



Christchurch City Council



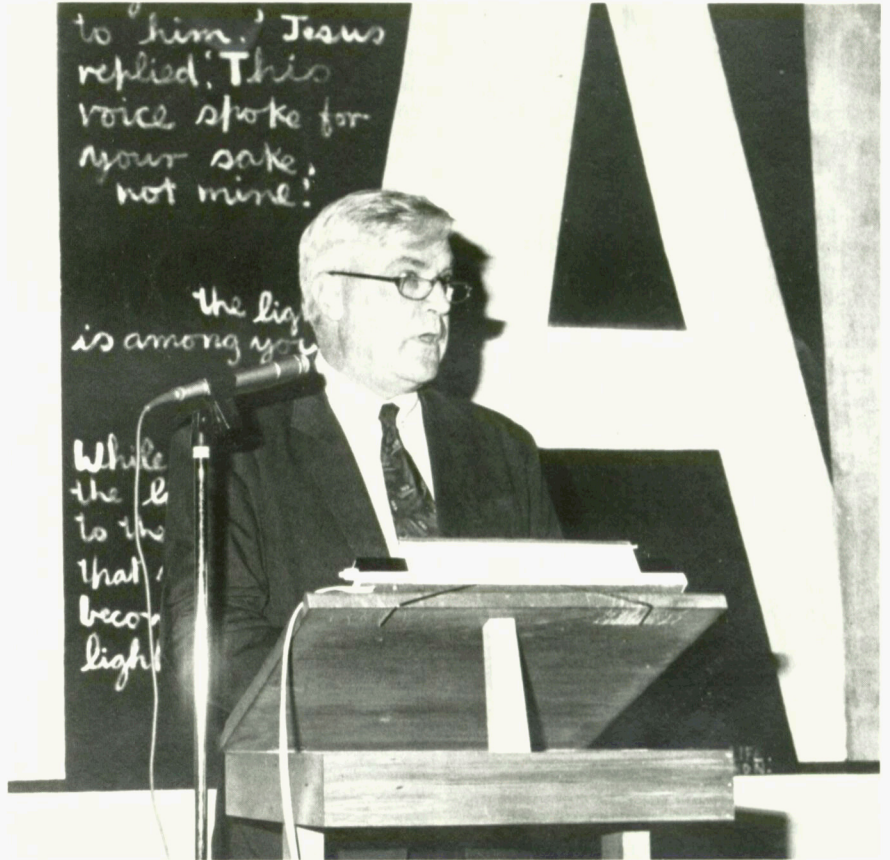
The Robert McDougall Art Gallery

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Wake
Series



Hamish Keith Opens Gates and Journeys

On October 1, the art historian, consultant and Chairman of the National Art Gallery Council, Hamish Keith O.B.E. opened the Colin McCahon – Gates and Journeys exhibition.

Here is the text of his speech:

To this city, this gallery, to those who invited me here and most of all to the artist, I am tied by a chain of obligation stretching throughout my entire life and which would take another lifetime to fulfil.

So strong is that feeling of personal bond to this moment, that were I given to synchronicity I might see it as the closing of a circle and with that, the gift of freedom to begin another.

It is not an event though entirely unalloyed by sadness and regret. The sadness, of course, that Colin is dead – although in his art he could hardly have given us more – but a more immediate sadness that this exhibition – by necessity, mischance or

curatorial mischief or all or none of those things – is only a fraction of that breathtaking, overwhelming lifetime of vision shown in Auckland.

That leaves Christchurch and Wellington with the future and no doubt welcome task of doing a definitive McCahon exhibition again – if for no other reason than to show here once more Colin's most powerfully lyrical and stunningly beautiful **Wake Series**.

That work, painted in memorial for the death of John Casselberg's great dane Thor, earned for Colin, when it was first shown here in Christchurch in 1959 or 1960 I think, almost his first unequivocally approving review – by Nelson Kenny in the Christchurch Press. Kenny, who wrote over the initial JNK, described McCahon as "one of those rare painters who is also an artist" a tribute so infrequent then in Colin's public life that we had a party at my house in Auckland to celebrate it.

And here again in synchronicity.

At that party – to celebrate the reception in Christchurch of a painting commemorating the death of a much loved dog

— a departing guest, visiting from Christchurch, was seen off the premises by my own exuberant dog — misnamed Inertia — who was run over and killed by his taxi. And if that were not coincidence enough that guest — in no way to blame for the accident was Tim Garrity, whose gallery, the Hocken, now owns and cares for **The Wake** Colin and I buried Inertia that wet Auckland night, beneath a cairn of bricks filched from a kiln of Barry Brickell's.

