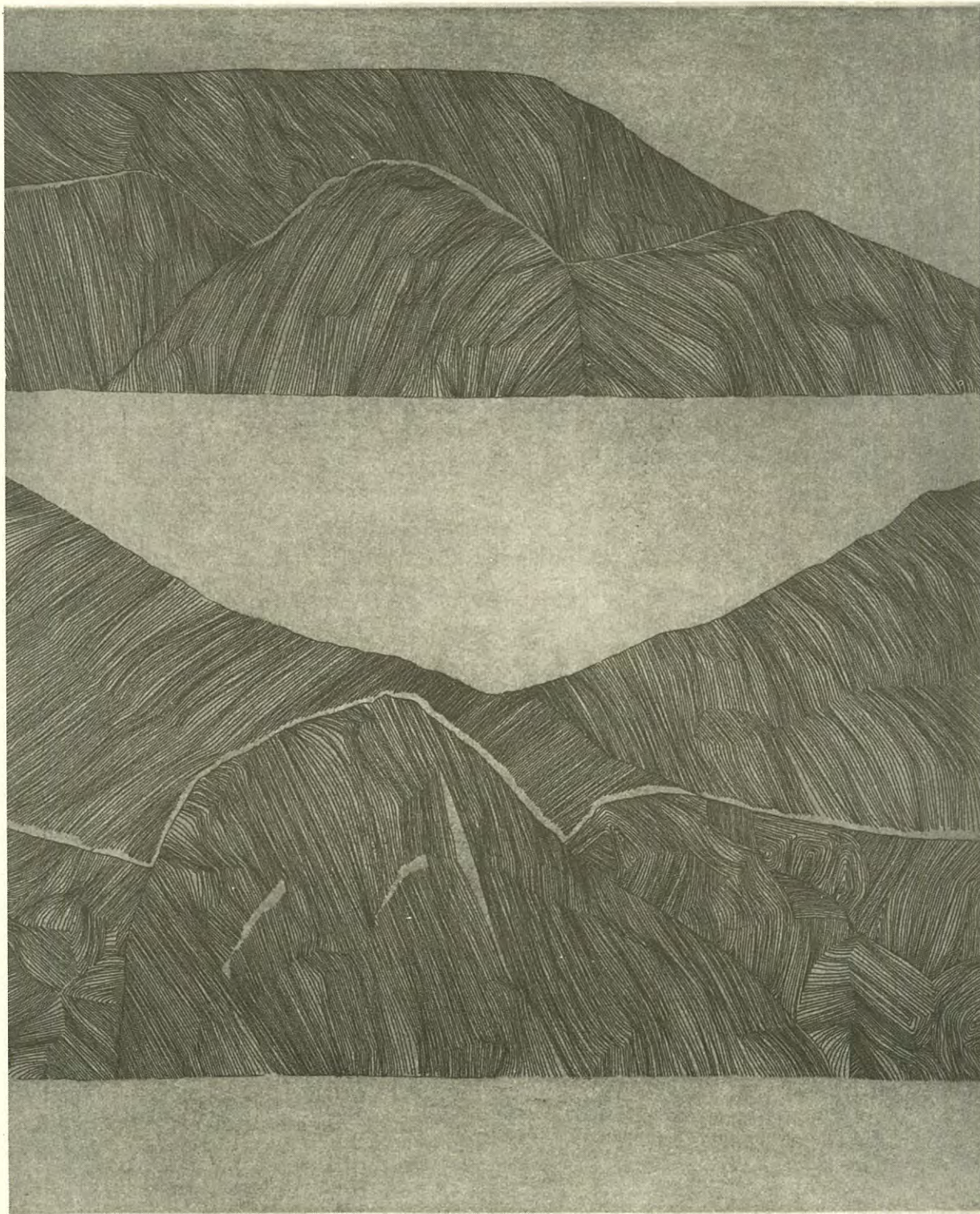
MORAINE. Steel, 1967. 4' 10" x  
4' 6" x 5' 1".



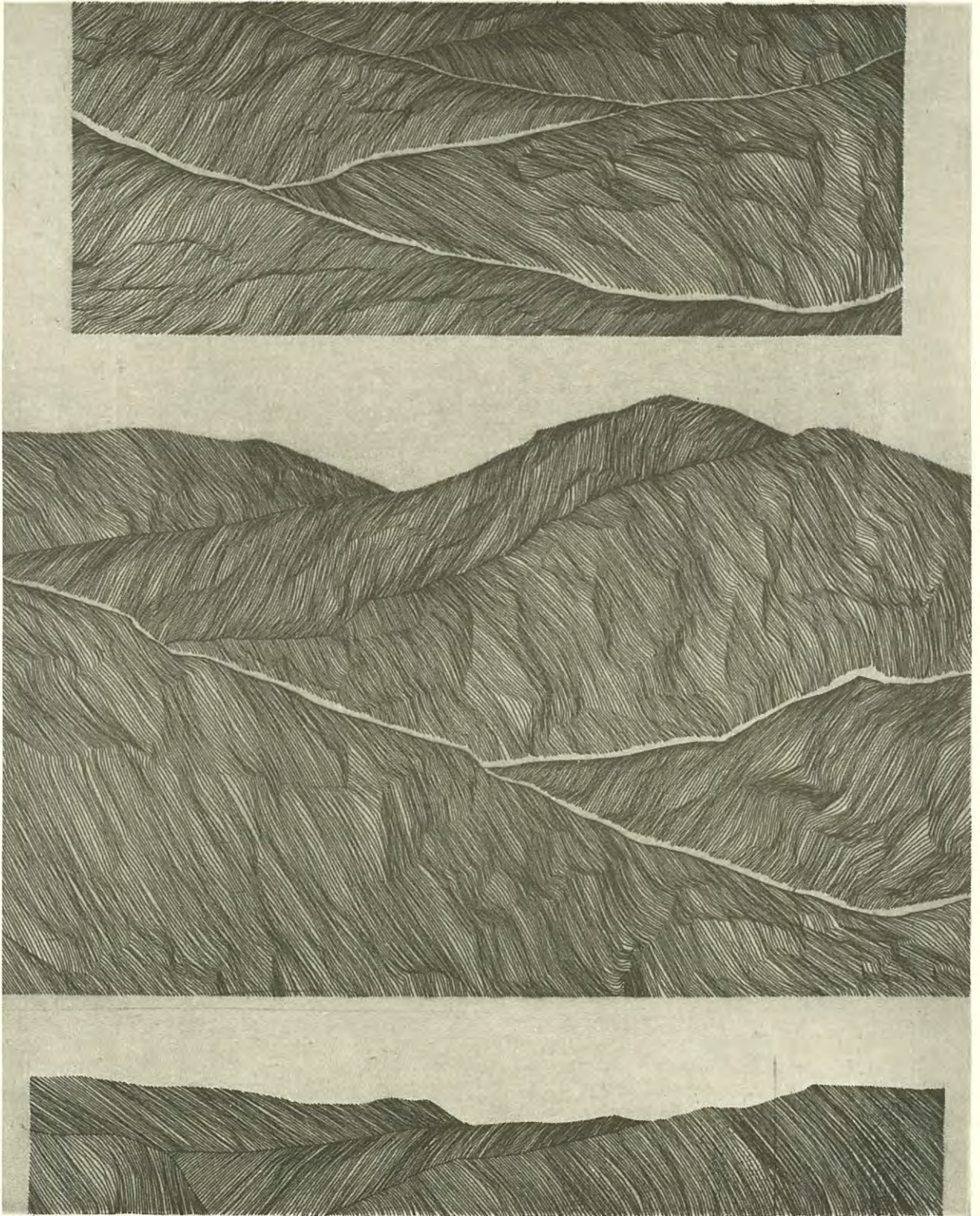
E. N. BRACEY. NORTH ISLAND SYNTHESIS, No. 11. PVA on canvas. 42½ x 34½ ins.



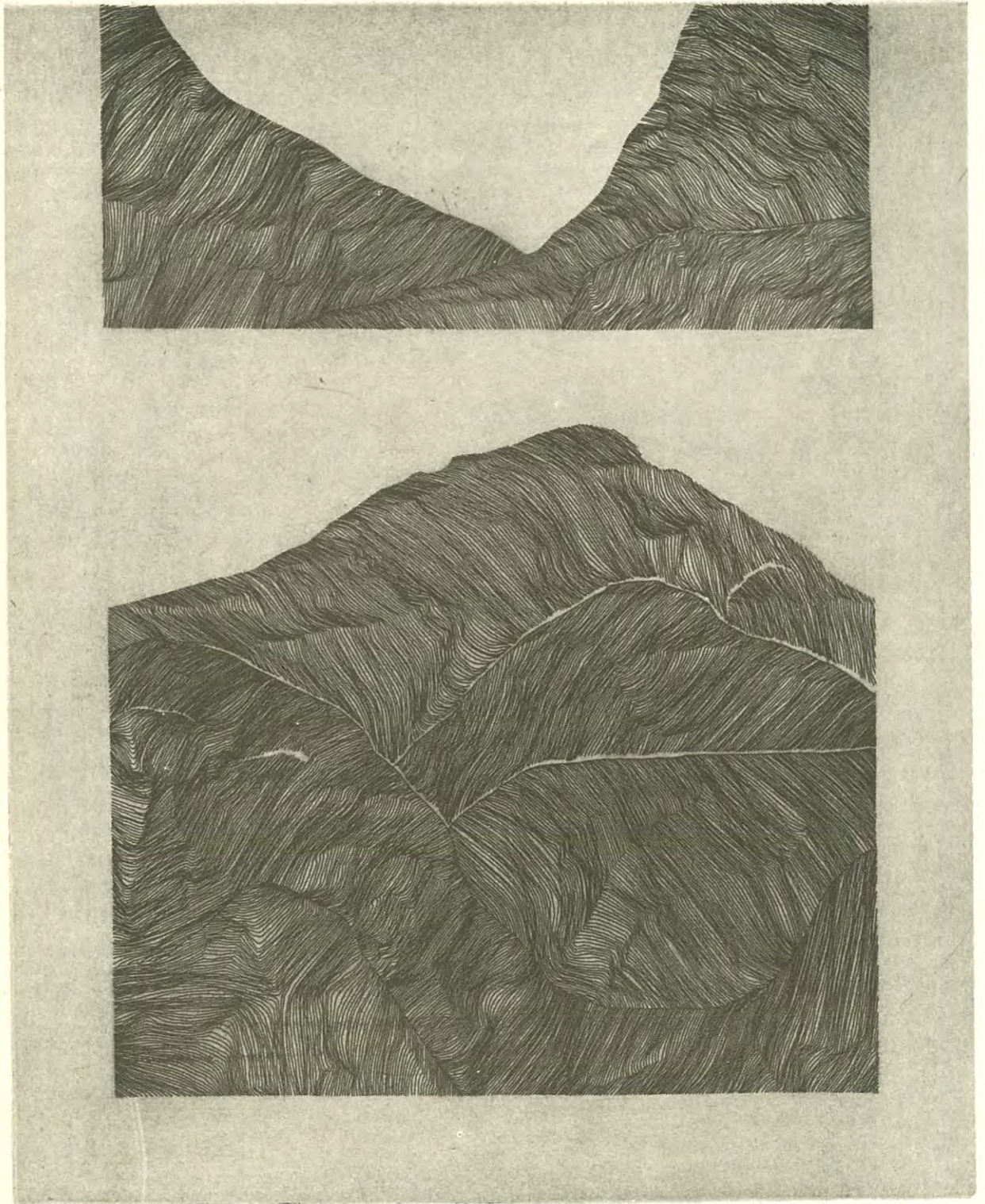
D. MITCHELL. Port Hills—Diptych II. Etching on steel plate, 1967. 15 x 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ ins.



D. MITCHELL. Banks Peninsula—Diptych I. Etching on steel plate, 1967,  $14\frac{3}{8}$  x  $11\frac{5}{8}$  ins.



D. MITCHELL. Port Hills—Triptych I. Etching on steel plate, 1967.  $14\frac{7}{8}$  x  $11\frac{7}{8}$  ins.



D. MITCHELL. Port Hills—Diptych I. Etching on steel plate, 1967.  $14\frac{5}{8}$  x  $11\frac{3}{4}$  ins.



**ROY COWAN.** Juliet Peter sorting tiles for a column installed at Hamilton. The tiles, 13 inches square, are in lightweight ceramic.

## The Pottery of Roy Cowan and Juliet Peter

### ROY COWAN

**M**y interest as a child in drawn expression did not fit into the pattern of academic progress of the time, and I would have gone to University but shortage of funds in the depression years sent me to Wellington Teachers' College where students received a small salary. Here I met Roland Hipkins, the art lecturer, I think the first person I encountered who really regarded the arts as a possible major vocation.

This attitude taught more than his efforts to instruct what was at the time the almost hopelessly un-instructed!

I became an art specialist trainee, then went off to the war. After the war, I re-entered teaching but soon left and was engaged briefly in publishing. At this time I was interested in motor sports and car-building and other mechanical exploits which pro-

vided a basis of technical experience to be used later. I joined the School Publications Branch of the Department of Education, in 1949, and contact there with the work of artist-illustrators revived my leaning towards the arts.

I married Juliet Peter, who was then at School Publications, in 1952. I became a member of the Christchurch Group, in 1953, and was awarded the Association of Art Societies Scholarship in the same year. I went to the Slade intending to study painting but did not take the Diploma course for early in the period, 1953-55, I found the lithographic cellar, and remained at work there for almost the whole period, at the same time attending lectures in Art History, Materials and Methods, and carrying on other studies in Book Illustration and Production. Juliet was studying pottery at Hammersmith and as a consequence I received some introduction to the craft. I returned to School Publications and put on the first shows of lithographs with Juliet, at Architectural Centre Gallery and introduced other artists to the medium.

I left honest employment in 1959 to become a full-time potter. In the prior period I had found attitudes in Wellington to the non-conforming painter to be indifferent, to say the least. In the field of the print the position was easier, while in the field of decorated earthenware in which we worked at the time there was acceptance of images which could not have gone across in the more convention-ridden media. The first years as a full-timer were very hard as the small electric kiln was limited and I was forced to break new ground in kiln matters. From the point of beginning construction of my first oil-fired kiln in May, 1960, one year passed before I had a reasonably successful firing. The subsequent technical developments including machines and materials as well as kilns has been an important part of my work.

Construction has extended to larger ceramic forms, and sculptures in other media. Pottery operations now extend over a very wide range of media from fine domestic wares to very rugged rock-like media used in massive modelled work or actually treated as a rock for hewing. I have always been a student of Art History and the sciences and continue to read in these subjects. To these are added studies in Ceramic Technology and other technical subjects.

In my work I draw upon and re-combine motifs or images from these different fields—suitable forms for very highly stressed clay from micro photos of organic structures; images for prints suggested by mineral structures, and metal forms from vegetation.

My first one-man show was held in the French

Maid Coffee House, Lambton Quay, in 1946. Since then, I have lost count. Works in several media are in museums and private collections in and out of N.Z. Again, no record. I have always been involved in art movements, gallery works, publishing and so on and hope in future to reduce this type of activity on behalf of the 'arts incorporated' as my work is becoming more engrossing.

I should have said that I received a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Fellowship in 1966 and made further studies in kiln designs and in the use of N.Z. materials as a result.

## JULIET PETER

I was born at Anama, Canterbury, so long ago that I have conveniently forgotten the exact date.

I trained first as a painter—there seemed little other outlet in the field of the Fine Arts at that time—in the late 1930s and studied at the Canterbury College School of Art, where I gained my Diploma in 1940.

I turned to book illustration as a means of livelihood, and was staff artist to the School Publications Branch of the Education Department for a period. But I found such work limiting, and so, after two visits to Britain in the 1950s, turned with relief to making pottery.

At first the aim was to make a living, then the emphasis shifted as the diversity and adventure of potting and kiln firing opened up with practice and increased knowledge, helped by the experimental work done by my husband, Roy Cowan.

To me, pottery has its fascination in the exploration of means and materials. Thrown ware, slab, coiled and pressed objects all have their function and interest. Likewise the development of glazes and the control of firing.

Pottery is a demanding occupation, in terms of time, thought and physical energy. Thus I am less free to follow up my other interests of print-making and painting than I would like to be.

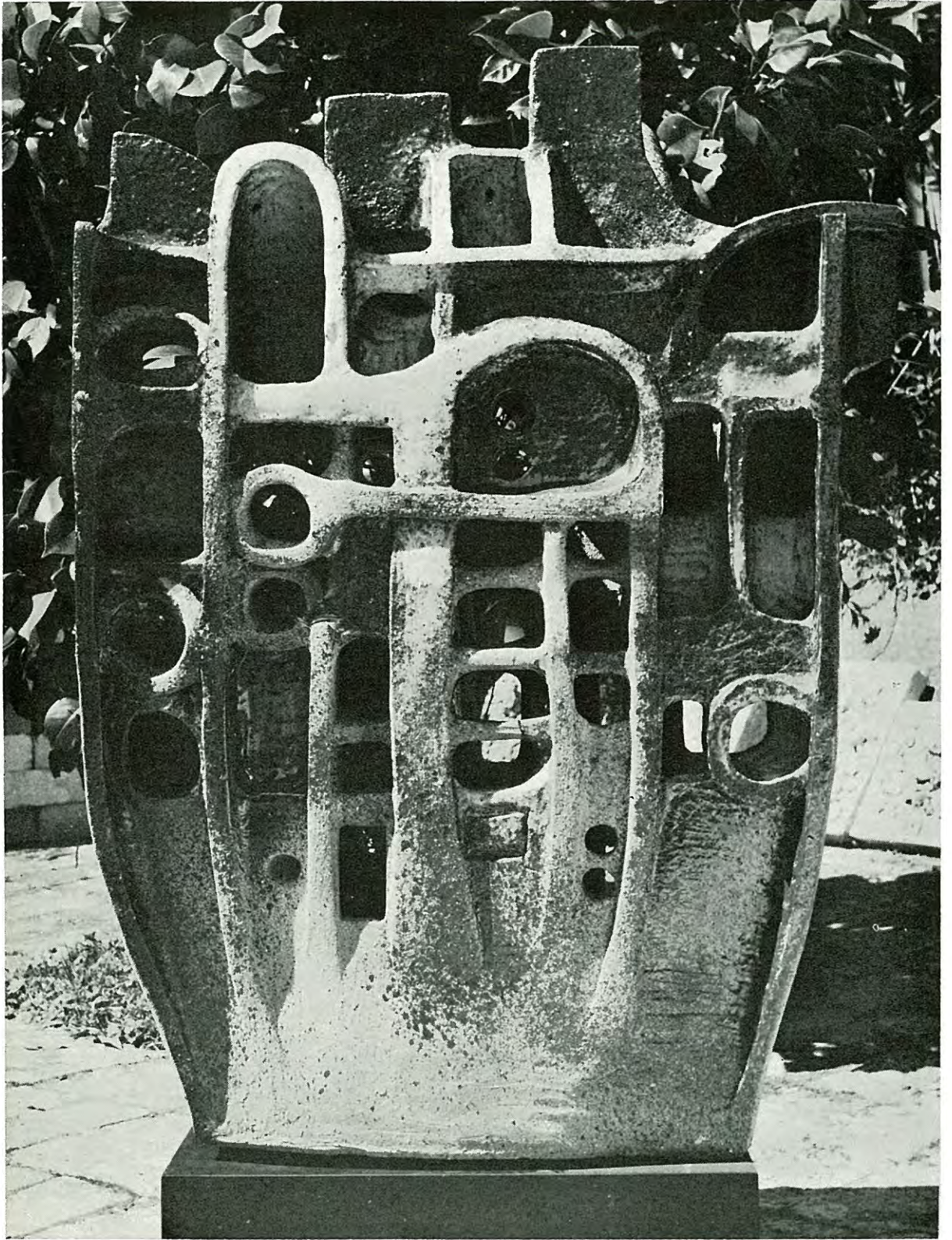
Working in several media discourages any inclination to list the numerous exhibitions participated in, or to keep notes of where one's work goes. The work in progress is the one that matters.

I am currently a member of the N.Z. Society of Potters, the Wellington Potters, the N.Z. Print Council, the Christchurch Group, the N.Z. Academy, and the editorial committee of 'Potter' magazine.

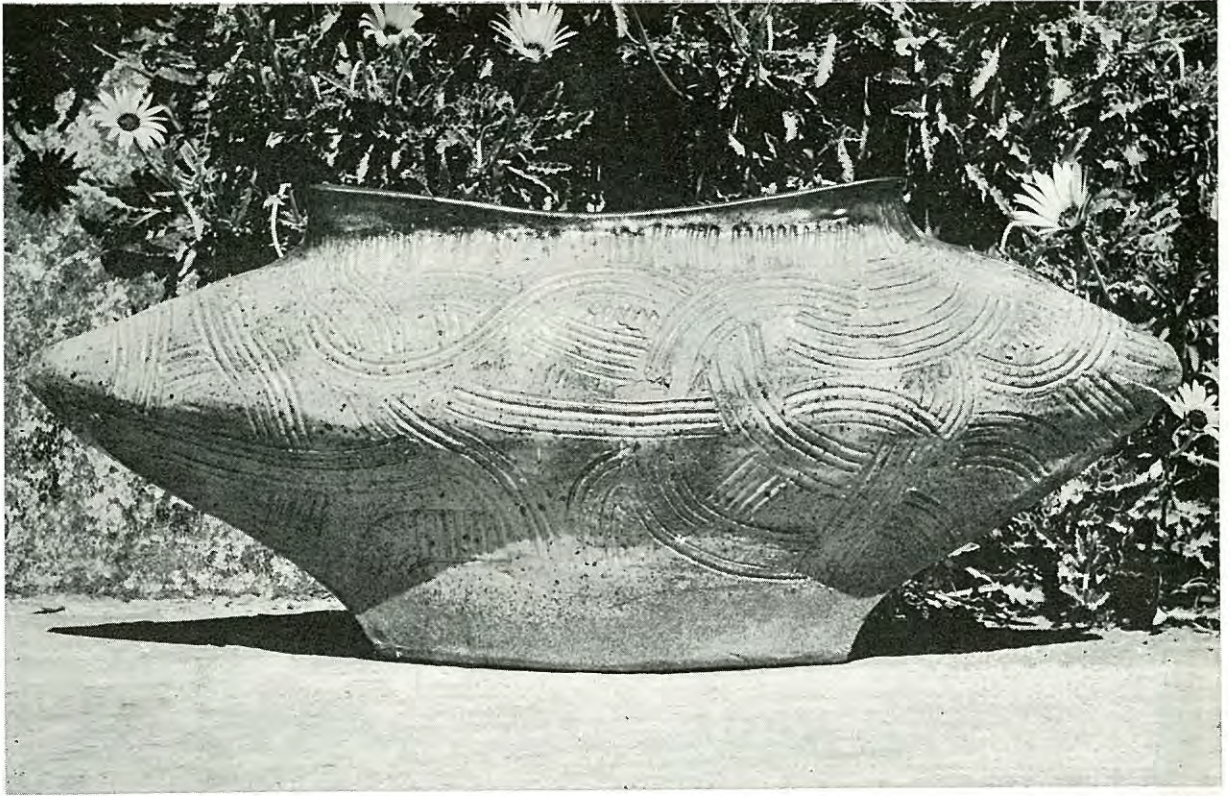




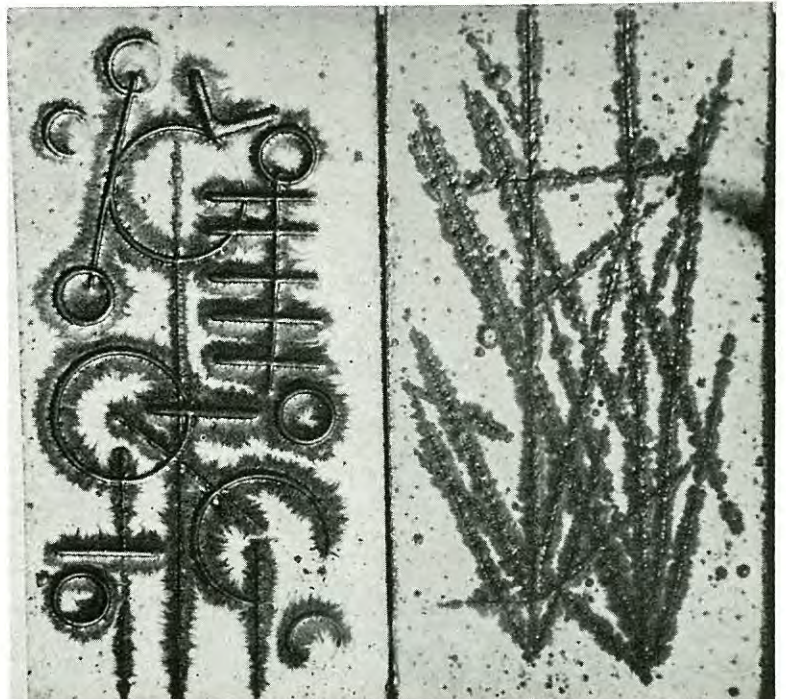
**ROY COWAN** holding part of a tile mural designed for the Motor Hotel at Te Rapa. **JULIET PETER** about to place a group of newly-finished pot-pourri jars in the sun to dry before biscuit firing.



ROY COWAN. Sculpture, about 3 feet high. A cellular formation between plain end surfaces with references to 'sculptural architecture'.



**ROY COWAN.** Branch pot, length about 33 inches. The shape and patterning were suggested by Maori 'Whaka-huia'.

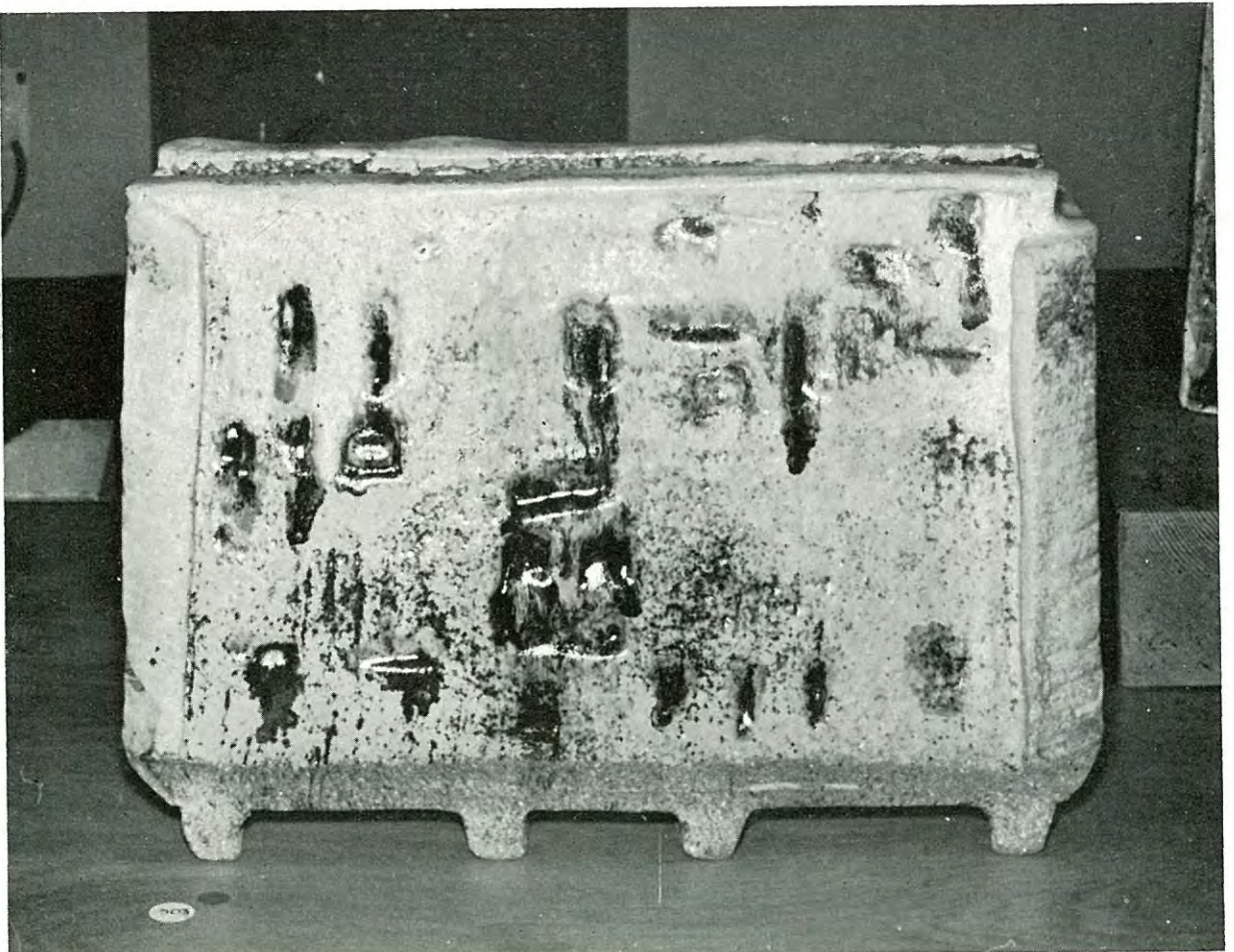


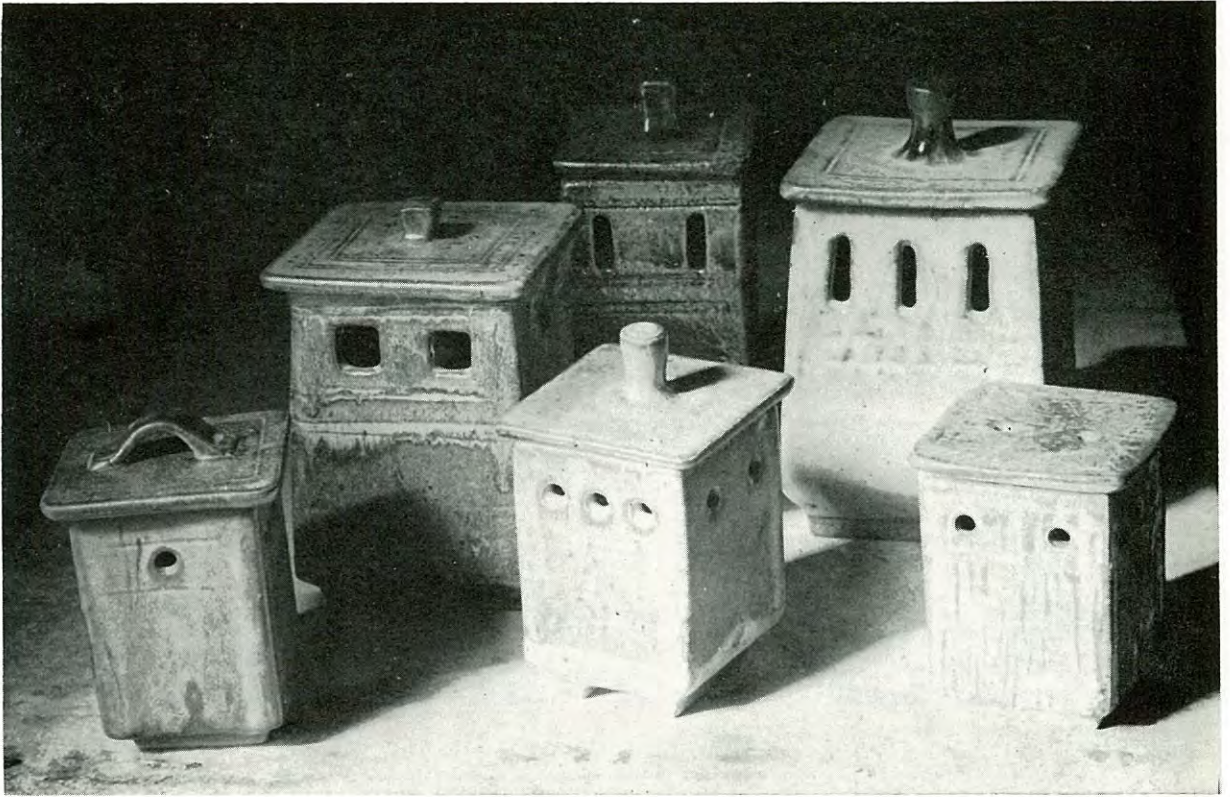
**ROY COWAN.** Tile samples, dense hard body. Size 12 x 6 inches. Two specimens from walls in the Newtown Post Office, Wellington. The surfaces were finished with alternating plain and decorated tiles, the latter having different but related patterns suggested by electronic diagrams and figures.



**JULIET PETER.** Terrace pot. Diameter 17 inches, coiled. Shown at the 11th N.Z. Potters' Exhibition, 1967, and purchased by the Hawkes Bay Museum and Art Gallery, Napier.

**JULIET PETER.** Slab-built branch pot, 15 inches high. Made in 1967, now owned by Mr Peter Wilde, Palmerston North.





**JULIET PETER.** Group of pot-pourri jars after firing. Heights vary from  $4\frac{1}{2}$  to 7 inches.

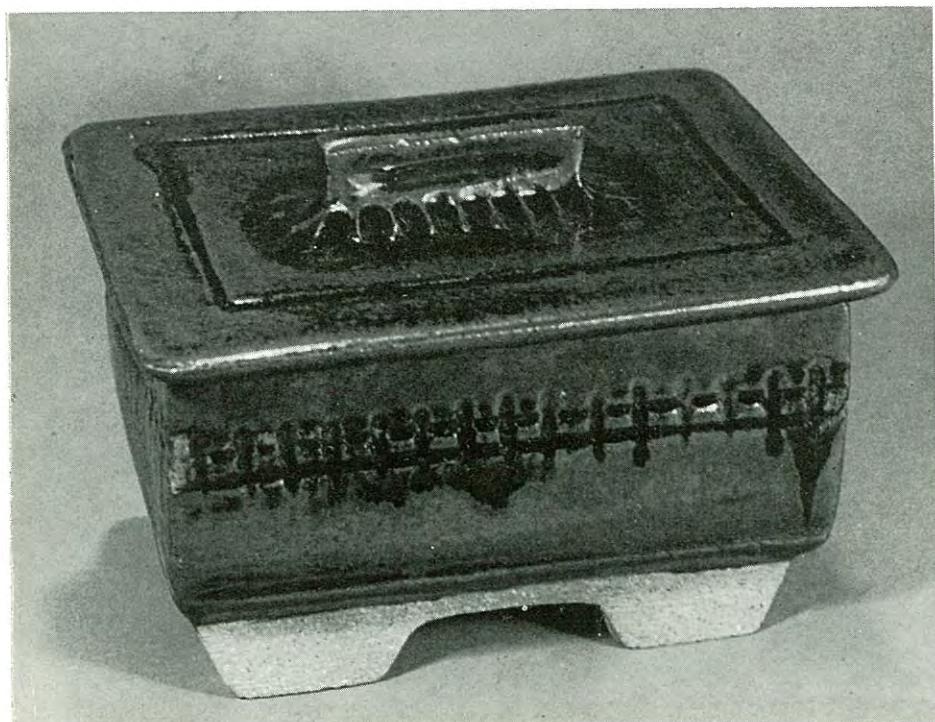


**JULIET PETER.** Coil-built garden pot, 1967. Height 21 inches. In the collection of Mrs Susan Turner, Wellington.



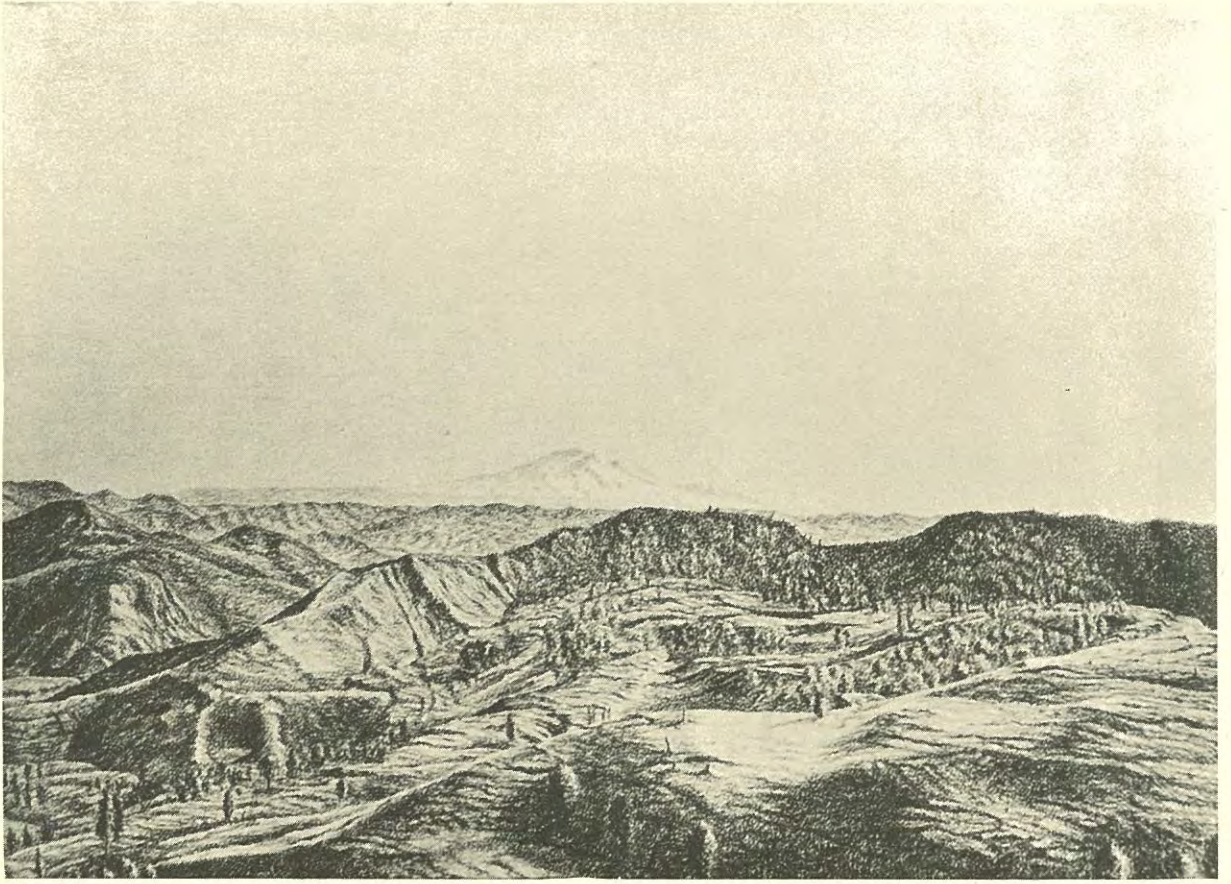
**JULIET PETER.** Lidded jar, wheel-thrown, 1968. Height 4½ inches.