That might seem a trivial enough anecdote, but it is one that I offer to demonstrate how much to many of my generation the realisation and unfolding of Colin McCahon's vision, was threaded through our everyday lives.

Despite what I intend to say about some curators shortly, I must acknowledge the felicity with which the curators of this exhibition have selected its title — **Gates and Journeys**.

For those many New Zealanders who have chosen to open the one and begin the other, Colin McCahon has provided gates and journeys of a richness and in an abundance provided by no other New Zealand artist — or for that matter, by no other artist for New Zealanders.

I am proud and not a little humbled to say that he has provided gates and journeys for me for more than forty years and that I very much doubt that my life here would have had as much form or purpose — perhaps not any form or purpose — without them.

He generously set me off on a career as an artist and later, and with as much enthusiasm, diverted that to career as a consumer and by that consumption, a definer of my own culture.

In the right order I first encountered Colin's work before I met him.

I was eleven or twelve. My parents discussed at length a strange painting hanging in the Christchurch group show. My father had some distant connection with the Group through being in business with Doris Lusk's husband.

I don't know if my interest in their conversation was aroused by my father's description of the work — which he repeated with much emphasis — "just a square of blue canvas with a sort of yellow circle in the middle" or by its title, repeated as often "Easter Morn". It could have been the latter that took my adolescent fancy since I had about the same time caught a glimpse of a wicked painting called "September Morn" which had greatly stimulated my imagination.

In any event I was taken to the exhibition — my parents with a stroke of bad luck had become the proud owners of a very ordinary landscape by Elise Mourant instead of a McCahon — and saw the work.

I cannot describe how I felt. I could not take my eyes off Colin's painting. It seized me and would not let me go. I knew nothing about it. I could understand nothing of it.

Revisiting that moment I now know that I had learnt the first and most essential mechanism of a work of great art. Many years later I found the words to describe that in the last stanza of a poem by Rilke describing a Greek carving of Apollo.

"There is no part here that does not see you. You must change your life."

An enigma not unlike those inscribed by Colin on your own painting. "Tomorrow will be the same, but not as this is."

After that encounter with **Easter Morn** I knew that my life had changed profoundly. I had never before thought of art. From that moment I could hardly think of anything else.

Perhaps to cure my fever, my parents introduced me to Colin McCahon, who at that time worked for my father making rather odd jewellery. (He later worked in partnership with my brother making even odder jewellery). The cure, if that was their intention did not take. Colin encouraged me in my folly. (I eventually went to Canterbury School of Art and even that didn't cure me of it).

In 1958 I went to the Auckland City Art Gallery as a student assistant and from then until 1965 I worked with Colin as assistant keeper and eventually replacing him as keeper of the gallery when he moved briefly to teach up the hill at Elam. A period that spanned from the painting of the **Northland Panels** to the first **Number Paintings**, **The Wake**, **The First and Second Gate Paintings**, the **Bellini Madonnas**, **The Landscape Series A and B** and the **Waterfalls**. An enormously prolific time in Colin's output.

He painted at night upstairs in the gallery attic — an arrangement no gallery now would tolerate for very good reasons, but acceptable in that more beleaguered time — and every morning I would sneak upstairs to confront what seemed to me another miracle. And then in 1962 I saw another McCahon that began a journey almost as entirely new for me as that begun by **Easter Morn** a decade or so before.

Until then I had aspired to be a painter with a small degree of success. Inspired and encouraged by Colin I had completed a series of paintings in gouache based on the **Song of Solomon**. To show me the way, perhaps, Colin one weekend painted four panels on the same theme — only once exhibited again by coincidence here in Christchurch at the Group.

I saw them, I knew with no regret that I would not paint again. I had nothing to say

and could have nothing to say with such power and vision and with such a flawless grasp of the truth. But I could, to more purpose, listen to the songs creating my own culture in this place. I could also tell of what I heard and ask and encourage other to listen as well.

Colin McCahon did not hide from interviews or publicity from shyness, modesty or fear. He truly believed that his paintings should speak for themselves. He had his vision and burnt to tell of it.

After he left the Auckland Art Gallery, he used to lurk, like the Ancient Mariner, after closing outside the Kiwi Hotel and drag you to his studio to confront you with new work — not out of any pride, but to see if it did work — and he did not blame you if it did not.

The pain of Colin's life was not rejection or a yearning for honours and recognition — or no more than that of any ordinary person — but a passion to be heard and understood.

To communicate that metaphorical Angel he had seen in the landscape of Otago.

In the words he borrowed from Casselberg and painted like a flock of Van Gogh crows across a Canterbury sky.

"Oh God it's Dark. The heart beats and from the fields there comes no answering hark of hearer and no one to speak."