**JULIET PETER.** Small slab-built trinket box, 1968. Height 4 inches.



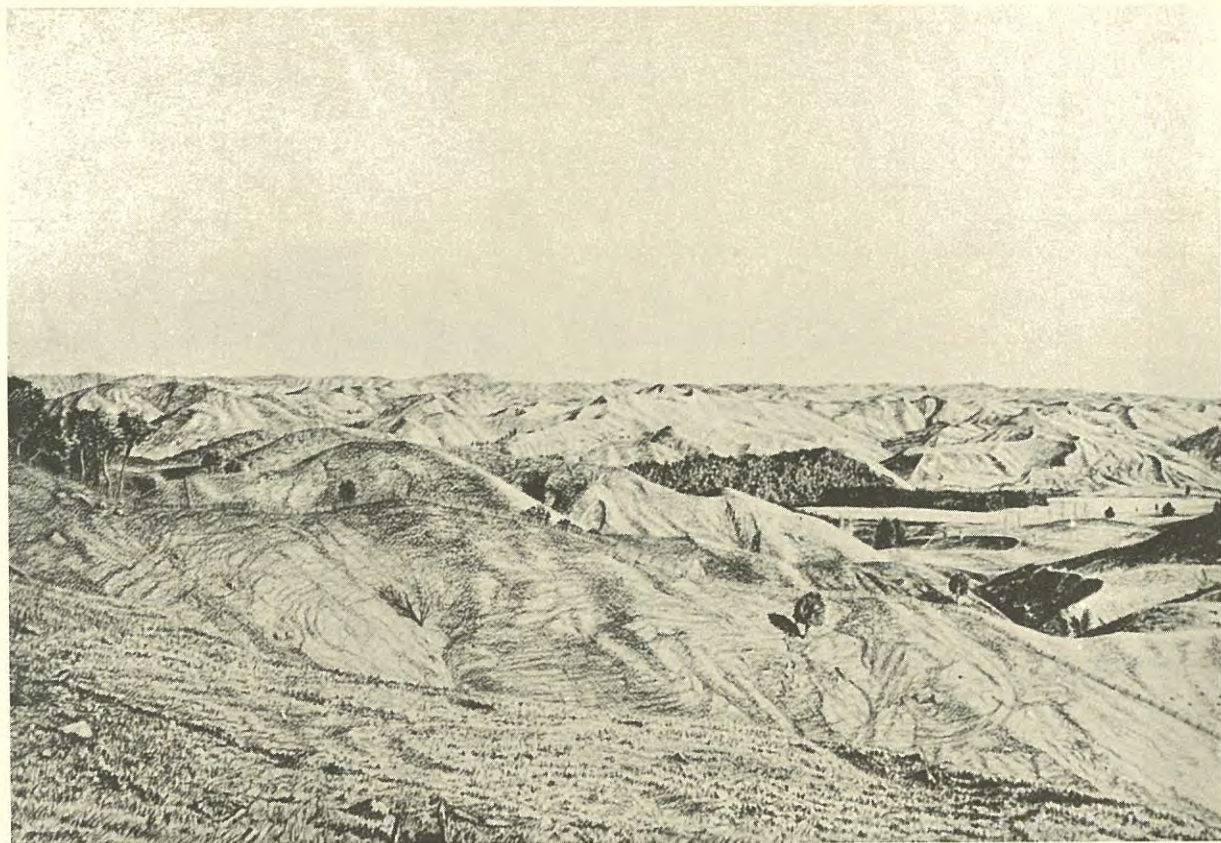


**DAVID CHEER. EAST LANDSCAPE, MORNING, THE ARTIST'S HOME.** Pencil, 1965. 20 x 30½ ins.  
(Owned by Mr Bryn Jones).

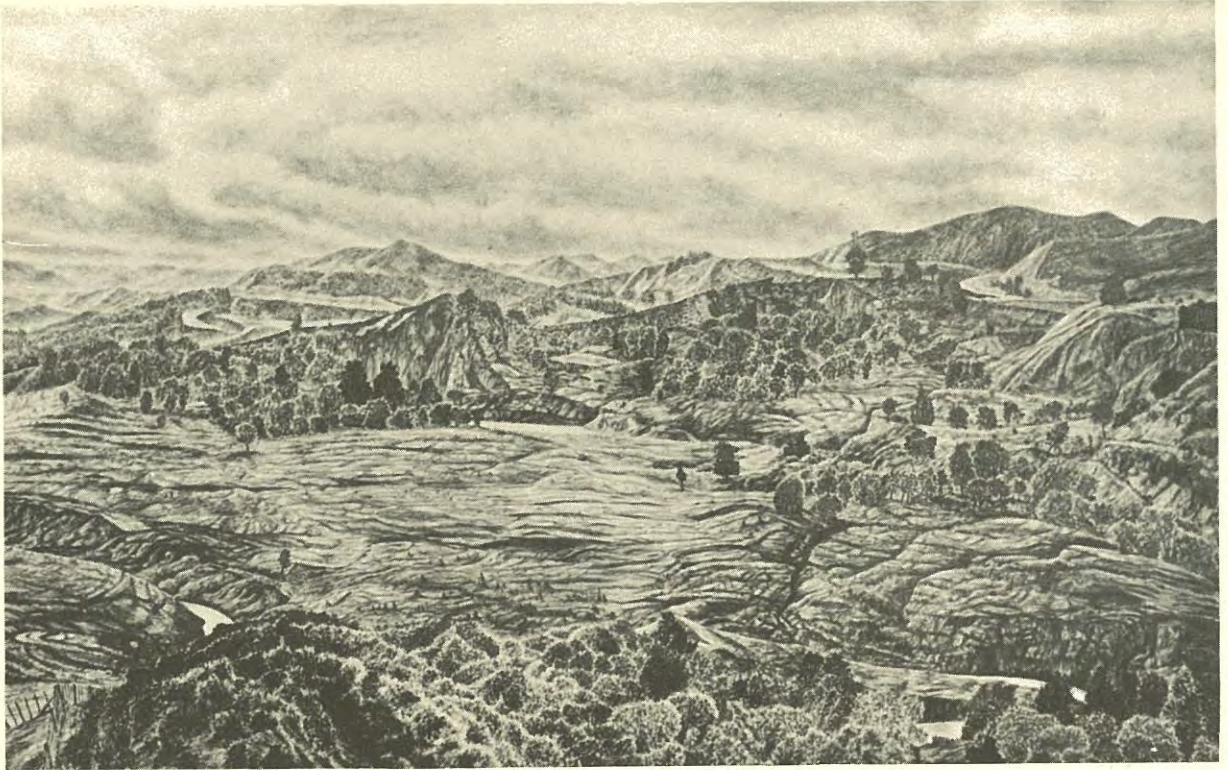


DAVID CHEER. MORNING LANDSCAPE, THE ARTIST'S HOME. Pencil, 1965. 21½ x 29½ ins.





DAVID CHEER. WESTERN LANDSCAPE, AUGUST, THE ARTIST'S HOME. Pencil, 1966. 20 x 30½ ins.



DAVID CHEER. DARK LANDSCAPE, THE ARTIST'S HOME, KOUKOUPO RIVER. Pencil, 1967. 19 x 30ins.

# 20/20 Vision Print Show

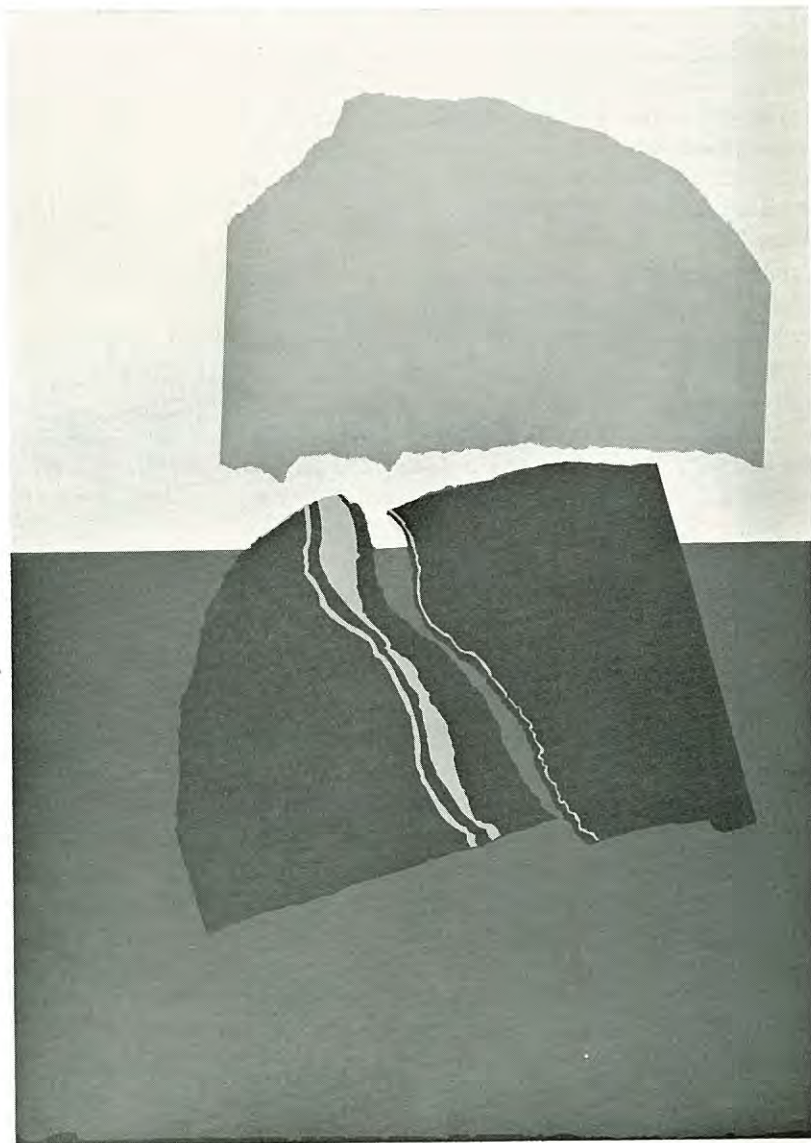
## QUENTIN MACFARLANE

During the second Pan Pacific Arts Festival held in Christchurch recently, a group of young painters and sculptors presented an exhibition that was a unique event for New Zealand followers of the arts. The group known as 20/20 Vision arranged among its members a print exhibition of 'multiple' or commercial silk-screened works to be sold for two dollars each. All the prints were processed from original drawings and designs which were sent from many parts of the country and the supervision was undertaken by local members. It was an ambitious and challenging venture typical of the group and an interesting festival event.

20/20 was formed in 1964 at a time when the younger painters in Canterbury became conscious of a lack of stimulus after the closure of Gallery 91. With the financial backing of the first Pan Pacific Arts Festival they mounted a controversial and witty exhibition. As a group 20/20 Vision had no formal organization but the members believed that art had to be an accessible and enjoyable experience. John Coley who had recently returned from a study tour of America saw the chance to pool the energy of the artists and with Tom Taylor the idea of 'collaborations' or collective exhibitions became a stimulus that released a flood of work. Taylor's skill in designing the first exhibition set new standards of presentation and working without the inevitable restrictions which control orthodox shows, the artists were able to realise a new freedom of expression. Artists

were encouraged to experiment with new forms and materials and provide a forum for their most advanced ideas.

Possibly the many other exhibitions that 20/20 mounted helped to form a new purpose for the members (who in some cases had moved to other districts) because each new venture has had a maturing influence on their outlook and dedication to an idea. However this 'fly-by-night' nature of 20/20 Vision has meant that each showing has been an all too brief meeting and sharing of experiences. It was therefore a wonderful chance when the idea of the multiple print scheme became a reality. Overseas the great success of the commercially reproduced print



VIVIAN BISHOP. SERENDIPITY. 26 x 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ ins.

by such famous printing firms as the Kelpra Studios—who had published the works of Paolozzi and other British artists—intrigued the small band of 20/20 members. No similar silk-screen printing firms existed in New Zealand but the idea of co-operating with the commercial printers on the project seemed worthwhile. Originally each artist who was invited to participate was sent a simple directive on the nature of the kind of modest print the group could support and it was agreed that each artist should share in the other's efforts by being sent a full set of the prints when all the editions were complete. Initially the organizing members made an attempt to sort out the print designs and arrange for printers to make the screens. In the case of an artist not living in Christchurch and therefore unable to supervise the making of his print a local member did this for him.

Perhaps it was inevitable that some murmurs of protest came from the makers of hand-crafted prints. But then 20/20 have always invited some kind of critical analysis of their work and the debate that ensued made everyone aware of the fact that the print and its place in the contemporary world had to be fully understood. To work with a litho stone or etched metal plate is a solution for the dedicated artist-printmaker who relishes the complexities of his craft, but to the 20/20 artist the problem was a challenge. Many had not been active printmakers and the commercial product became a means to an end; a way of showing their variety and depth of thinking in visual terms. For the designers the process enabled them to seek out complex formalized patterns, while the painters tended to extend their current themes to suit the medium. It was clearly possible to 'read' their works and it became evident as more of the editions arrived from the printers that the idea inherent in the work was the main point of interest, not the differences in technique. Actually many of the screens were hand-cut stencils with photographically reproduced areas where some of the detailed techniques required fine reproduction.

The public was intrigued with the idea and general quality of the show and the success of the venture from a commercial point of view, was proved by the near sell-out of some editions. It could be argued that the two dollar price accounted for this success; but even if these prints have displaced the travel poster in the student bedroom, they have made the quality of the works of these serious artists more accessible.

It was noted that prospective buyers chose their

print with the same concern which one would expect a collector of original paintings to adopt.

If any criticism is to be made it would be that some of the works lacked colour; but then it must be understood that while the artists themselves were involved in a new medium, the craftsmen were also presented with problems that they normally do not have to cope with. The participation has proved an interesting event for twenty-five artists and it is to be hoped further multiple print making can be expected as they gain experience.

20/20 Vision has mounted two touring exhibitions and it is intended to display these in other New Zealand centres.

LOUIS JOHNSON

## The Perfect Symbol

For Edgar Mansfield

I remember reading as a boy, Giotto,  
Asked for a picture fit for a Pope's wall,  
Picked up a brush, painted a perfect circle,  
And offered this as prize to the puzzled pontiff  
Whose shocked reaction was a dark reproof.  
"No, sir," the painter answered, "Nothing less  
Than this would be apt gift for your great grace.  
This line is endless and begins nowhere.  
It contains all the truth a man might know  
And is a barrier excluding dross.  
Or, it's a world, and outside it, the heavens  
And every aspiration worthy of him.  
I made it with one stroke: you cannot tell  
Where I began it, only that, through grace  
Patience, the pain of all my craft,  
I made what Nature does not make—the circle,  
The thing enclosed, entire, perfection's symbol."

Humbled, his master gave it pride of place  
Upon the palace wall, and no doubt gave  
Much thought as well to what might burn within  
A peasant breast that beat beyond itself  
In realms of contemplation learning strove for  
Without, always, the same degrees of insight.  
Then let Giotto's circle stand for those  
Who see beyond the lines and shapes of things,  
The orders, and the ordering of men's lives,  
And all the passing show, to what might be  
Ultimate truths contained in a simple act,  
The maker's hand unveiling what is hidden  
From understanding by what's understood,  
And what is real surprisingly revealed,  
Hard, simple, whole, something to stand forever.

# Art and the *Encyclopaedia*

## 2. Maori Art



R. N. O'REILLY

THE ART article in *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand* is stated to be on 'European art in New Zealand' and, except for a reference from Mr MacLennan to MAORI ART, the two subjects are treated as unconnected.<sup>1 2 3</sup> This reflects normal practice in New Zealand, where Maori art has long been a field for specialists but New Zealand European art has not; we have noted the paucity of bibliographic sources for the ART article and now note in contrast the solid bibliography that closes MAORI ART. If, as the Prime Minister himself has recently told us, New Zealand's official policy is integration and integration is to be distinguished from separation (*apartheid*) on the one hand and from assimilation (of *them* by *us*) on the other by giving status to both cultures and encouraging mutual borrowing, then it is timely to point out that the division of the subjects is a separatist one and to question its necessity.<sup>4</sup> We must, in other words, learn to consider Maori art as art, consider the problems faced by Maoris who are artists and the ways in which Maori art is already relevant to New Zealand Europeans, particularly artists.

The question may lead to some readjustment of New Zealand European attitudes, since we New Zealand Europeans in my observation have built up a cosy view of our own tolerance without disturbing the deeper racist assumptions of our culture. It is culture itself, and so cultural difference, which we do not understand, indeed are oblivious to; so that we are mostly unaware of the cultural tension that our very presence in these islands imposes, and not only on the Maoris. By 'cultural' I speak of everything in a people's make up and characteristic behaviour that is not inherited genetically but acquired from birth onward, whether unconsciously acquired or consciously learned; language is its matrix and art but one, though the most conspicuously distinctive one, of its expressions.

To illustrate the cultural thing. In Nigeria it is clear to all that American Negroes are primarily Americans; they speak and behave as Americans and generally manifest typically American attitudes. It is true that in Nigeria they appear generally more constrained than their compatriots, whereas in the United States they often appear less constrained and

more relaxed than American Europeans. Nonetheless they are, to Nigerians, to other expatriates including (reluctantly) to their compatriots, and to themselves, Americans. Whenever I made this point in the U.S. I was always regarded with incredulity and the uniform response was expressed more or less like this: 'Do you mean to try to tell me that *they* aren't different than *us*?' to which I uniformly replied: 'I don't say there aren't differences, all I say is that in a place like Nigeria the differences don't seem important to anyone.' I did not have opportunity to observe Maoris abroad but I have formed the impression since my return that in New Zealand we are already much more a single tribe, brown and white, than we think; the tribe also includes New Zealand Chinese. Now I believe that a major source of frustration amongst American Negroes in the present U.S. strife is precisely that their Americanness is denied them; the crunch could come here when a growing sense of the Maori as a New Zealander is resisted and repudiated. The air worn by the young Maori today, an air he wears more easily than his European work-mate, who has nevertheless taken over some of the laconic idiom and Maori style, is that of the archetypal Kiwi-Australasian proletarian.

Mr MacLennan must be credited with raising the question of whether Maori art can be an alternative source for a future New Zealand art, so that the terms in which he disposes of the question are worth studying.<sup>5</sup> He says of traditional Maori works 'studied and appreciated by Maori and by Pakeha' that 'their meaning and purpose is of the past and they linger on in practice only as traditional craft. Their motifs have been effectively used in decorative schemes but their original purpose and significance have vanished and, with them, the creative impulse. No Maori artist of stature has yet arrived.' He goes straight on to conclude: 'The process of integration has isolated the Maori of today from the living meaning of the arts of his forefathers, and his culture must, from now on, be one with his European neighbours.' There are many tendentious points in Mr MacLennan's statement but the ones of immediate concern are his assimilationist use of 'integration' and the way in which his conclusion hangs on the question of meaning and significance, a question he does not raise in discussing New Zealand's European art.

Mr McEwen, author of the *Encyclopaedia's* MAORI ART article, suggests that Maori art is a living art but does little to answer Mr MacLennan's

questioning of its meaning and significance. On the contrary, he writes: 'Very little is known of the meaning of Maori carving. Probably much of it was purely decorative.'<sup>6</sup> And he reinforces these remarks with others of like bearing, as we shall see.

Mr McEwen, Secretary for Maori Affairs, is a scholarly, self-effacing author who has mastered his sources, tried his own hand at Maori carving and plainly has examined most of the carvings to be found in our museums and on maraes throughout the country.<sup>7</sup> As befits a subject of such importance within New Zealand scholarship, he has been allocated over twenty pages, more than twice the space given to the ART article, and he fills them, line by line, many times more compactly than Mr MacLennan fills his. Having built up his specialist vocabulary simply and clearly, he applies it with admirable economy especially in his treatment of regional styles of carving; surely this will long stand as the standard reference source for future studies of the styles.

The article, after an introductory paragraph, is divided as follows: Origin of Maori Carving; The Carver and his Implements; Elements (subject elements: Human Figure, *Manaia*, *Marakihau*, Lizards, Birds, Fish and Whales, Other Natural Objects; stylistic elements: Spiral, Surface Patterns, Simple Incised Patterns, *Rauponga*, *Taratara-o-kai*, *Unaunahi*, *Pakura*, *Koru*); Meaning and Symbolism (Symbolic Carving on Houses, Symbolism and Storehouses, The Tiki, The Lizard, General Symbolism); Composition; Culture Areas—divided into Northern including Northland, Hauraki and Taranaki; Central and Southern including *Tainui* (Waikato, King Country and Manawatu), *Te Arawa* (Rotorua-Bay of Plenty), *Matatua* (Urewera-Whakatahe-Opotiki), *Ngati Porou* (north-east of Gisborne), *Kahungunu* (Gisborne to Napier), *Tuwharetoa* (Taupo-Upper Rangitikei), Wanganui and Others; Painted Designs—on wood and on rock; Tattooing; Textile Designs. Many of the sections have diagrams and they are concise and well illustrate his descriptions. I know his sources only bibliographically and have no intention of mastering them so as to put myself in the position of a rival specialist to criticise him; from this cursory, bibliographic knowledge supplemented by discussions with others who have some expertise, I should venture to say that, published in pamphlet form, his is the work I should carry with me into museums and onto the maraes.

The points I wish to raise from Mr McEwen's

treatment are those that bear on Mr Maclennan's assertion, especially Mr McEwen's opening remark on living arts and his discussion of meaning and symbolism, with particular reference to the *koru*, to the large carved house and to sex symbols; incidentally I shall touch on some other matters, such as style. The central quest is meaning and significance.

As to meaning, let us go back to the *ABC* situation where the child knows that two unlike things, the spoken word 'apple' and a picture of an apple both *mean* apple, a thing he knows through sight, touch, smell, taste and the muscular and auditory sensations involved in biting. The child now is to learn that yet another unlike thing, the printed word APPLE, means the same thing yet means it through identification with the auditory thing, the spoken word, rather than with the picture though it, like the printed word APPLE, is visual: we make the *a* sound repeatedly for him, pointing to the A that stands by itself and later to it in APPLE, which we sound slowly—the letters mean the bits of sound and not things like mummy or apple.<sup>8</sup> Later the child will recognise other visual things as meaningful in still different ways, e.g. road signs and traffic lights. Now, we say that the word 'apple' means apple *literally* but, apart from conveying that the meaning is to be recognised through a thing made up from letters, this conveys a certain high degree of neutral referential specificity which a picture of a material object (or of a particular material complex such as a landscape) may also have; likewise a map or a diagram. Thus in the art tradition which despite a century of modern art is so much a part of our culture that we make use of it in teaching our children about things that (as here) are not art, a painting or drawing or piece of sculpture had to have this neutral referential specificity before it was allowed to have anything else; 'the arm does not go like that,' we say in criticism, implying that there must be a one-to-one correspondence in shape (often also in colour) between the distinguishable parts of an object and the distinguishable parts of the picture: this shape means an arm and that a torso, and the interrelation of the two must be as the visual interrelation of the arm to the torso of a normal human being from a particular vantage point. Another literal aspect of the situation is that we use the words for the physical parts in identifying the represented parts; we could describe this situation by saying that this sort of art (and the same I suspect is still true of much of what is termed 'pure art') is, to a significant

extent, *language bound*. As to referential neutrality, no doubt the apple is chosen by the compiler of the *ABC* as being affectively toned for the child, but the learning process is such that, once the child can identify an apple when he sees APPLE, he can do so without finding his mouth watering. The way in which painting or drawings convey meanings of neutral specificity, I shall refer to as *depiction*; the corresponding term in sculpture would be *modelling*, though bas-relief and similar 'frontal' sculpture is simply *depictive*.

The ability to depict is ancient, as is demonstrated by the cave and rock drawings and painting made in the old stone age tens of thousands of years ago. We know that when we try to depict we have difficulty in mastering the utensil (etc.) used to mark the surface on which the depiction is to be: pen and ink is different from pencil, each in turn from brush and paint, and the result also differs with the surface to be marked—paper, canvas, plaster, stone, etc. etc.; this may be summed up by saying that the media, being material things each with its own physical properties, produce each its own characteristic effects identifiable with the *formal* properties of that medium, such as the 'outline' of a drawing. (Similarly, in carving wood from different trees with a variety of instruments, e.g. adzes and chisels, these being either stone, bronze, iron or steel.) The overall effect, assuming the intention is neutral depiction, is a product of the ability of the artificer to cope with the physical properties of the medium; some of the effects falling short of realising the intention may interest in other ways, e.g. they may produce a witty ambiguity of shape, may be simply pleasant or may mysteriously conflate a number of meanings. Ways of coping tend to be copied by other artificers and thus become recognisable techniques; utensils and materials evolve or new ones may be invented; effects become characteristic from depictions of one thing to depictions of another (or are imitated from one medium to another) and so we have recognisable *styles*, including those of individuals, schools, peoples and civilisations. Once we drop our assumption that the intention is always neutral depiction we may also see in the evolution of styles a whole range of differences in attitude towards what is depicted, including the attitude that what is depicted is of no importance, the one that insists that nothing is depicted and the work is an exercise in formal relationships only, and even the one where we are to read only the rhythmic and other mani-

festations, in the brush strokes, of the psychic energies of the artist.

There are two contrasting directions in which stylistic evolution may lead and either may influence the other. One that apparently evolved in the old stone age is towards simplification and conventionalisation. A contemporary example is our use of the arrow sign, '—>', as conveying direction. In the study of palaeolithic rock paintings, researchers have been able to correlate the stages in the progression from depiction to conventional signs, apparently in most cases phallic.<sup>9</sup> Evolution in this direction leads eventually to writing; we may call it *notational*.

The other direction in which stylistic evolution may lead is towards decoration. For this direction to be taken, stylistic effects must be seen as pleasing in themselves, rather than pleasing by virtue of success in depictive reference and so in recognisability. Though the animal depictions of the old stone age are felt by us to be beautiful, and no doubt their beauty heightened their significance (whatever that might be), there does not seem to have been any elaboration in that age towards the decorative or ornamental; on the contrary the simplification and conventionalisation, we should call 'crudely utilitarian'. But there may quite easily have been a later utilisation of stylistic play in the evolution of notational elements for decorative purposes; the decorative motifs of classical architecture, for example, may well derive from the repetition of meaningful signs. Once hierarchical societies have evolved, the appurtenances of royalty, descended from the gods, called for the elaboration of decoration to enhance the value of the things associated with royalty and with the priestly practices (and ritual objects) that gave it sanction.

So far we have spoken of meaning rather than of significance. The two are often used interchangeably but, when not so used, 'meaning' tends to stress unambiguous, neutrally factual, referential simplicity, while 'significance' stresses referential complexity and/or value in what is referred to; in other terms, 'meaning' tends to cover denotation and 'significance', connotation. High value in the referent may call for enrichment of the depiction, e.g. the setting of rubies and emeralds into depictions of crowns or the use of gold leaf and lapis lazuli in representations of the Virgin; the enrichment however may be through stylistic variation. Where social conditions allowed for the sharing of the monarch's affluence over wider classes of his subjects, there tended to be an increase in the use of sumptuous decorative effects

and a lessening of their link with sacred things; these are symptoms of secularisation, often associated with decadence. When we speak nowadays about decoration we think of such things as choice of wallpapers and carpets and of 'art objects' subordinated to them; I wonder whether Mr McEwen realized this when he said of the detail of Maori carving that: 'Probably much of it was purely decorative.'

When we introduce the idea of a symbol we are dealing with a thing, a concrete, material thing primarily (so also one that can be depicted or otherwise referred to) which conjures up references to other things; the reason for this generally is that it has been referred to in a well known poetic utterance the significance of which it can call again to mind. The choice of 'apple' in the *ABC* was probably determined by apples being (1) easy to depict recognisably, (2) referred to by a fairly simple word, (3) objects attractive to children. But consider the significance of a reference to an apple in a context which evokes Eve. The incident described in *Genesis* has a complex metaphoric force, which duly attaches to the apple itself, but the force of the metaphor does not derive from a metaphoric use of 'apple'; on the contrary 'apple' must be first understood literally before the description as a whole has metaphoric force: it is literally that 'apple' refers to a sensuously appealing object. It is from such contexts that objects become *symbols* and Eve's apple is an instance of a symbol. Sex symbols made such an impact on the more immediately post-Freudian generations (not so much the recently risen one) because references to sex were the most *tapu* of all in European society and the *tapu* had reached the zenith of its power in the more immediately pre-Freudian generations—and still holds its power for a large section of society today; particularly was its power at its zenith during the 19th century when the culture clash between Maoris and Europeans was at its most violent stage. We now tend to see covert sexual references in things that may have been used neutrally and without such reference, or where the force of the reference, not being covert, would be quite different from that of our own; still more importantly in our rediscovery of metaphorical reference to sex, we are often blind to the fact that for many peoples, perhaps for all peoples for most of their human evolution, literal references to or depictions of the sex objects and act were understood as symbolic references to things we should now describe in such abstract terms as 'fertility', 'creativity' or 'life processes'; the same symbolic references are,



however, in a subsistence economy of direct, practical importance in relation to such mundane matters as food supplies from hunting, fishing, root and berry gathering or agriculture.

Mr McEwen, to dispose of the question of phallic symbolism in Maori carvings, says: 'It is true that when the older carvers made a human figure, they carved a man in his complete form without shame or inhibition. This, of course, has nothing to do with phallic worship.'<sup>10</sup> 'Phallic worship' suggests something much more positive than treating the phallus as important in a set of sacred beliefs and the disposal of the one by no means disposes of the other. The earlier carvers did not, as Mr McEwen's remarks suggest, merely treat the phallus or the vulva in a matter of fact way; in many cases they emphasised them in a way they did not do with, for example, fingers.<sup>11</sup> That later carvers smoothed off the lower bellies is the direct result of the impact of evangelical Christianity and Victorianism and it radically changes the significance of Maori carving.

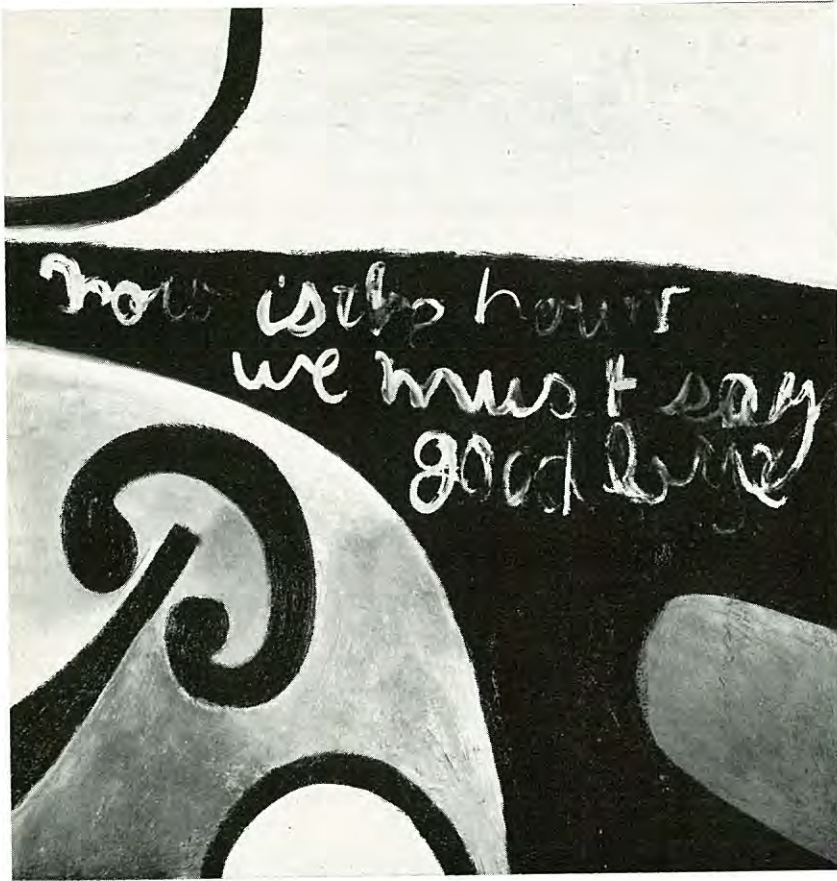
It is in the section, *Symbolic Carving on Houses*, (that immediately follows the one, *Meaning and Symbolism*, in which Mr McEwen heavily plays down meaning and symbolic significance) where he himself provides a framework within which meaning and symbolic significance can be seen.<sup>12</sup> The house as a whole (and so the house as a unit of accommodation) is referred to as 'the belly of —,' where the blank is an ancestor's name; Mr McEwen furnishes in detail the parts of the house that correspond to the parts of his body, the head for example, being carved as a head at the apex of the gable, the arms being the sloping barge-boards. He neglects to point out that the ancestor named is in direct line of descent in the sacred genealogies from the gods and thus is pivotal for the self confidence of this particular branch of the human family. He does however point out that the ancestor is *tapu* and so is his house, and that one way of removing a *tapu* for a man is to have a woman step over him on the ground. (Of relevance here would be the story of how Aokapurangi saved all the Arawa who could crowd into the meeting house on Mokoia from the wrath of her fellow Ngapuhi, Hongi, by 'passing them between her thighs' as she straddled above the entrance.)<sup>13</sup> Mr McEwen cites the practice to explain the role of the *pave*, or lintel carving, in which either the central or each of the three figures is female, in removing the *tapu* of the house for a man entering under it.

Mr McEwen says that the principle here was 'that

a woman, having no *tapu* herself, could neutralise it in a man'. However the mere absence of *tapu* has no neutralising power and surely the point is an implicit recognition of the counter-magic of the female parts. If so, the counter-magic is explicable from the creation myth itself, where the earth is personified as the mother of all, and from the Maui myth of Hine-nui-te-po where the locus of conception and birth is also identified with human mortality; the myth, referring with a pauky humour to the archetypal symbol of male anxiety, the *vagina dentata*, is candidly retold in the same volume in the MAORI MYTHS article.<sup>14</sup> Mr McEwen's account of the female counter-*tapu* in the context of the symbolism of the carved house, however, suggests that he is aware of the essential facts and so the question, which reflects equally upon me, is whether in this decade it is right to be so delicate as to fudge the whole issue of meaning and significance, as I believe he succeeds in doing.

As to the question of meaning in the detailed cuts in the carving, Mr McEwen is persuasive in dismissing the work, *Maori Symbolism*, of Ettie Rout, but I should very much doubt whether what she reports from Te Rake can be written off as a hoax; his foreword to the work suggests such sincerity as is compatible with uneasy, defensive pretension.<sup>15</sup> *Maori Symbolism* is indeed a hopelessly undisciplined work, oblivious to the requirements such as documentation that could have given it some value for scholarship. But it is very much of its times and reflects a great deal of undigested reading and research on the part of either Te Rake or Miss Rout or both; much of it, e.g. the preoccupation with questions of public health is direct feed-back of the Reporter's own preoccupations, feed-back that could be expected from such a forceful and opinionated personality as Miss Rout; much of the rest is a more generalised feed-back from the literature of the period.<sup>16</sup> To reject all this however is not to reject the thesis that the distinctive markings on carvings were primarily notational; there is still room for research here, in which Maori rock drawings (given only a short paragraph by Mr McEwen) could supply some of the missing links.

In one instance, at least, I should say that Te Rake was right: the symbol referred to by Miss Rout as 'the Sacred Life Symbol' is indeed a sacred, life symbol.<sup>17</sup> This is the *koru*, which Mr McEwen describes as 'a curved "stalk" with a round "bulb" shape at the end'; the 'bulb' is however more rounded than round, like the letter 'c' with swollen in-curving



COLIN McCAHON. Now is the Hour. Oil, 1962. 25 x 25 ins. (Collection Mr and Mrs Hamish Keith).

terminals, the symbol as a whole being: ‘—→’.<sup>18</sup> Someone who has discussed the meaning of Maori art with many Maoris, mainly from quite humble walks of life, and confirmed from them their belief that there is indeed an emphasis on sex symbols, has suggested to me that the *koru*, which is adapted to make refined and elaborate patterns, means either embryo (from the ‘bulb’ or ‘c’ shape) or phallus (when taken as a whole); if the directional force of the line of the ‘stalk’ is emphasised, connotations of fertility, germination and growth are superseded by those of aggressiveness and creativity.<sup>19</sup>

In rejecting the hypothesis of meaning and significance in parts of carvings, Mr McEwen argues that, if it had been there in the early days of European settlement, it would have been revealed, as other matters including sacred ones were, to European investigators.<sup>20</sup> However it is not too much to say, in view of the history of European attitudes to art during the period in question, that early European investigators were simply not equipped conceptually to ask the relevant questions about Maori art. Later,

of course, as Maori culture began to adapt itself to European culture and Maoris adopted Christianity, very soon Maoris were confused about it themselves; they remain so today, whilst taking illicit satisfaction from the mystery.

In the same context of meaning and significance, Mr McEwen also argues that Maori carvings, not being idols, had no religious significance. This is a confusion similar to his argument about sex worship; the carvings were, as he elsewhere affirms, *tapu*, which means they had a role to play in evoking a sense of the sacred. Incidentally Mr McEwen appears not to have taken cognisance of recent work on polytheistic religions elsewhere.<sup>21</sup>

I accordingly conclude the discussion of meaning and significance by observing that the question is much more open than some of Mc McEwen’s words suggest and that there are many other approaches yet awaiting critical examination. At this stage I prefer Agathe Thornton’s: ‘Maori art down to its detail lies in the region of the sacred, and . . . its beauty is the artist’s reverent tribute to powers he

believes divine. Aesthetic considerations [are] . . . thus secondary to an appreciation of the religious meaning expressed in his art.<sup>22</sup> With a classicist's sensitivity to language, she proceeds to the particular detailed patternings (the stylistic elements also discussed by Mr McEwen) and elucidates carefully from their names (the descriptive force of which can be seen in the patternings, but the words have wider connotations) that they have food-supply significance; the apparent divorce of the sacred from the practical in our own culture is not, we may observe, typical of cultures generally. Mrs Thornton's observations reinforce the impression given unconsciously by many of the authorities, including Mr McEwen, that Maori art is to a very large extent language-bound. Mr Schwimmer comes close to making the point explicit where he compares it to the art of mediaeval churches, pointing out that it retells and so recalls to mind familiar stories either of sacred events or events associated with sacred persons.<sup>23</sup> It seems clear to me that, while Maori art is not depictive in the over-all way in which is the European tradition, it nevertheless combines stylised depiction with notational elements, the latter operating through word-linked, visual, symbolic clues. Mr McEwen emphasises the centrality of the human figure in Maori art and there are examples both of a relatively unstylised (or quasi-representational) figures and of the more familiar, highly stylised ones with the elements I call notational; taken as a whole the latter are, through being of the ancestors, symbolic. It also seems there is a strongly rhetorical element in the art, perhaps related to the *haka*, and this has tended to become empty.

Mr McEwen's attitude to Maori art, like the attitude of most of those upon whom he relies, is *nil admirare*, an attitude appropriate to scholarship and never more so than when dealing with matters in which flights of fancy are notoriously hard to curb; it is a fallacy however to assume that what he deals with was produced by and for people who shared the same attitude, that is, to assume that they did not themselves marvel.<sup>24</sup> As to keeping the curbs, it appears that this is the time when the subject of Maori art, with its ramifications in other branches of Maori studies, should be reviewed bibliographically and historiographically in the light of changes in Europe and elsewhere, over the last two centuries, in the treatment of cultural phenomena. In view of their proprietorial attitude to the subject, our authorities, which are Mr McEwen's, often appear insular and conceptually ill-equipped.

This brings us to the more general issues raised in Mr McEwen's introductory section, in which a note of indecision can be detected.<sup>25</sup> He starts by chiding ethnologists for their habit of studying Maori art 'as if it had come to an abrupt end on the arrival of the European settlers . . . and [for their regarding] post-European work as being of little importance.' He does not refer however to the opposite theory of Mr L. M. Groube or to Mr Simmons's article in *Landfall* that refers to it, which article would indeed (June 1965) have been too late for Mr McEwen's article in its original form, since I understand that contributors were given a much earlier deadline.<sup>26</sup> Mr Simmons is explicitly impatient with the literature on which Mr McEwen himself largely relies and invites us instead to look at the carvings themselves and to note both the paucity of extant, authenticated pre-contact work and the paucity of reference to the carved house in the diaries of explorers and missionaries up to the 1840s. He considers much of the material considered by Mr McEwen and anticipates many of his particular conclusions about Maori carving, e.g. the effect of steel tools and the degeneration of the *Marakihau* to a mermaid. Mr Simmons however relates such phenomena to its changing historical context and challenges the long established concept, to which Mr McEwen's chide may well refer, of a 'classic period of Maori culture', understood to have (by some mysterious accident) reached a zenith at the time of the arrival of the European explorers; he also mentions the work of young Maori sculptors today. (A more recent concept of a zenith is that one was reached, as a result of mastery of the new steel tools and of cultural buoyancy due to successful adaptation to European farming techniques and produce marketing in the first two decades of European settlement, up to the Land Wars.)<sup>27</sup> Mr McEwen does not allude to the 'classic period' concept (the temptation is to say he 'is careful not to allude'), or to the work of the younger sculptors, but goes on from his chide to stress the continuity of the carving tradition up to present times, adding that 'it is probable that more major carved houses have been built in the last 30 years than in any like time in Maori history'. My guess is that Mr McEwen recast his original opening at a late stage but was unable to recast it completely or to tie up what now appear as loose ends.