Nor was he ever deterred by the warning in James K. Baxter's poem that "Those who would speak to the Master of Pig Island about the love they dread, plait ropes of sand."

When I accepted John Coley's invitation to speak here tonight there were so many things I wanted to say — about listening to art, about the taking hostage of public galleries now by curators bent only on marshalling art and artists as grist to their faddish polemical mills or enlisting art in irrelevant battles of racial, social or cultural politics. I wanted to make a plea for art and artists to again write the agenda for galleries and curators.

But again Colin said listen and help with the listening. And I found these words, I am sure not by chance, in the book **Songlines** by Bruce Chetwin.

"I have a vision" he wrote "of the Songlines stretching across the continents and ages; that wherever men have trodden they have left a trail of song (of which we may now and then, catch an echo); and that these trails must stretch back in time and space, to an isolated pocket in the African savannah, where the First Man opening his mouth in defiance of the terrors that surrounded him shouted the opening stanza of the World Song, 'I AM'.

All cultures, even our own pakeha culture, born after an age of reason and with the

dubious baptism of science, must have their own myths of creation. Earth Mother Sky Father. A songline leading back to that first I AM – shouted by the first man or first woman.

Colin McCahon knew the absolute truth of that.

Out of the mythological baggage deposited here with us – and a vision of light upon darkness, of life and death, of faith and resurrection and a sacrificed god – Corn King or Jesus – he has conjured up our own songlines.

From South to North, Colin McCahon has

sung into existence the visionary landscape of modern New Zealand.

He is, perhaps, just one among many founding ancestors, but like Tane, he is the one who made the space in which his descendants could live and breathe. And, importantly for this moment in our history, his stature is so great that the shadow of his work lies across both our cultures, providing Gates and Journeys in the past and future of each.

I am honoured to declare this exhibition open.

On Loan 19 December-1 February

For many New Zealand art museums it is becoming increasingly a daunting task trying to acquire important historical works for collections with the result that now perhaps more than at any other time the value of having a substantial loan collection as an added resource is vital.

Over the past decade this gallery has taken into its care on long-term loan many works from a variety of sources, and now has over 600 in its loan collection.

Many of these are from private collections but a larger proportion are on loan from the collections of the following: Canterbury Museum, the Canterbury Society of Arts, the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts, Canterbury Public Library, Christchurch Polytechnic as well as several schools.

As an exhibition 'On Loan' comprises a selection of works most representative of the calibre to be found in the loan collection.

It also acknowledges the considerable generosity and support of all who place works of art on long term loan to the gallery for the benefit of the public.

R. N. Field: The Dunedin Years 1925-1945 15 December-7 January

This exhibition features the work of the sculptor, painter, potter and teacher, Robert Nettleton Field (1899-1987). Field's name is not widely known these days mainly because the public has had little opportunity to view his work in recent times. The majority of exhibits, brought together by the Manawatu Art Gallery and toured nationwide with the assistance of the New Zealand Art Gallery Directors' Council and Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, are drawn from private collections from all over New Zealand so this is a show not to be missed.

R. N. Field emigrated from England in 1925 to take up a teaching position at the King Edward Technical College of Dunedin. He brought with him ideas which were still considered avant-garde even back in London at the time and quickly became known in Dunedin and Christchurch art circles for his modern approach to art.

Field was influential both as a practising artist and as a teacher. His painting and sculpture challenged nineteenth century assumptions regarding the nature of art and the role of the artist. The principles of simplification and the expressive use of form embodied in his work represented a reaction against Victorian naturalism. Rather than trying to reproduce the world around him as a camera might, Field aimed at representing an idea of what he saw, having realized that colour, line, form, design and materials could be enjoyed for their own sake, irrespective of the subject.

Field's art and teaching helped oust the notion of there being only one correct way of painting and drawing – a notion which pervaded the New Zealand art societies and schools of art at the time. The pupils he inspired included Doris Lusk, Sir Tossill Woollaston and Colin McCahon, who wrote of his time at the King Edward Technical College between 1937-1939 "the

painter's life for me was exemplified by the life and work of R. N. Field".

R. N. Field: *The Dunedin Years 1925-1945*, includes examples of Field's sculpture, drawing, painting, print-making and pottery with the idea of capturing some sense of his shifting interests and artistic output as a whole. The sizeable catalogue which accompanies the show provides a biographical and art historical context within which the works themselves may be better understood.



R.N. Field *Still Life* c.1931



Frank Bramley Portrait of Helen Graham Chalmers and her Mother 1908 Private Collection.

An Historical Exhibition of Art in Canterbury for 1990

For almost a year now gallery staff have been preparing Christchurch's major historical art exhibition for 1990. Titled 'A Canterbury Perspective' it will plot the progress of art from pre-European settlement forward.