As to the work of the last 30 years, there is an important story to tell and Mr McEwen is one who could tell it; if he stepped boldly outside the frame-



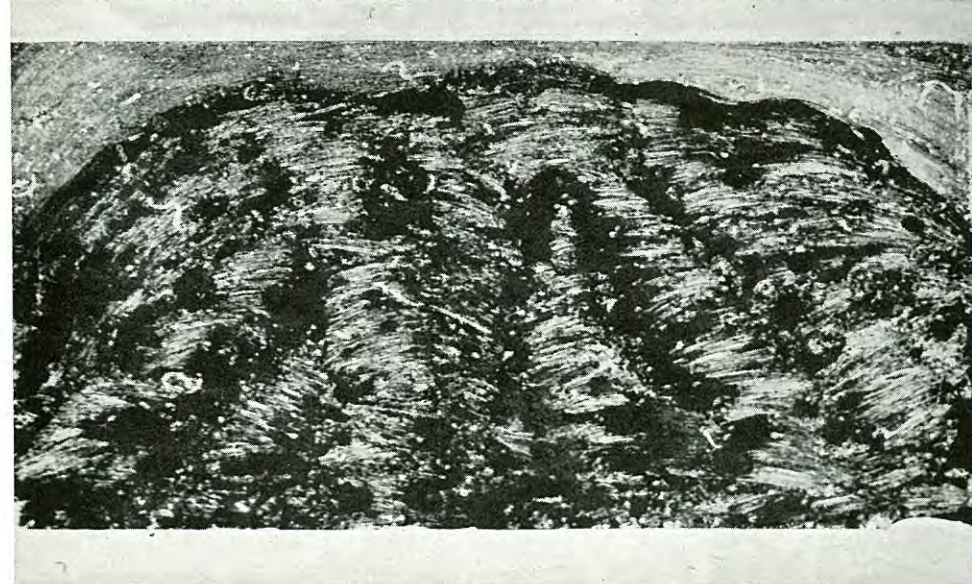
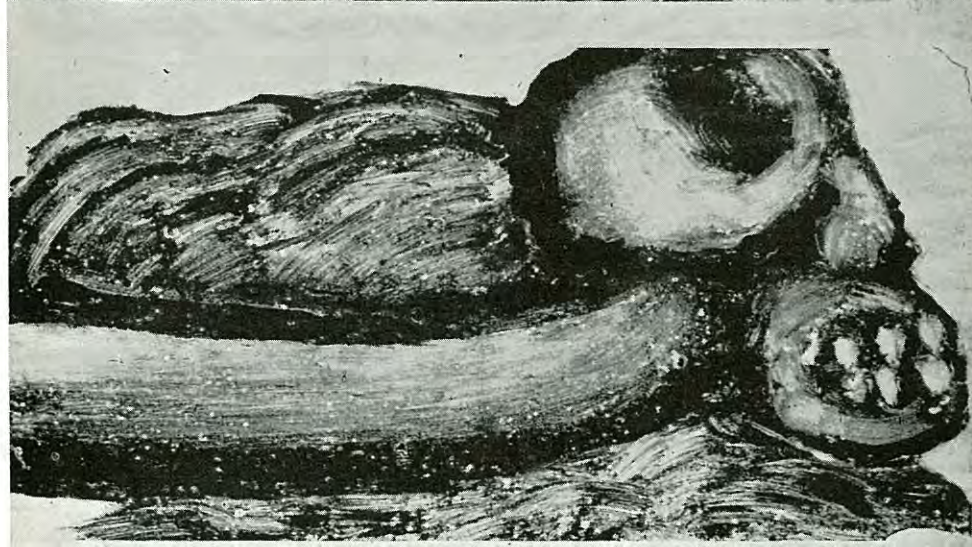
PARA MATCHITT. Te Kooti at Ngatapa. PVA on board, 1967. 60 x 48 ins. (The artist).

work of his authorities he could document it straight from the pages of his department's own publication, *Te Ao Hou*.<sup>28</sup> The work springs directly from the establishment, in 1929 in Rotorua by Sir Apirana Ngata, of the School of Maori Arts and Crafts and from the work done in and from it by the Taiapa brothers, Pine and John, who took a major part in nearly all the important carved houses made thereafter, with the exception of the Arawa ones.<sup>29</sup> Mr McEwen, in connexion with the continuity of carving, mentions families 'which have produced outstanding carvers for centuries'.<sup>30</sup> That this remark, made in conjunction with his mention of the renaissance of the last 30 years, needs qualifying, may be gleaned from the fact that the Taiapa brothers, themselves Ngati Porou, learned their carving from the (Ngati Terawhai) Arawa, Eramiha Kapua. Pine Taiapa himself tells how, the school in 1929 not being satisfactory, Sir Apirana asked him to find someone skilled in the ancient tradition and how he found Eramiha, then aged 60; Pine's article, *The Art of Adzing*, is sub-titled to make explicit that the art was 'as taught by' Eramiha, and he sets all the teaching forth in a veritable 'do-it-yourself' that Mr McEwen surely referred to in his own ventures into the art.<sup>31</sup> Pine also says of Eramiha that he was 'the very last expert of the old Maori School of Arts and Crafts'; which raises a real question of the continuity of carving families today, except perhaps amongst later Arawas of his family. According to John Taiapa as interviewed by Eric Schwimmer, Eramiha was a strict observer of the old carving *tapus* but told his pupils not to bother with them because, if they did and fell into a mistake, that would be more disastrous than if they did not; accordingly the Taiapas did not observe them.<sup>32</sup> Now this is another fact that is surely relevant to any statement on the continuity of carving; it means that the work deriving from the school, whilst otherwise dedicated to preserving the ancient lore as passed down through Eramiha, consists of secularised versions of a once sacred art; it may also be added that, even so, the term 'decorative' is at odds with Pine's account of it. In Africa one soon becomes sensitive to carving done within the ritual framework, which still survives, and so is able to detect, usually at a glance, what is done outside it but otherwise in the same tradition, nowadays for sale to visitors.

As has been noted, Mr McEwen deals with the same sort of particular change treated by Mr Simmons, but he does so in the body of his work while

his introductory section stresses continuity. That he is aware of the changes that need to be explained is shown in his sudden reference to them in the sentence that rounds off the opening paragraph, following straight on from his mention of families with successive generations of carvers. It is an astonishing sentence that begs all the questions it raises: 'Modern life has produced many changes, but all arts must change if they are to live.'<sup>33</sup>

That 'modern life has produced many changes' may stand as the understatement of the decade; that Maori traditional art has changed correspondingly and in response to the changes of modern life, which I take to be the implication of the words, is comparatively a whopping overstatement. Between the two we can hardly be convinced, in the face of Mr MacLennan's questioning, of Mr McEwen's further implication that we are here dealing with a living art. Consider for a moment the changes involved in 1850 (while also being mindful of changes in New Zealand life since 1850) when under the protection of the old heathen war lord, Te Raurapaha, the Maoris built the Rangiatea church near Otaki.<sup>34</sup> Here a buoyant culture is assimilating techniques and forms from another and making them over as its own. What happened to the Maoris, and so to the Maori culture, when the wars and the confiscations ended the buoyant period, has been dealt with frankly over the last twenty years by our historians and other specialists, including those in the *Encyclopaedia*, and is relevant to a discussion of Maori art.<sup>35</sup> The Maoris either appeared as pariahs in their own country or from a safe distance were romanticised as a noble but dying race. They survived, now increase at a faster rate than we Europeans increase, and have of late shown a return of buoyancy. The carving that resulted from Ngata's act in establishing the Rotorua school and the Taiapa practice of working for a variety of tribes with a variety of tribal helpers has resulted in a national rather than a tribal art, as Mr Schwimmer has pointed out; it is indeed a piece of Maori nationalism, re-integrative but otherwise conservative; its main function by now has been to enhance Maori claims towards something more like equality in the overall task of integrating the New Zealand nation.<sup>36</sup> This makes it all the more important that we should evaluate it and, still more, evaluate *as art* the art from which it derives. We have now parted company with Mr McEwen and must consider the state of the present New Zealand scene in order to



**TONY FOMISON.**  
Night and Day.  
Triptych, monotype,  
1963 (?)  
60½ x 35 ins.  
(Collection of R. N.  
O'Reilly).

explore the questions raised at the outset in relation to Mr Maclennan's oracle.<sup>37</sup>

Outside the accepted forms traditional in Maori art, but casually borrowing from them, the Maori people have evolved very different forms for their own purposes. In their role as entertainers they are contributing, incidentally, to the common New Zealand scene, increasingly exploited for tourists, at both the folk and the commercial levels, which are no longer capable of being distinguished. Not exploited for tourists, non-U, are such things as Ratana churches and tombstones in rural Maori communities; here are forms which, though imported from divers sources, are at variance both with the forms evolved by New Zealand Europeans and, even more so, with those obvious in the Maori art of Mr McEwen and his authorities.<sup>38</sup> (Rua's one-time temple at Maungapohatu, illustrated in a Turnbull Library photograph published in *Te Ao Hou*, is an earlier example.)<sup>39</sup> Not yet categorised for easy reference are artists who are Maoris and who do not want to be considered as Maori artists but simply as artists; Ralph Hotere is one and another is the artist painting under the pseudonym, B. Black. They could be considered simply as Maoris who anticipated Mr Maclennan's advice, but it is not as simple as that. A Maori who masters any field not traditionally associated with Maoris, and who, as Mr Pearson reminded us, usually enters into the discipline of the field in the hope that mastery of it will enable him the better to help his own people, assumes a burden far greater than it would be for any one of us, whose people have long since contributed masters to it.<sup>40</sup> (An analogous burden was that assumed by a woman entering a few generations ago a field traditionally reserved for men.) To do so he may have to repress a great part of his Maoriness, may indeed have to see through and beyond a Maori sense of acquiring the *Mana Pakeha*; his own Maoriness will not thereby be annulled, though his act may weaken the Maoriness of those who follow him.

And now to our original questions. Yes, Maori art can be regarded as art, though the job of sifting out the best of it is yet to be tackled and we must work hard on it to see it as something other than strange and exotic in its own homeland. The task of establishing its meaning and significance is not separate from the task of seeing it as art; though we can feel the force of things we do not understand and what we call great art has an inexhaustible significance, this however is not a matter that prevents

exegesis but invites it, and exegesis does not kill living art. What Maoris who are artists will do is a matter for them alone to decide as Maoris, as New Zealanders and as individuals; we can expect however that their work will be 'informed with a quality not European'.<sup>41</sup> (I must confess that this quality is not as perceptible in Ralph Hotere's work, in the new international style, as it is in Hone Tuwhare's poetry or in the work of 'B. Black'.) We may also mention here some other Maoris who are at least as worthy of mention as many artists mentioned by Mr Maclennan: Muru Walters, Para Matchitt, Selwyn Muru, for example. Some New Zealand European artists (and one expatriate Colonial-European) are indeed studying Maori art as something to be learned from: Theo Schoon who pioneered the extensive copying of Maori rock drawings and now is something of a folk artist; Tony Fomison who has had ethnographic and archaeological experience, as well as art schooling, who has for some years worked on the rock drawings and who has informed his own most moving work with a Maori quality; Gordon Walters who in his disciplined treatment, these last several years, of what he calls 'positive/negative relationships within a deliberately limited range of forms', has chosen the *koru* form to work on;<sup>42</sup> Colin McCahon who (besides deriving images for us from the familiar, geomorphically bare, New Zealand non-tourist landscape) has worked over the symbols imported and local that are part of the present New Zealand scene, to bring out afresh for us what is living and humane in them, and has blown on the cinders of Maori art to show us, there still, emblems glowing.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*; ed. A. H. McLintock. Government Printer, Wellington, 1966, 3v. Elsewhere herein referred to as the *Encyclopaedia*. (Dr McLintock retired in March from his post of Parliamentary Historian and died on 29 May, 1968; he was one of our great scholars and was overloaded with work. Unless a successor is found and given more assistants, basic historic studies he instituted will not be brought to fruition. As to a new edition of the *Encyclopaedia*, the only arrangement is that the General Assembly Library is acting as an agency for the filing of suggested alterations.)

<sup>2</sup> Maclennan's discussion of Maori art, *Encyclopaedia, op. cit.*, v. 1, p. 87, c. 2.

<sup>3</sup> MAORI ART, *Encyclopaedia, op. cit.*, v. 2, pp. 408-29. (Since frequent mention was made in the first part of this review, *Ascent*, Nov., 1967, to the ART article in the *Oxford New Zealand Encyclopaedia*, it is fair to say that the MAORI ARTS AND CRAFTS article there is

an interesting but cursory treatment of less than three pages.)

<sup>4</sup> *The Press*, 5 Dec., 1967, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Maclennan, *loc. cit.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>6</sup> MAORI ART, *op. cit.*<sup>3</sup>, p. 414, c. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Mr J. M. McEwen, *New Secretary for Maori Affairs* (in *Te Ao Hou*, *infra*<sup>28</sup>, no. 45, Mar., 1959; p. 3).

<sup>8</sup> *a*, the phonetic character for the vowel sound in 'cat'; cf. *Everyman's English Pronouncing Dictionary* by Daniel Jones.

<sup>9</sup> Recent studies are *The Art of Prehistoric Man in Western Europe* by A. G. L. Leroi-Gourhan (Thames & Hudson, London, 1968—French ed., 1965) and *Prehistoric Art* by P. M. Grand (Studio Vista, London, 1967). Mme. Grand was a pupil of Abbé Breuil and criticises Leroi-Gourhan's monumental work.

<sup>10</sup> MAORI ART, *op. cit.*<sup>3</sup>, p. 416, c.1.

<sup>11</sup> Mr McEwen has some sensible things to say (MAORI ART, *op. cit.*<sup>3</sup>, p. 410, c. 1) on the so-called 'three-fingered hand' in Maori carvings but could sum up his discussion and give the whole matter sharper art focus by indicating that stylistic considerations, in relation to the shape of the space to be filled, determine the number and placing of the fingers (a point for which I am indebted to A. L. Fomison). Where, however, the context makes identification of stylised fingers more difficult, and where the identification is nevertheless important, as in the case of the 'hand' at the end of the barge-board of the ancestor/meeting house, the fingers are precisely five (*ibid.*, *illus.*, p. 415, c. 1).

<sup>12</sup> MAORI ART, *op. cit.*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 414-415.

<sup>13</sup> A recent version of the story is given in *Te Arawa* by D. M. Stafford (Reed, Wellington, 1967) p. 180.

<sup>14</sup> *Encyclopaedia, op. cit.*<sup>1</sup>, v. 2: MAORI MYTHS AND TRADITION, pp. 447-454 (Creation myth, *Rangi and Papa*, p. 448, c. 2; *Hine-nui-te-po*, pp. 449-50).

<sup>15</sup> ETTIE A. ROUT (Mrs F. A. Hornibrook), Reporter. *Maori Symbolism*. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, London, 1926. (Her 'report' is 'from the evidence of Hohepa Te Rake'.)

<sup>16</sup> The Amazon personality of Miss Rout and the evolution of her interest in public hygiene is treated in *Venus and the Lonely Kiwi* by P. S. O'Connor (in the *New Zealand Journal of History*, v. 1, pp. 11-32, esp. p. 16 ff., Ap., 1967).

<sup>17</sup> ROUT, *op. cit.*<sup>15</sup>, esp. pp. 198-219.

<sup>18</sup> MAORI ART, *op. cit.*<sup>3</sup>, p. 414, 'Koru'.

<sup>19</sup> C. McCahon, personal communication.

<sup>20</sup> MAORI ART, *op. cit.*<sup>3</sup>, p. 414, c. 2.

<sup>21</sup> I have in mind *West African Religion* by Geoffrey Parrinder (2nd ed., Epworth Press, London, 1961). In his first chapter Parrinder discusses the imputations of 'idolatry' and 'fetishism' and shows how descriptively empty the terms are. The imputations are Judaeo-Christian (and Muslim) in origin and both are involved in Mr McEwen's discussion of the 'stick gods'.

<sup>22</sup> *What is Maori Carving?* by Agatha[!] (i.e. Mrs H.) Thornton (in *Te Ao Hou, infra*<sup>28</sup>, no. 29, pp. 41-42, Dec., 1959) p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> E. G. SCHWIMMER, *Building Art in the Maori Tradition* (in *Te Ao Hou, infra*<sup>28</sup>, no. 28, pp. 31-34, 48-51) pp. 48-49.

<sup>24</sup> *Nil admirare* (Nothing to marvel at—or trouble yourself about). HORACE. *Epistles*, Bk 1, Epist. 4, l.13.

<sup>25</sup> MAORI ART, *op. cit.*<sup>3</sup>, p. 408, c.2.

<sup>26</sup> D. R. SIMMONS. *Perspectives in Maori Carving* (in *Landfall*, v. 19, pp. 143-8).

<sup>27</sup> A. L. Fomison, in a personal communication, attributes the view to Dr R. C. Green who, 1961-1966, was

in the Department of Anthropology, University of Auckland.

<sup>28</sup> *Te Ao Hou: The New World*; ed. E. G. Schwimmer 1952-1962, Margaret Orbell 1962—. Maori Affairs Department, Wellington, for the Maori Purposes Fund Board, 1952—. Quarterly.

<sup>29</sup> SCHWIMMER, *op. cit.*<sup>23</sup>, p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> MAORI ART, *loc. cit.*<sup>25</sup>

<sup>31</sup> PINE TAIAPA. *The Art of Adzing, as taught by Eramiha Kapua of Ngati Tarawhai*[!] *Te Arawa, to students of the Maori Arts and Crafts School, Rotorua* (in *Te Ao Hou, op. cit.*<sup>28</sup>, no. 33, pp. 42-49 & no. 34, pp. 41-47; Dec., 1960 & Mar., 1961) no. 33, pp. 43-45.

<sup>32</sup> SCHWIMMER, *op. cit.*<sup>23</sup>, p. 34. John Taiapa now says (pers. comm.) that only one of the *tapus*, that against women watching, was nullified then, the others still being observed. Would even such a doughty defender as he wish to say that the (religious) social and psychological context in which *tapus* operated has more than a ghostly force today?

<sup>33</sup> MAORI ART, *loc. cit.*<sup>25</sup>

<sup>34</sup> A colour plate derived from Barraud's lithograph of the church interior is in *Rangiatea* by Eric Ramsden (Reed, Wellington, 1951), frontis.

<sup>35</sup> *Encyclopaedia, op. cit.*<sup>1</sup>, e.g. HISTORY and the articles with headings MAORI ——— (following MAORI ART), esp. MAORI HEALTH AND WELFARE, MAORI SOCIAL STRUCTURE, MAORI WARS, all in v. 2.

<sup>36</sup> SCHWIMMER, *op. cit.*<sup>23</sup>, p. 50.

<sup>37</sup> Maclennan, *loc. cit.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>38</sup> The temple interior at Ratana township is illustrated in *Ratana* by J. M. Henderson (Polynesian Society, Wellington, 1963) facing p. 72; the Te Hapua church in the far north, facing p. 73. Mr Henderson discusses Ratana symbols, stating that they are ancient Maori ones, but fails to discuss the obvious (even if unconscious) reference to Islam in the Ratanaist star and crescent. There are curious parallels between Mohammed's and Ratana's treatment of the Judaeo-Christian traditions and between the Islamic reference to Mohammed as the 'prophet' and Ratanaist reference to Ratana as the '*Manga*' ('mouthpiece') of God. And, as Mohammed attacked polytheism, so Ratana attacked (polytheistic) *tohunga*-ism.

<sup>39</sup> *Te Ao Hou, op. cit.*<sup>28</sup>, no. 29, Dec., 1959; p. 38. (Nearer the traditional and yet also at variance with it, is the rafter painting in the old meeting house *Te Whai a te Motu*, Ruatahuna, *illus.* inside front cover of no. 45, Dec., 1963).

<sup>40</sup> BILL PEARSON. *The Maori People* (in *Landfall*, v. 16, pp. 148-180, June, 1962; no. 7 of the series *New Zealand since the War*) p. 167. Pearson's article remains basic for a European appreciation of the Maori in the contemporary New Zealand scene and a pervasive sense of the cultural issues involved.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>42</sup> *Gordon Walters* [Catalogue of an exhibition]. New Vision Gallery, Auckland, n.d. [i.e. 1968]. Gordon Walters' interest in Maori art according to Kees Hos of the Gallery 'originates from his contacts long ago with Theo Schoon' (pers. comm.). Hos also states that Walters' motif is based on the ponga bud. It is not incompatible with McCahon's elucidation (*supra*<sup>19</sup> and p. 56) that the *koru* may also involve a play of forms with the unfolding or thrusting 'bud' of the ponga frond; the significance would hardly differ. Mrs G. Walters is Margaret Orbell, editor of *Te Ao Hou* (*supra*<sup>28</sup>).



# Reviews

## The Auckland Scene

During the last six months Auckland has witnessed the birth and death of another dealer gallery. This was the Vulcan Gallery which opened on Thursday evening, 26 October, under the Directorship of Alan Pearson and Gary Underwood. It had been planned to make the gallery the swiftest in Auckland, with a policy of promoting 'all aspects of the visual arts' including crafts and possibly furniture. Also to be considered were 'adult life painting and sketching classes, speech and drama classes, lectures, film evenings and children's art classes during the weekends'. But these things were not to be. The Vulcan Gallery ceased to function from the beginning of March, after four months in existence.

During this same period two stimulating lectures were delivered, one by P. A. Tomory to the Art Gallery Associates on October 31; the other, the first Vernon Brown Memorial Lecture, was given on April 18 by Hamish Keith. For this lecture Mr Keith drew upon his experiences of the art world during his recent visit to the United States and England on a Carnegie Fellowship. Mr Keith considered the unsatisfactory role of the artist in a world of mass culture and mass production, and wondered if

the artist had really adapted his mode of expression to contemporary society. He also queried the role of the Art Gallery (or Art Museum) in minimizing the effectiveness of much that has been valuable in recent art movements by a policy of extreme tolerance towards any art form, from the conventional to the outrageous. Such enlightenment often proves to be a destructive rather than a constructive force because it undermines any sort of valid protest the artist may be trying to make. Although Mr Keith's lecture was only indirectly concerned with the local situation, Mr Tomory's address, *Imaginary Reefs and Floating Islands*, was directly related to painting in New Zealand.

In 1965 the Auckland City Art Gallery acquired a collection of 37 drawings by Henry Fuseli. Considered as a collection these drawings form one of the most important collections of Fuseli drawings in the world. These were placed on display at the City Gallery during December and the first week of January. At present they are on exhibition in London at the gallery of Roland, Browse and Delbanco, and are later to be shown in Honolulu.

The event of interest during February was the



COLIN McCahON. Otago Landscape 4. Polyvinyl acetate, 1967. 48 x 48 ins.

announcement of the first Benson and Hedges Art Award. The term award is perhaps misleading as it is rather a prize won in open competition. While the winning entry, *Outside the Inside-out* by Wong Sing Tai of Wellington, was generally accepted with only a few dissenting voices, a number of people, including artists and others concerned with the visual arts, felt that the judge, Mr Robert Haines of Sydney, had compromised on his final selection of paintings for the exhibition. However, without seeing all the paintings submitted for the Award this question must remain speculative. It must also be remembered that such an exhibition is the result of one man's

choice over which he has no real initial control, and that in this case, it was undertaken by someone unfamiliar with New Zealand painting. What can be questioned is the inferior quality of a few of the paintings in the travelling exhibition; in particular those of W. F. Moore, Ted Dutch and Gerry Nigro.

Over the past few weeks Colin McCahon has been preparing for an exhibition, to open on 1 July, at the Bonython Gallery in Sydney.

### Painting

All the paintings in Colin McCahon's exhibition shared the general title *North Otago Landscapes*. 'These Landscapes', writes the painter, 'are based on places I have seen and known. I once lived in North Otago and in the last eighteen months have revisited the area three times. These visits have all been made in the winter. Each time it has been windless and cold. Once a thin snowfall lay over the hills and the essential black and green quality of the landscape was emphasized. Unlike many other parts of the country the landforms of North Otago suggest both age and permanence. They have been formed, not by violence, but by the slow processes of normal erosion on more gentle landscape faulting than has happened elsewhere. In painting this landscape I am not trying to show any simple likeness to a specific place.' These paintings, while not amongst McCahon's most perfectly realized landscapes, do capture much of the strength that characterizes his best work. They also reveal a revived interest in



M. T. WOOLLASTON. Grey River. Oil, 1967. 23¼ x 35¼ ins. Private collection, Fiji.

colour along with a more optimistic outlook than has been evident in much of his work over the past couple of years. Not all the *North Otago Landscapes* are successful in the fullest sense. One problem rarely found in McCahon, but noticeable in numbers 4, 14 and 24, is a slight lapse in the control over tone, but the medium used could possibly be partly to blame for this. On a deeper level the overall effectiveness of numbers 7 and 24 leaves room for improvement as does the foreground in number 2, although the remainder of this painting is extremely good. While these points of dispute exist, there are, in fact, no real failures amongst the paintings. Some simply work better than others. The best succeed because they capture a particular type of landscape and present it as a complete entity where form and content are welded together.

M. T. Woollaston's exhibition contained twenty-one paintings. If there were no really outstanding works, the general quality of most of the paintings was high. Compared with the works shown last year in Auckland, the current paintings hint at a broader treatment with colours that are less chalky, more vital, and even with occasional touches of bright pigment. A very real problem one faces with an exhibition of Woollaston's paintings is the internal inconsistencies in many of his works. So often, what would have been a magnificent painting, is reduced in quality by thoughtlessness and the artist's insistence that nothing, once put down, be reconsidered. Hence the centre foreground that is so disturbing in

*Tourist's View, Taramakau*, and which destroys the unity of an otherwise good picture, could have been avoided, and eliminated had greater effort been applied. The simple *View from Orowaiti*, although not as dynamic as other works in the exhibition, is free from the disarming passages found in them, however small these might be. Other paintings contain areas that reveal Woollaston at his best, for example, the sky in one of the *Taramakau* paintings.

Don Binney's exhibition, completed before he left on his trip abroad, contained a number of works revealing that he has still to overcome certain technical problems. Sometimes areas in his pictures are out of tone so that a feature in a landscape will jump out of context, or the foreground area is only partly solved, or a natural image, such as the lizard in *Grave, Te Henga III*, is only half realized as a workable entity. However, while conscious of such shortcomings, his work has a compelling quality that makes it memorable. Don Binney is, in the truest sense, an image maker with the capacity to instil into his images the potentials of a symbol. In this way his paintings can be equated with certain areas of New Zealand. This is clearly seen in *Pond Bird, Te Henga*. Native birds, while not the dominant image in this exhibition, have an important place in his pictorial language and one hopes he does not bow to those people who consider that Binney has been painting birds for long enough and is due for a change. As *Pond Bird, Te Henga* illustrates, they are still vitally alive and to drive them out from his pictures at a time when he is achieving mastery over them would be regrettable.

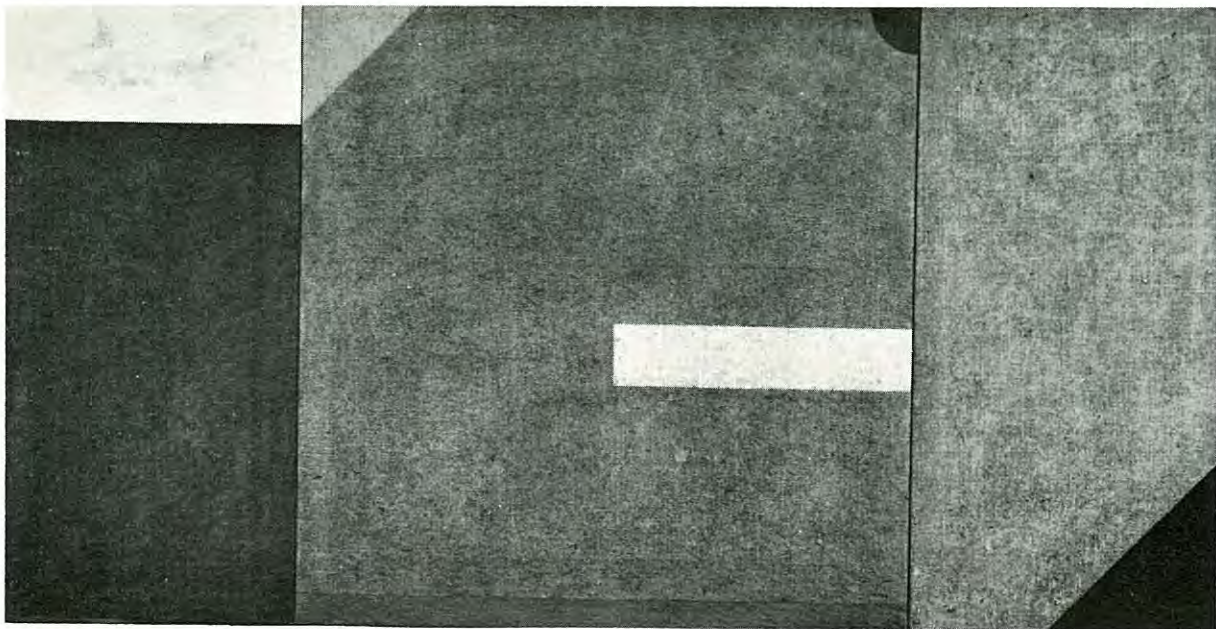
The twelve paintings in Milan Mrkusich's exhibition continued, in a similar vein, the theme he has been pursuing for the past two or more years. But there are some essential differences. The small areas of colour with their optical after-images have largely disappeared and are replaced by a simpler approach. In some of the paintings the colour combinations appear uneasy, while in *Dark Painting 1967*, where Mrkusich seems to be trying something a little different, the area of barely perceptible squares is not successful in adding anything to the general idea behind the painting. *Triptych (Purple, Sienna and Blue)*, made up of three separate panels framed as one painting, along with *Blue Spread*, presents the best painterly solutions where image, colour and shape act as a single unit. *Blue Spread* illustrates Mrkusich's absolute control over his medium. The bottom grey-white area is skilfully handled and has



DON BINNEY. *Pond Bird, Te Henga*. Oil, 1967. 40 x 34 ins.

none of the blotchiness seen in the green of *Dominant Green* nor the disturbing brush marks observable in *Ambient Gold*. The way in which the bottom panel is combined and contrasted with the larger blue area, heightened, as it is, by its well ordered and controlled red images, made this painting the best in the exhibition.

'The inspired intuition', writes Louise Henderson, 'from which I poured out my paintings seems to move towards new aspects more related to life, in which I try to overcome the dehumanizing tendencies in contemporary painting. The acceptance of a more common, human pattern and the human figure will possibly increase in my work.' From this statement it is clear that Louise Henderson has attached special significance to her new series of paintings, *Bathers*. While these paintings possessed some pleasant qualities they lacked the directness of the earlier abstract paintings which shared the exhibition with the *Bathers*. The handling of the figures is at times awkward and several of the paintings give the impression that the idea behind them had petered out before the work was completed. Even in the best ones there are ambiguities to be sorted out. The most striking aspect of the *Bathers* is the feeling that the painter has turned to the styles of the 1920s, a feature clearly



MILAN MRKUSICH. Triptych (purple, sienna and blue). Oil, 1967-8. 31 x 62½ ins.

seen in the stylization of the faces.

The only other woman painter to have a one-man exhibition was Helen Brown. Of the Auckland painters who established themselves in the nineteen-forties, Helen Brown is one of the few to have maintained some sort of artistic growth, even if this development has not been wholly consistent. Her subject interest, for the time being, remains centred on the coast-line and islands around Auckland, but what she puts down often betrays uncertainties, especially in matters relating to the visual image and the way it is set down in paint. Frequent dull areas appear where images have become hackneyed or where the brushwork is simply insensitive. However, a few paintings seen in the exhibition achieve equilibrium between the paintwork, the abstract qualities and the visual images. Most notable are *Harbour Entrance* and *Three Headlands*.

Two young women painters to make their debut were Barbara Stanish and Carmel Kelly. Both have similar interests in the human figure, particularly women in leisurely attitudes, as well as sharing certain painting characteristics. Whereas Barbara Stanish's paintings are more convincing than her drawings, the reverse is so with Carmel Kelly's work. While Miss Kelly's lively drawings belong to an established tradition, their quality of draughtsmanship is refreshing to look at.

One pleasant aspect of the Auckland Society of Arts Members' Exhibition was the reappearance of

Charles Tole. Like Helen Brown, Charles Tole is one of the Auckland painters to emerge during the nineteen-forties and remain active as a painter. His *Still-life*, in spite of the fact that some may consider it old fashioned, has more to offer than most of the more modern-looking works on display. Also in the exhibition were paintings by John Ritchie, Eunice Gasson, Jan Nigro, Burnie Hope, a portrait *Helena* by Frank Szirmay, some drawings by Nelson Thompson and some of Hazel Berryman's prints that at least merit mention. Amongst the topographical painters, Cyril Whiteoak's watercolours are the most noteworthy.

Another painter whose work has not been viewed in Auckland for some years is Jan Michels. Late in 1963 he returned to Holland but at the beginning of this year he revisited New Zealand for a few weeks. He is an expressionist, but while his work reveals a kinship with the painters of the Cobra Group, he is less aggressive and his gestures are not so wild or macabre. Such an approach gives him the advantages of immediacy and impact though it also encourages ambiguity and loss of form and definition. Frequently this problem of ambiguity outweighs the more positive qualities. One such quality, usually avoided by New Zealanders, is the emphasis given to a deliberately forceful use of colour.

Alan Thornton is an Australian painter with some similarities to expressionists like James Ensor. On the whole few of his paintings can be claimed to



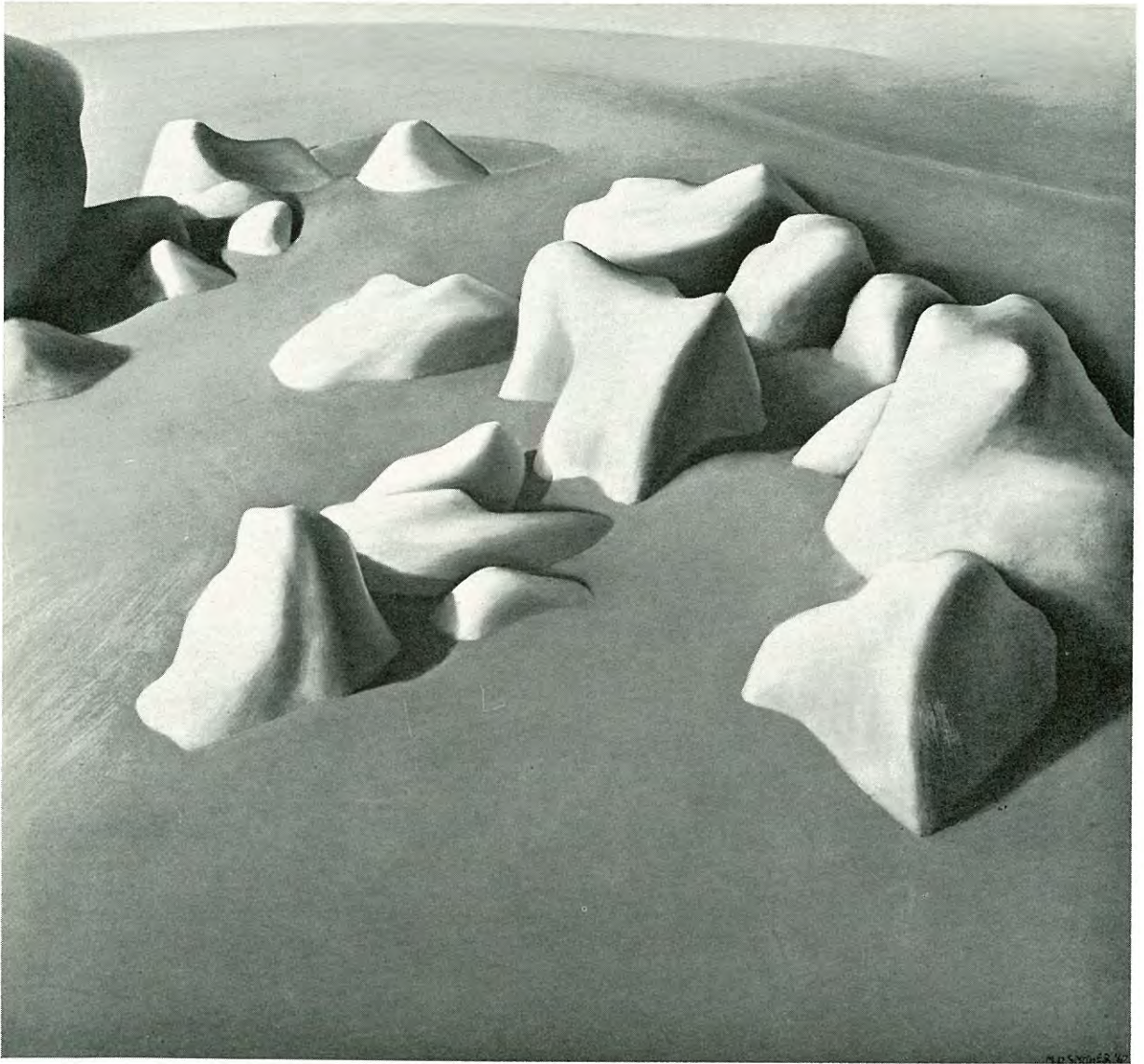
E. N. BRACEY. North Island Synthesis XIII. Oil, 1968, 45 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 48 ins.

be fully successful, while many of his ideas are somewhat naïve. He has, and this is his advantage over other more sophisticated painters, a strong belief in the ideas behind his paintings. These are couched in highly symbolic terms, and it is this that has appealed to some people while rendering the paintings unpopular to others.

One exhibition to receive more popular support than it deserved was *Face to Face*, an exhibition of painters' portraits of each other. Unfortunately a number of misunderstandings arose concerning the purpose of the exercise which resulted in some of

the original participants withdrawing while others lost much of their initial interest. The final result was a few reasonable portraits, a number of undistinguished ones and some very inferior efforts. The painting to arouse most interest appears to have been Colin McCahon's *Portrait of Gordon H. Brown*.

Roy Good is a young painter whose output has sufficient quality to demand attention. While his work tends towards pattern making of good design, rhythm and colour but little substance, there are occasional paintings offering something more



MICHAEL SMITHER. Rocks and sand at low tide. Oil, 1967. 23½ x 36 ins.

purposeful. *White and Green and Blue . . .* and *It could be to have*, in addition to a natural sense of design, an assured command over the pictorial elements which add up to more than a mundane sense of good taste.

The exhibition *This Land* included a number of interesting works without holding together well as an exhibition. Suzanne Goldberg, Quentin MacFarlane and Ted Bracey emphasize the suggestibility and physical qualities of paint. Although working within a limited tonal range, MacFarlane's *Summer Storm* was the most colourful painting in the exhibition, followed by the almost pointillist

watercolour by Patrick Hanly, but this work was not much more than mildly interesting. Ted Bracey's *North Island Synthesis XIII* showed more independence from the Richard Diebenkorn influence so obvious in the exhibition he shared with Maris Donald late last year. The ability to overcome technical problems has rarely worried Bracey to the same degree as his reliance on other painters' modes of expression. His most recent paintings suggest that perhaps he is overcoming this temptation. Although not ignoring the expressive qualities of the paint brush, McCahon's *The Second Easter Landscape: the Central Plateau* and Freda Simmonds' two paint-



**RICHARD KILLEEN.** *Man, Land and Sky.* Oil, 1968. 30 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 30 $\frac{3}{4}$  ins.

ings minimize these qualities for the sake of symbolic meaning, while Michael Smither's *Rocks and Sand at Low Tide* and Richard Killeen's *Man, Land, Sea, Sky* and *Man, Land and Sky*, minimize their appeal in order to stress the immediacy of the images so that they can add to the total pictorial effectiveness of the painting. Richard Killeen's clear-cut, controlled realism (he dislikes the term super-realism) would be closer to the avant-garde, if that term had not lost its meaning, than other more obviously up-to-the-minute movements. While having learnt

from McCahon's method of contrasting dark against light, Killeen shows sufficient independence from this influence for it to escape being obvious, and his means of eliminating non-essentials and his attitude to paint qualities reveal a marked divergence. As yet he is not always sure of himself, and he often encounters basic problems in his attempts to depict human figures, but a painter as young as Killeen, cannot solve all his problems at once.

In Michael Smither's recent shore-line rock paintings like *Two Rock Pools* (in the Benson and Hedges



FREDA SIMMONDS. Pied Oystercatcher. Oil, 1967. 42 x 24 ins.

exhibition) and *Rocks and Sand at Low Tide*, he shares some of the qualities found in Killeen's work. This is hardly the case with his exhibition of religious paintings. A crucial work is the second version of *The Baptism*, combining as it does, religious figures with the realistic elements of a rock pool. Where the landscape setting seems natural, the figures are awkward as if uncomfortable in such surroundings rather than being naturally a part of it. *Saint Francis in Ecstasy in the Presence of Nature* does at least achieve a reasonable unity between the conception of the figure and the landscape setting. The partial success of this painting, of *The Baptism of Christ* and *Christ Walking on Water* represents the exception rather than the norm for these religious works, many of which fall foul of the obvious pitfalls that

can be encountered in this type of figurative painting.

During November, five months after his previous exhibition, Max McLellan staged another show, this time at the Barry Lett Galleries. Except for three paintings connected with the *Canberra Series*, the paintings in this exhibition were more decisive in treatment and use of colour. However, he still lacks complete control over the way he paints edges and in the gradation of neighbouring colours, especially noticeable where 'Op' effects have been striven for. If his images are to work properly then such faults must be remedied. Some of these problems seem to arise from the apparent haste with which the works have been painted. By far the most consistent and convincing painting is *November*. Its greens, grey and white colour combination is simple, but workable, while the geometric elements suggest more than just a collection of well regulated shapes.

#### *Retrospective Exhibitions*

If, in fact, Louise Henderson's exhibition emphasized her work over the past four years, the retrospective aspect seems not to have been intentional. Similarly, the work from private collections shown at the Building Centre had a corresponding effect. As an exhibition it was indifferent in quality, with bad, mediocre and good works jumbled together in a rather disorganized way. One of the few paintings to deserve prolonged attention was a very fine portrait by Nerli of Mrs Forgie as a child.

The Auckland Society of Arts' Festival Exhibition of New Zealand women painters was the most worthwhile exhibition seen in their gallery for some years. As seems inevitable with exhibitions of this sort, there were some inferior works that did not add anything to the exhibition, while painters like Olivia Spencer-Bower, Edith Collier and Pauline Thompson were excluded, although there may have been good reasons for their absence. Out of the works painted since 1940 those of May Smith, Evelyn Page, Doris Lusk, Rita Angus and Freda Simmonds were amongst the more exceptional. Although there were some reasonable paintings from the younger women, their work was generally disappointing, especially when several of them are capable of much better paintings than those shown. Perhaps the greatest interest centred on Frances Hodgkins, Grace Joel, D. K. Richmond, M. O. Stoddart and Mina Arndt, all of whom were fairly represented. D. K. Richmond's *Early Morning, Wellington Harbour* and



*Trees*, from around the 1900 period, show her good qualities much better than her later, better known, flower pieces. More rewarding, if simply because they are only now receiving the recognition they deserve, is the work of Grace Joel and Mina Arndt. Grace Joel's qualities as a painter were well illustrated in *Young Girl* and *Portrait of a Gentleman*.

The other exhibition to look backward at what has happened was *Ten Years of New Zealand Painting in Auckland*. The paintings were obviously intended to be viewed as documentary items rather than a gleaning of carefully considered, significant works of art. Some of the selected paintings were poor in quality but appear to have been included to illustrate a subject of common interest during this period. To a number of onlookers the total effect gained from the exhibition suggested the fragmentation of New Zealand painting rather than a pointing towards some common denominator. To some degree this is true, but it is no less true of painting from other parts of the world. To over-emphasize this is partly the result of near-sightedness where insufficient distance is available to enable a clear view to be gained. Some people, taking a clue from the Victorian paintings on show at the Building Centre, pointed to the art of last century, forgetting that this battle of the styles was also a feature of the nineteenth century, and that the differences then apparent have proved less than originally thought. If we consider paintings from Australia, from England, Germany, Italy or from the United States, characteristic elements are often singled out which, while not necessarily nationalistic, are regarded as national in origin. The real question then, is whether there are signs indicative of growing national characteristics in New Zealand painting? Here a distinction must be drawn between a national style of painting and national characteristics that go beyond stylistic differences. The most obvious influences are environmental ones. Here the effect that the harsh natural light has had on New Zealand painters has been singled out for comment over a period extending beyond one hundred years, although it is only comparatively recently that painters have begun to exploit this aspect more fully. If works from the two recent exhibitions of Australian paintings to tour New Zealand are considered, what becomes apparent in the Australian work is the brighter range of colour, the general emphasis on textural qualities and a tendency toward literal types of subjects, while in comparison



**GIROLAMO PIERI NERLI.** Mrs Forgie as a child. Oil, 19 x 12 $\frac{3}{8}$  ins. Mr John Forgie, Auckland.

New Zealand painters seem to prefer more sombre colours, a greater emphasis on contrasting tones and a broader, more abstract approach to their subject matter. As with any generalization, this is over-stating the case, but it does explain why visiting Australians often complain that our painting is cold-hearted and sometimes a little gloomy, while New Zealanders claim that much Australian painting is fussy and overconcerned with qualities that New Zealand painters often regard as superficial. Surely these conflicting attitudes result from an over-simplification of characteristics that are recognizable as national in origin. On the New Zealand side, these things were discernible in a great many, but by no means all of the paintings in the Auckland exhibition.

### *Sculpture*

What has proved striking about the two exhibitions by groups of sculptors has been the work from the younger exhibitors. In the exhibition organized largely by the New Zealand Society of Sculptors, a

notable feature was the dullness of much that was offered, particularly the disappointing quality, or the absence, of work by the older sculptors.

By local standards Darcy Lange's well made constructions are large. These explore, with moderate success, the spacial relationships between elementary shapes—oblongs, squares, cylinders—which are partly isolated from each other yet are tied together by rod-like, or sheet-metal, linking elements that extend the structure outwards from its basic area of balance. Don Driver's work is also constructed and often utilizes a good deal of 'ready-made' material. There are, however, two sides to Driver, and the carefully proportioned, formal but elegant *Sentinel*, is more convincing than the tongue-in-cheek work called *Hello Dolly*. Warren Viscoe's colourful, though not entirely successful *Hybrid*, has a genuine humorous appeal that is absent from *Hello Dolly*. But if the frivolous element in Driver's work is compared with the highly sophisticated decorative pieces by Terry Powell, then the latter seem superficial, fashionable and often unsatisfactory in their overall proportions. It is said that they are satirical in intention, but this is rarely self-evident.

While less blatantly modern, the work of Graham Brett holds promise. His series of small bronzes entitled *Woman* suggest a debt to Boccioni. Although parts of the human image have been amputated, the works exist as complete entities and are sculpturally satisfying. *Woman III* is the most assured piece in the set. Two other young sculptors showing work of merit are Leon Narby and Marte Szirmay.

Greer Twiss's recent sculpture, while technically good, is in other respects disappointing. The inclusive title given to these works is *Frozen Frames*. In the sculptor's words, the title 'implies a relationship with photographic imagery, in terms of perspective, distortion, the freezing of light and the arbitrary framing of environment. You are the camera. You, the viewer, create the environment in which the sculpture operates, by your acceptance of the limitations of a specific view-point.' These ideas are most clearly appreciated in the 'pre-image' drawings with their cut-out photographs of parts of bodies, the implied distance between the main figurative image and a small subsidiary one, and the drawn, elongated shadows. While these collages more or less succeed, the idea is not successfully carried through into the sculptures. What is acceptable in the two-dimensional photographic image seems an unnecessary and arbitrary limitation when applied to a sculpture. The

manner in which limbs, bodies, heads are cleanly sliced through as if some invisible frame has hidden the rest of the body from view, has led to the figures being terminated at unfortunate places, and gives the sculptures an awkward fragmentary appearance. Another doubtful aspect comes from the way the sculptures are painted—usually in a single colour, red, blue, white or black—sometimes with a painted shadow cast across the stand; an addition that rarely helps to clarify the total impression. If considerable doubt can be directed at Twiss's realization of his ideas, there are a few works from this exhibition that did succeed. From the larger works *Framed Plane I* was sculpturally the most successful, as were a number of the smaller works. A few other less successful ones were at least intriguing.

GORDON H. BROWN

## EXHIBITION CALENDAR

### OCTOBER 1967

North Otago Landscapes by Colin McCahon. Barry Lett Galleries: 24 October to 3 November.  
Paintings and drawings by Peter Smith. New Vision Gallery: 25 October to 4 November.  
Paintings and drawings by Alan Pearson. Opening exhibition, Vulcan Gallery: 27 October to 10 November.  
Recent Prints from Britain: P. Caulfield, B. Cohen, A. Davie, R. Denny, J. Dine, D. Hockney, H. Hodgkin, A. Jones, E. Paolozzi, P. Sedgley and W. Scott. Auckland City Art Gallery: 31 October to 19 November.

### NOVEMBER

Pottery, prints and ceramic sculpture by Juliet Peter and Roy Cowan. New Vision Gallery: 6-18 November.  
New Paintings by Max McLellan. Barry Lett Galleries: 6-17 November.  
Paintings and drawings by Colin McCahon, Ross Ritchie, Pauline Thompson, Carmel Kelly and Barbara Stanish. Vulcan Gallery: 9-22 November.  
Paul Wunderlich lithographs 1949-1967. Auckland City Art Gallery: 13 November to 10 December.  
Paintings by Helen Brown. John Leech Gallery: 14 November to 1 December.  
Te Kooti: paintings and prints by Para Matchitt. New Vision Gallery: 20 November to 1 December.  
Sculpture by Greer Twiss, Darcy Lange, Warren Viscoe, Molly Macalister, Don Driver, Terry Powell and Ted Kindleyside. Barry Lett Galleries: 20 November to 1 December.  
Paintings by Alan Thornton. Vulcan Gallery: 24 November to 6 December.  
Drawings by Henry Fuseli, R.A. Auckland City Art Gallery: 30 November to 7 January.

### DECEMBER

Paintings by Maris Donald and Ted Bracey. Barry Lett Galleries: 4-15 December.  
Rodin and His Contemporaries (A. Dunhill Ltd. Collection). Auckland City Art Gallery: 7 December to 31 January.

### JANUARY, 1968

Paintings and drawings by Roy Good, Norman Markby

and John Parker. Vulcan Gallery: 19 January to 7 February.

Paintings and drawings by Don Binney. Barry Lett Galleries: 22 January to 2 February.

## FEBRUARY

New Paintings by Milan Mrkusich. Barry Lett Galleries: 5-16 February.

Recent Paintings by Jan Michels. New Vision Gallery: 12-23 February.

Paintings by Denis O'Connor. Vulcan Gallery: 15-28 February.

Benson and Hedges Art Award Exhibition. Barry Lett Galleries: 18 February to 1 March.

## MARCH

Paintings and drawings by Gustave Devanthery. Giotto Gallery: 6-21 March.

The 1946-7 Ned Kelly paintings by Sidney Nolan. Auckland City Art Gallery: 15 March to 10 April.

Recent New Zealand sculpture. Auckland City Art Gallery: 15 March to 30 April.

Ten years of New Zealand painting in Auckland. Auckland City Art Gallery: 15 March to 12 May.

Paintings by Louise Henderson. New Vision Gallery: 18-29 March.

Frozen frames: recent sculpture and drawings by Greer Twiss. Barry Lett Galleries: 18-31 March.

Pictures from private collections: Portraits, paintings and sculpture. Building Centre: 18 March to 7 April. Victorian Taste: Paintings from the Auckland City Art Gallery collection. Building Centre: 18 March to 7 April.

New Zealand women painters, 1845-1968. Auckland Society of Arts: 18 March to 14 April.

## APRIL

Recent paintings by M. T. Woollaston. Barry Lett Galleries: 1-14 April.

Face to face—painters' portraits: Norman Bilbrough, Gordon H. Brown, Patrick Hanly, Kees Hos, Colin McCahon, Stanley Palmer, Ted Smyth and Garth Tapper. New Vision Gallery: 1-19 April.

Graphic International; prints from Great Britain, Holland, Australia and New Zealand. New Vision Gallery: 22 April to 3 May.

Paintings and drawings by Jiri Kayser. John Leech Gallery: 23 April to 10 May.

This Land, paintings related to the New Zealand environment. Barry Lett Galleries: 29 April to 10 May.

Members' exhibition. Auckland Society of Arts: 30 April to 17 May.

## MAY

New paintings by Stanley Palmer. New Vision Gallery: 6-17 May.

Religious paintings and drawings by Michael Smither. Barry Lett Galleries: 13-24 May.

Sculpture by James Bowie. John Leech Gallery: 14-31 May.

## The Wellington Scene

When the City Council approved the grant for a sculpture in the Civic Square much of the reaction from the public reflected the conservatism which typifies the Wellington art scene. However, recent de-



Harry Wong Sing Tai.

velopments and events may yet help to shape the change in attitude sought by a progressive minority whose interests were successfully represented in national competition.

Of the five Wellington artists who entered the Benson and Hedges Award, the City produced the winner and two whose work was commended. This serves as constructive recognition to those artists, who in doing contemporary work in Wellington, strive as individuals towards a common aim while contending with the dominance of the traditional school for which we are better known.

The winner, Harry Wong Sing Tai, was born in Otaki and is part Chinese and part Welsh-Canadian. He developed an interest in art while at high school and studied for a year at the Polytechnic.

Although he has since used art as an outlet for his main interests, he has exhibited three paintings. The first was in the mid-66 exhibition at the Barry Lett Galleries in Auckland and the third, which was in the Academy was an extension of his second, the Award winning painting *Outside the Inside-Out*. This he describes as an 'expression of an emotion stimulated by an event for which he had great feeling'.

Gordon Walters was born in Wellington and studied here for a time before going to Australia and Europe where he often had to work part-time. Since his return to New Zealand, some ten years ago, he has done some free-lance work and exhibited 'occasionally in Wellington, but mostly in Auckland'. Walters is at present working as art editor for School Publications and planning an exhibition in Sydney.

Exhibiting in other centres is typical of many artists doing contemporary work in Wellington and this is

largely attributable to the prevalent conservatism which, in part, results in a lack of demand for 'suitable' exhibition space.

The Centre Gallery, which began as part of the Architectural Centre but is now a separate entity, is a venue for exhibitions of contemporary work and among those artists who have exhibited there are Vera Jamieson, Joan McArthur, John Drawbridge, Elva Bett, Bonnie Quirk, Helen Stewart and Gwen Knight. Until comparatively recently the gallery was in Lambton Quay, where because the rental on the premises was over £1,000 per year, part was sub-let to the W.E.A. When they moved the Gallery was threatened with recession until a city council grant of \$1,000 secured well-lit exhibition space in a Willis Street coffee bar.

Since the change the exhibition standard has varied, but the financial improvement, the wider audience and the tight exhibition schedule promising some high quality work, has compensated for this.

Further exhibition space is available at the Dunhill Foundation which rents 1,800 square feet from the Display Centre in Cuba Street and provides free space and organizes publicity to exhibitors of the fine and applied arts.

The room, originally intended for conferences, features a bright blue carpet and brown and tan formica panels—a reasonable background for pottery. Because the space is free, and the exhibitions sponsored, the selection is varied and they are able to present exhibitions not always available to other galleries.

The Centre Gallery and the Dunhill Foundation rooms have the advantage of being central and accessible to city viewers when compared with the position of the Academy rooms and the National Art Gallery.

In some quarters the academy is frequently criticized for the comparatively small proportion of contemporary work exhibited. But, while some of the established contemporary painters have had their work refused others have never submitted. Some consider that a more liberal policy towards the selection of work should be adopted, but in the meantime, the Academy does give those artists whose work is accepted a standard to achieve.

The appointment of Melvin Day as the new Director of the National Art Gallery is seen by some as a step forward and it is hoped that more contemporary New Zealand work will be shown.

Two attempts are currently being made to establish contemporary painting in Wellington.

The first is the recent proposal to start a Society of

Contemporary Artists. Thirty have received questionnaires and to date their replies are wholly favourable. An exhibition of their work is planned for July of next year in the Academy rooms.

The second attempt is being made by Paul Olds at the University where since his appointment as the Lecturer in Visual Arts at the Extension, about 16 months ago, he has secured the premises and the basic equipment with which to embark on a long term programme of teaching by 'example rather than precept'. The aim being to develop an appreciation of art in its widest sense.

The programme is developing along two lines. Firstly at the University where six artists and two sculptors are to hold exhibitions in the library, where possible coinciding with talks by them. The students have themselves formed a Visual Arts Society and have heard talks by John Drawbridge and Toss Woollaston. Some have joined drawing groups and it is hoped that classes in printmaking and photography can be organised for them.

Secondly aside from the University are the summer and week-end schools employing the best tutors available in their fields. To date these have included Kees Hos, Don Peebles, Patrick Hanly and Toss Woollaston. Two film schools are planned for later in the year and the aim of the second one will be to produce a ten minute film.

On a different level the City Council has, with the \$6,000 grant for a sculpture in the Civic Square, an opportunity to promote contemporary art in Wellington. But even if something in 'fine traditional style' is chosen, the interest created is adding vitality to the art scene.

It is perhaps worth noting that the last major work of art ordered by a Wellington City Council was the statue of Queen Victoria, acquired in 1905, and that the venue for the proposed sculpture is the Civic Square where an art gallery is shown on the draft town plan.

Although Wellington has no art scene in the sense accepted in other centres, it does have a public, who though conservative are interested. It also has a minority of serious contemporary painters who may have failed to achieve note here as individuals but must surely make some impact with an organization behind them and when this happens Wellington should be taken more seriously as an art centre.

ROBYN ORMEROD

## The Christchurch Scene

In March the Christchurch Pan Pacific Arts Festival with 30 good, bad or indifferent exhibitions, crowded more into three weeks than is normally available during a year. Panic goaded a few inveterate viewers into visiting everything but most succumbed to visual indigestion long before the arrival in April of the final and probably best exhibition—that of Australian sculpture. Meanwhile the menu had been somewhat as follows . . .

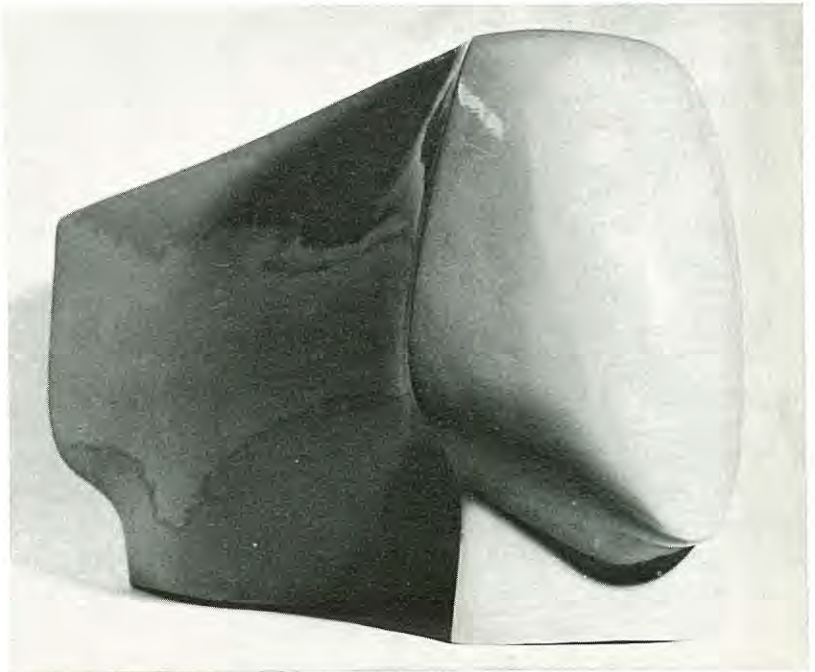
Showing (or performing?) at the Exhibition Centre was David Cowie's 'environmental art' display. Various forms and shapes, some movable, but all non-symbolic and non-organic and mostly painted white, were mounted in an enclosure about the size of a caravan. Coloured lights and images, all very remotely controllable from a foreground switch-board, issued from several slide and movie projectors; random sounds were simultaneously played from a tape recorder. Can electronic gadgetry produce instant art—as pop groups produce instant music? It seems that no amount of fiddling with coloured lights can match the impact of the Beatles unless one falls back, as does the cinema, on the human form.

The Canterbury Museum housed an Historic Canterbury Exhibition—period 1842-1890—compiled by John Oakley. Shown here were some really touching pictures—painted of necessity from the heart—and some were good also in an artistic sense . . . no Cézannes of course, but odd works by Norman, Preston, Booth, Hambro, Fox or Smith remain locally unexcelled.

The Canterbury Society of Arts has opened its new gallery in Gloucester Street. The unsightly M-line roof reflected southern light most effectively onto the split-level exhibition area where initially Rodin, Cardew and Nolan held sway. School Publications contributed a display of illustrations; the standard of acceptance has risen in recent years and there is now hope of employment for the more imag-

inative artist—Ralph Hotere for instance can do, and should be encouraged to do, better work than he showed here. Apart from some photography, the only other New Zealand work present was contributed by three jewellers:—Kobi Brosshard and Guenter Taemmler are highly competent goldsmiths perfectly capable, I am sure, of the most exquisite work—but here, apart from a ring or two each, they were uninspired. Tanya Ashken favoured a more amateur, more experimental approach which sometimes failed to knit material and form to any telling advantage. Silver, to my eye, presents a rather bland surface unless more finely worked and perhaps oxidised. She has, however, set some polished stones very fetchingly.

John Coley compèred a lively foray by 20/20 Vision into the print making industry; two identical exhibitions were concurrently held miles apart (one in Dominion Motors, the other at the Northlands Shopping Centre) and impressed by a thoroughly professional approach. Although most of the prints were of a high standard and all were for sale, some seemed technical exercises only, being neither interesting enough to hang on a wall nor arresting enough to sell anything. Some did sell themselves though—notably one by Quentin MacFarlane and some each by Don Peebles, Alan Oliver, and Derek Mitchell.



ROSEMARY JOHNSON. Bird Sleeping. Resin fibreglass.

An exhibition of 100 New Zealand Painters, held in the old Durham Street Art Gallery, was the usual hotch-potch. The exhibition was amassed from paintings offered by the 17 art societies (which explains why non-members Hanly and McCahon, among others, were not included). It was not as the catalogue inevitably claimed 'a fair cross-section of the work done in this country' but more like a graph showing how high we may occasionally rise and from what extensive shallows. Almost invariably the better painters showed indifferent works while the indifferent painters occasionally excelled themselves. Ted Bracey's *North Island Synthesis No. 11* (see page 32), which dominated the exhibition, looked the best work by him ever seen here. This treatment, through sheer consensus of opinion among painters, is becoming accepted as the classic New Zealand landscape. Ian Hutson's *Woman on Horse* hardly made the top grade as a picture but attempted more than most and was in parts extremely well painted. Others to impress me were Joan Trollope and Isobel Branthwaite. Among local practitioners David Graham, Trevor Moffitt, Olivia Spencer-Bower and Ivy Fife were well represented.

Already coincidental in time and place, a similar lack of selection was apparent in the Travelling Exhibition of the New Zealand Society of Potters. Again the result was a misrepresentation of our capabilities. Many notable potters such as Adrian Cotter, Jeff Scholes, Barry Brickell, Juliet Peter, Michael Trumic, Paul Melser and Helen Mason were missing. Of the remainder none of the highest talents were adequately represented (except Crewenna) and in Christchurch the whole display was heavily infiltrated by 50 non-travelling exhibits and further handicapped by the customary knee-level placement on concrete blocks and drapery. Such indifference (which recalls the fate of thirteenth century English pots) scarcely troubled Doreen Blumhart whose work, especially a bowl, glowed like a rose amidst rubble. Another and very different bowl, this time by Len Castle, also shone with a light of its own (like rubble among roses?) from a welter of less bold exhibits. Nola Barron's re-thought forms interested me while Roy Cowan, Peter Stichbury and Warren Tippett were each completely convincing in their well-known ways.

An exhibition of Canterbury sculptors was held at the same time and included work by Ria Bancroft, John Turner, Tom Taylor and Rosemary Johnson (now studying in Italy). Only the latter

providing for me a readily acceptable form.

Meanwhile Michael Cardew, during the course of three demonstrations at the Wool Exchange, was proving himself an enthralling pottery exponent. Although muddled by unfamiliar equipment and surroundings, he wasted not a movement when dealing with the clay itself. At first glance his finished pots looked unattractive, even forbidding, but closer acquaintance (at arm's length or less) was rewarding. Nevertheless Cardew's severe and anti-formal designs in heavy colours (a legacy of his Nigerian stay?) were not accepted without a struggle.

The private galleries were unremittingly active. Several Arts featured a triple billing of Moffitt, Barry Cleavin and Taylor. Cleavin maintained his integrity and purity of style as he regressed further into a subjective world of micro-biology. Moffitt shifted focus from miners to riverbeds to his detriment—these paintings, shorn of a story, looked just too self-sufficient to justify such repetition. Taylor used black-painted welded sheet-steel and tried for the classical sculptural language of stress, balance, and space—nothing symbolical or representational. Such austerity produces great sculpture or junk. Either I can't read the language or Taylor has not quite reached his lofty objective.

Also at Several Arts, but later and across the road, were some paintings by Rudolph Gopas. Again my reservations matched the artist's self-imposed restrictions. These pictures were too indefinite visually to plumb emotional depths or scale philosophical heights and, perhaps for the same reason, failed to express (as I suppose them to intend) the inexpressible and the unmanifest—they merely conveyed that peculiar tingle of wonder so familiar to the astronomer.

The Little Woodware Shop devoted its gallery to an exhibition of paintings by Graham Barton. There are signs that his work is coming out of that dreadful phase which in this country passes for abstract expressionism. This style—the so called international language of art—has become so common as to render indistinguishable (while in its throes) the work of widely differing painters. The same gallery had earlier featured work by Michael Eaton who has progressed to the use of rectangular, triangular and even cubic shapes—all divided by straight lines into brightly coloured areas. The result is easily recognizable anywhere as being by Eaton and is singularly stimulating and refreshing.

The administration of the Robert McDougall Art



**RUDI GOPAS.** Uncharted Region I. PVA, 1967, 37½ x 37½ ins.



IAN HUTSON. *Woman on a Horse*. PVA on hardboard, 1967, 39½ x 48 ins.

Gallery was the subject of dissatisfaction among the active artist fraternity. Several private meetings were held, a statement circulated and a newspaper article published—all, so far, without avail. No direct attempt was made to influence the City Council where lies, I suspect, the root cause of discontent.

Exhibitions unhappily missed by this reviewer included Japanese prints, Chinese art, Period furniture and Embroidery besides many on and beyond the artistic fringe. Students' work was shown on the riverbank.

While the festival spirit prevailed (with crowds of relatively brightly dressed people circulating in search of culture) life in Christchurch was most enjoyable. The mere presence of so much art from elsewhere seemed to enormously enrich the city. But, as already recorded, the strictly visual arts do not thrive on the occasional orgy; they each need a basic sustenance of at least a hundred real works—more,

probably, than visited Christchurch during those three hectic weeks.

The most advanced resident collection is that of the Canterbury Public Library. The Chief Librarian, Mr R. N. O'Reilly, commenced with prints in 1952 and started buying original New Zealand works in 1958. The collection (which quickly became self-supporting) now consists of 593 prints and reproductions plus 118 original N.Z. prints, drawings and paintings by some 73 artists . . . quite a powerhouse of sensibility.

PETER YOUNG



# The Dunedin Scene

## JOHN DRAWBRIDGE IN DUNEDIN

In October of last year, John Drawbridge showed about three dozen prints and four paintings in an exhibition held in the Otago Museum Foyer in association with his wife Tanya Ashken, the 1967 Frances Hodgkins Fellow at Otago University. This exhibition proved to be a fore-runner for a second by John Drawbridge alone and held by invitation at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery during three weeks from the end of March this year. Paintings were in the majority this time. They ranged in date of execution from the early 1960s to 1968 and for this reason might have been expected to provide an opportunity for making a balanced assessment of Drawbridge's abilities, especially as seen against the background of the previous exhibition. However, it must be admitted that the quality of the work which Drawbridge was able to put together for this exhibition was uneven and so only a limited appraisal is possible.

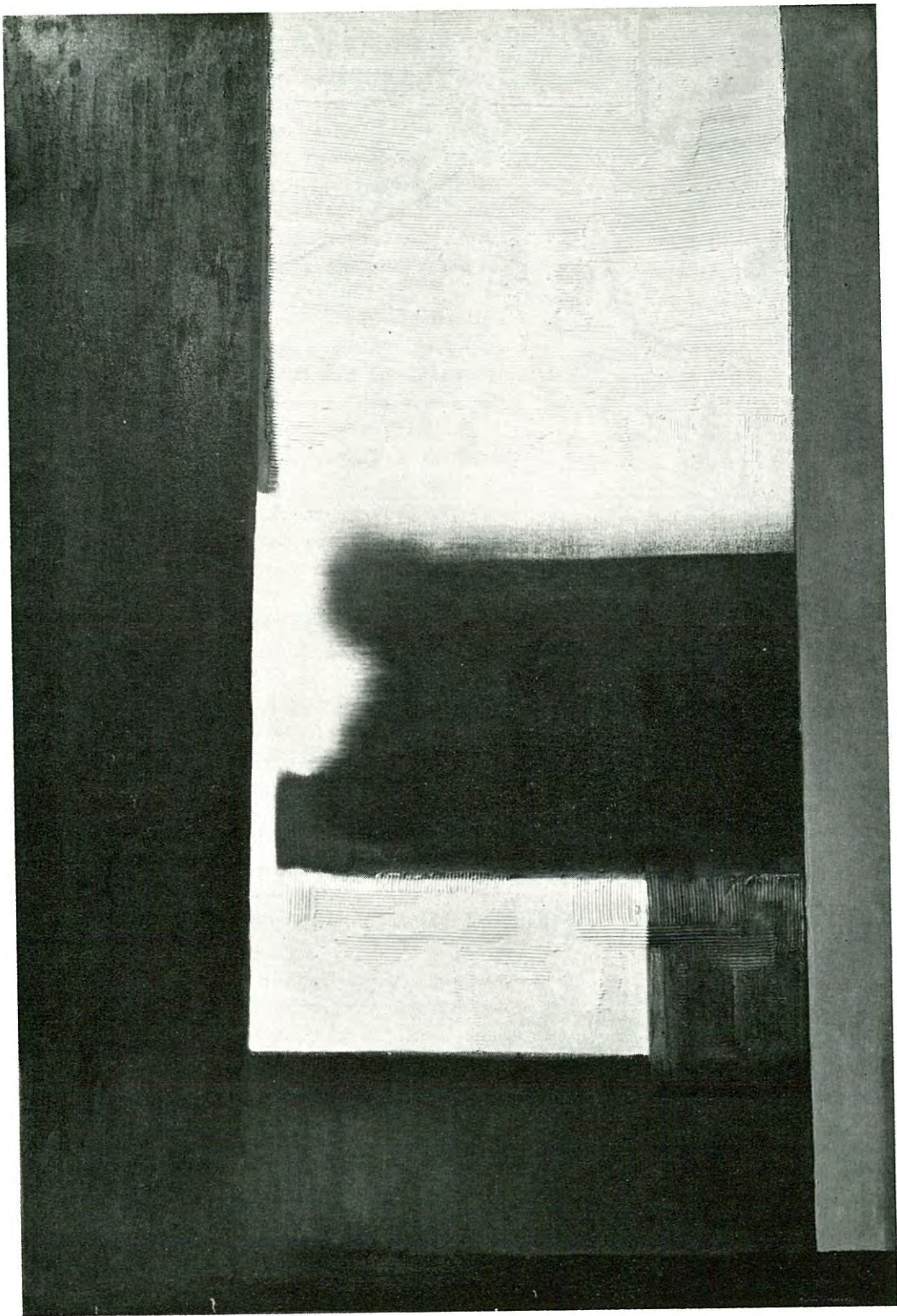
Prominently hung to catch the eye of the viewer approaching the exhibition, the large oil *Flight* turned out to be unlike any other painting on show. It was gayer than anything else; a large clean-cut blue winging shape spread across a double rectangle of green and orange. The colour contrasts were sharp, the paint, evenly applied. In at least this last respect it was not typical, for Drawbridge generally shows a considerable preoccupation with the surface texture of his paintings. If this picture with its emphasis on flat pattern and colour is a new departure for Drawbridge, he can surely claim it to be a success, even if, as in this case, the imagery is not especially original.

In many of the paintings, the dominant surface interest is achieved by combing. In Drawbridge's hands the technique is capable of producing some beautiful effects, but where, as in several pictures, he attempts to superimpose with the brush the elements of a hard edge design, the delicate swirling qualities of the surface are clumsily marred. The effects produced by combing seem best left to speak for themselves. I would like to see Drawbridge take this aspect of his work further perhaps by using a more broadly toothed comb to explore a wider and bolder range of curved form.

However, in the majority of the paintings, surface interest played a supporting rather than a dominant role. Perhaps the best of the paintings in this class was *Sea Element* (1963-4). In this, an interplay of combed and canvas textures support a beautifully controlled design in blue and white. This is a genuinely expressive work, perhaps with its roots in some strongly felt experience of seascape or landscape—the exact source does not matter. What does matter is the conclusion that Drawbridge seems to be at his best when he can draw on some past visual experience which has been given time to crystallize and take on the formal qualities appropriate to his vision and technique. This perhaps accounts for the lack of success of a group of eight small paintings dated 1968 which combine combed surfaces and brush work. They appear to derive from observation of landscape or seascape, but they lack the poise and simplicity characteristic of the best work in this exhibition. They may have been too hurriedly conceived and certainly they give no clue to Drawbridge's very real abilities. The large geometric composition *Painting, No. 5, 1968* is much more successful especially in its use of a wider than usual range of colour.

Three earlier paintings, *Provence* (1961), *Woman of Paris* (1961), and *Barmaid, Rue Lepic*, successfully use the human figure to establish strong formal qualities. *Provence* is a cool composition of grouped figures. In it, Drawbridge allows each human figure to emerge from a formal envelope of colour defining the structure of the painting. The same treatment is used in *Woman of Paris*, although this is conceived more romantically, and in *Barmaid, Rue Lepic*, a superbly textured painting now in the possession of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. It is interesting to see that the treatment of the figure in these earlier works looks forward to the use of an equivalent technique in some of the recent prints, notably the Tanya series of 1967 reproduced in the first issue of *Ascent*.

It is evident that from the start Drawbridge has had enviable ability as a printmaker. He has concentrated on intaglio techniques, and resorts to engraving, etching, drypoint, aquatint and mezzotint as the occasion demands. Amongst the earlier prints there is a group of etchings of European towns and landscapes in which facility of line fails to retrieve a too conventional perception of the subject. But some of the earlier prints successfully employ rich areas of ink in a way that is more



JOHN DRAWBRIDGE. SEA ELEMENT. Oil. 60 x 42ins.

characteristic of recent work. *Transparency No. 1* and *Transparency No. 2* of 1960 are forceful designs in a combination of etching and aquatint made by placing a number of small rectangular plates to form an abstract pattern. *Child* of 1963 is an expressive exercise in line and tone which achieves a more meaningful degree of abstraction than the townscape etchings of 1960. This seems to be a recurring problem for Drawbridge; to abstract a freshly conceived image from 'recognizable' subject matter and transform it to the requirements of his chosen technique. It is evident from the work we have had the opportunity of seeing in Dunedin that Drawbridge is capable of successfully solving this problem and in several ways.

J. G. BLACKMAN

## Fox Portfolio

A PORTFOLIO OF SIX VIEWS BY SIR WILLIAM FOX, K.C.M.G. (1812-1893) . . . with a brochure by E. H. McCormick. *Wellington, issued by the Alexander Turnbull Library Endowment Trust Board, 1967.* Portfolio, 8 sheets, 14½ x 18½ ins. SIR WILLIAM FOX, PUBLIC MAN AND PAINTER by E. H. McCormick. *Wellington, 1966.* Brochure, 11 pages, 8 ins. Price: \$10.

The brochure. Dr E. H. McCormick's essay gives an adequate glimpse of William Fox without aiming to encompass much more than this. The account is predominantly factual, with that quickness of touch expected from the author, but little attempt is made, or necessarily called for, to create a penetrating portrait of Fox the man. Similarly, the short section dealing with Fox the painter is restrained in treatment, but the judgements on his paintings lean towards uncertainty, although McCormick hints at some real problems in assessing Fox's stature as an artist.

The six views! On Fox's watercolours McCormick writes: 'his better work is submerged in a mass of the merely competent or the indifferent, and the critic faces a daunting test in discrimination.' That the choice can be intimidating is shown in the works selected for the portfolio, but the choice highlights a lack, rather than a test of discrimination. To anyone interested in Fox's achievement as an artist the

selection is misleading as well as disappointing; nor is the selection very useful as a visual record of historic interest—a tenable reason for selection if the function of the Turnbull Library is considered. With the original Fox Collection boosted by the Wilkie Loan Collection the Turnbull Library has at its disposal a considerable body of work from which an excellent selection could have been made. While the Wilkie Collection is weak in watercolours of New Zealand subjects it does contain some good works painted by Fox during his overseas tours. Some of the American watercolours, like *White Mountain—from Mt Washington, 1853*, do more for Fox as a painter than the parochial choice of inferior paintings of New Zealand subjects. However, the Wilkie Collection is not devoid of New Zealand paintings with real interest but unfortunately these have not been used.

From the six watercolours reproduced only *The Mangles Grass Valley, on the Mangles or Teraumei River, 15 Feb. 46* is a work of importance within Fox's oeuvre. *On the Coast near Kaiterri-terri, Blind Bay, Jan. 1846* is no more than partially successful, while *Tuakau, Lower Waikato, 1864* is merely competent. The remaining three paintings have little merit, and in such a publication do more harm to Fox's standing as a painter at a time when his final place in New Zealand painting has yet to be firmly established.

A prestige publication? As a publication it is notable for its near absence of design: the layout is indifferent, the portfolio cover archaic, and the sheets of the portfolio differ in size to those of the reproductions while the brochure is considerably smaller and is without any true relationship to the portfolio. When such shoddiness is added to the selection of watercolours reproduced, the result is an extremely disappointing and expensive publication of dubious value.

GORDON H. BROWN

## Fuseli

A COLLECTION OF DRAWINGS BY HENRY FUSELI. With an introduction and notes by P. A. Tomory. *Auckland City Art Gallery, 1967.* \$4.00.

IN 1963 Mr Peter Tomory made the remarkable discovery of 37 hitherto unknown drawings by Henry Fuseli in Dunedin. They were acquired by the City

of Auckland Art Gallery in 1965 and now form the subject of one of the Gallery's most interesting publications. All of the drawings are reproduced in this valuable monograph and the introduction by Mr Tomory touches mainly on Fuseli's development and sources of inspiration. The notes accompanying each drawing are adequate pieces of research scholarship and are illuminating without offering any critical analyses.

Unlike many great drawings which, springing from some marvellous perception of man and nature, cross the frontiers of time, place and language, Fuseli's remain essentially steeped in their own time and reflect the literary background which provided him with his symbols and inspiration. Inspired these drawings certainly were; but, reaching after the 'sublime' through Milton, Shakespeare, Dante and Michelangelo, Fuseli frequently achieved only a ludicrous charade of Gothic horror. Many of his highly dramatic drawings would pall very soon indeed if it were not for their wild energy and sensuousness. He had no interest in landscape drawing as such and roundly dismissed the subject with the remark 'Damn Nature!—she always puts me out!' It is a pity that only one in the Auckland collection hints at any feeling for landscape (No. 29) because a little more of this and a little less of the beef would have added some relief and depth to the ceaseless 'demoniac Phrenzy'.

He was, and still is, renowned for his sensuous women. Heavily embroidered, flimsily clad, his ladies move inhumanly through some tight situations assisting in all manner of torments with a slightly unconvincing commitment. Their pinchable proportions remain their chief charm—a charm, one feels, that might rapidly disappear if they opened their mouths. He may be, as sometimes claimed, the artist's artist but he never was, for all his violent persuasion, the artist's painter. When he exhibited his large painting of Macbeth at the Royal Academy Gainsborough remarked nervously that 'He shd. not like to be in a one Horse Chaise before that picture meaning that the Horse wd. start at it.\*'

Given the best of critical opinion and scholarship the drawings still need a dash of the extraordinary man himself to make them a satisfying experience. And perhaps it is impossible to approach these drawings without approaching the man and from there be led into the fascinating background of eighteenth century art chit-chat and intrigue. To

quote Farington again: 'On our return home the conversation turned upon *Men being like their works*. I mentioned Fuseli as an instance, which was admitted to be a very forcible instance. Lawrence was ostentatious—not natural, *but acting*,—with little feeling &c.—'

Fuseli lived in an age of diaries and memoirs so it is not surprising that this gifted and eccentric man should have figured in so many references and anecdotes. This gem places both Blake and Fuseli before us. Discussing one of Blake's works Fuseli remarked: 'Some one has told you this is very fine.' 'Yes,' said Blake, 'The Virgin Mary appeared to me and praised it. What do you say to that?' 'Say, why nothing, only her ladyship has not an immaculate taste.'

But at least the Pelorus Press has shown taste with some excellent printing and added much to the pleasure of this book. Mr Gordon Brown's typography is thoughtful and careful, perhaps a shade too much so. The type has been nicely chosen but the juxtaposition of text with drawings at different eye levels brings a slight sense of jumble. Also the excessive use of rules is an intrusion and once noticed becomes distracting. As Fuseli might have said (and after all he claimed that he could swear in eight languages): '*balhornisiert!*'

L.B.

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#### PHOTOGRAPHERS IN THIS ISSUE:

Page 6, British Museum: 7, Auckland City Art Gallery: 9, The Hocken Library: 10, The Alexander Turnbull Library: 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, Auckland City Art Gallery: 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, Gil Docking: 30, 31, 32, Robert Prisk: 37, Roy Cowan: 39, Marti Friedlander: 40, 41, Roy Cowan: 42, Stan Jenkins: 43, Peter Cape: 44, Peter Cape: 56, Photo-Associates Ltd: 53, Steve Rumsey: 60, Robert Prisk: 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, Photo Associates Ltd: 73, Robyn Ormerod: 75, 77, 78, Robert Prisk: 80, R. Drawbridge..

Cover design by Pat Hanly.

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\* *The Farington Diary, 1793-1821*. Vol. II.



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The publishers and editors of *Ascent* would like once again to acknowledge the financial assistance given by the City of Auckland Art Gallery towards the colour blocks for M. T. Woollaston's 'Upper Moutere' and the equally valuable assistance given by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council towards an overseas distribution of the journal.

We are also grateful to the many artists and writers who have come forward with enthusiasm to help launch *Ascent*. They are too many to name—but by their willingness to send work, their interest, advice and sometime criticism they have made *Ascent* possible. Success, however, is another matter. Judging by the reviews of the first issue we could claim that we are at least on the slippery path to that happy state; judging by the sales perhaps we are not. But little can be gauged on a single issue of any magazine, let alone such a perilous enterprise as establishing an art journal. We believe that our

original aim of attempting a comprehensive survey of the most significant work in the visual arts in New Zealand will succeed. We have advisedly limited the scope of the journal to New Zealand work in the belief that (as was said before) the growing awareness of the importance of the New Zealand image in art will be stimulated and developed by the appearance of a regular publication. And for that reason, we hope, receive support.

We regret that it has not been possible to include a review or discussion of the Benson and Hedges Art Award Exhibition in this issue. The exhibition was judged by Mr Robert Haines of Sydney and opened in Auckland on Sunday, 18th February at the Barry Lett Galleries. The judge's award for the winning entry (which was fortunately supported by some very good paintings by Hanly, Smither, Mrkusich and Walters) was received without much criticism: but a few of his other choices for the exhibition had some paint blistered off. We intend to discuss the subject of art awards, competitions and prizes in a future issue.

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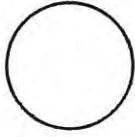
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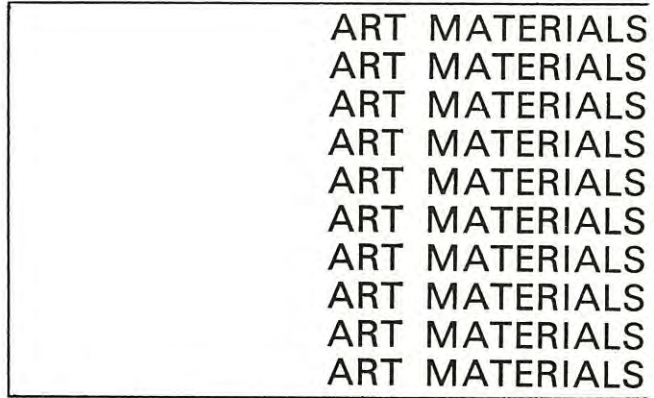


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