Its conception as a contextual exhibition will mean that each phase of development will need to be highlighted with appropriately designed gallery installations. To this end attempts will be made to recreate where possible a sense of the time in which art works were made. As the exhibition will occupy the whole gallery more than 50% of it will undergo a complete transformation.

Most of the 300 exhibits to be shown will come from the gallery's own holding. However, over a hundred works will be on loan from private and other public collections. Some of these will be exhibited in Christchurch for the first time in decades. Others have never been seen here before.

In support of 'A Canterbury Perspective' a 90 page book of the same title will be published, which will also be available, alternatively in five separate parts.

Much of the success of an exhibition such

as this is dependant on a variety of factors, the least of which is not financial support. Without the generous sponsorship of both Trustbank Canterbury and the New Zealand 1990 Commission it is unlikely that 'A Canterbury Perspective' could have become a reality.

Acquisitions

The following works have been acquired for the collection:

William D. Hammond
Talk, Talk
Black Ink and pencil on paper

Specified Departures
Lithograph 25/25

Barry Cleavin
Small bull being tormented by a lady
Etching 9/30 imp

Betrothal
Etching 10/50 imp

Frederick Vaughan Ellis
Nightfall on the Sabine Hills, Rome 1921
Oil on Board

Judy Darragh
Evolution, 1989
Wood and plastic assemblage

Alfred H. Cook
Untitled, 1932
Pencil on paper

Sam Mahon
Drought No. 1 88/89
Tempera on Board

William Strang
Untitled 1882
Etching

Mervyn Taylor
Serenity
Linoblock Print

William A. Sutton
Hills and Plains, 1956
Oil on canvas board

J. Fraser Scott
The Jesuati, Venice
Woodcut

Edgar B. Vaughan
Sketching Recollections No. 1
Ink

An Affecting Moment
Ink

Jule Einhorn
Interior with Vase
Lithograph 2/15

Boyd Webb
Untitled, 1988
Unique cibachrome photograph

Jason Greig
Batwing, 1987
2 colour relief etching A/P

Baseheart, 1988
Hardground etching A/P

Self, 1987
Relief etching AP/IMP

Berenice 1988
Transfer Lithograph 8/20

Gail Wright
Month of May, 1989
Acrylic on customboard

Edward Bullmore
Self Portrait, 1960
Pencil on Paper

Max Hailstone
Rules for Making Kites
12 typographic prints and cover

Bronwyn Taylor
Mother Confronts Vanity Fair
Bronze - 8 pieces

Philippa Blair
Untitled
Charcoal Graphite Pastel on Paper

Gayle Forster
Is this my destiny?
Woodcut and watercolour 1/50

Our land III - Sailing
Woodcut and watercolour A/P

It's no use I just cannot keep up
Woodcut and watercolour 9/50

The following works were generously gifted to the gallery:

Sydney Lough Thompson
A corner of Lake Wanaka in Autumn
Oil on canvas
Presented by Mrs M. Bradshaw, Christchurch

T.B. Kennington
James Alfred Wadmore, 1890
Oil on canvas
Presented by Mrs C.H. Hamilton, Christchurch



Ann Betts farewelled by staff and guides.

Farewell to Ann Betts

Mrs Ann Betts who for ten years has been the Gallery's Education Officer, has accepted a senior management post at the Christchurch Polytechnic as Head of the Department of Art and Community Studies where her experience and deep understanding of community education will be put to excellent service.

Ann's energy, scholarship and innovative programmes earned her the respect of museum educators throughout the country and contributed much to the success of the McDougall's activities. Her formation of the Gallery Guides has been particularly effective. Substantial in numbers, the Gallery's keen corps of Guides are a vital factor in transferring information about the collection and touring exhibitions to the visiting public. Ann also edited this journal and was Gallery liaison with the Friends.

This year Ann's winter series of lectures on "The Social Role of Art" drew large audiences proving that stimulating programmes that provoke involvement and discussion can draw people from the warmth of fireside and the blandishments of television.

The gallery staff will miss a long-serving colleague, her bustling enthusiasm and her extraordinary accounts concerning the parking problems and perambulations of her faithful Volkswagen.

We all wish her the very best in her new sphere and thank her for her very considerable contribution to the Gallery and its public.

Art Annex

Recent Work by Ken Orchard December 23-January 29, 1990.

In early June this year Sydney based artist Ken Orchard arrived in Wellington to begin a 3 month residency project in association with the Wellington City Art Gallery's Artist in Residence Programme.

For a New Zealand context and audience the gallery was particularly interested in focusing on the work of a younger Australian artist working in the medium of printmaking. The Wellington City Art Gallery sought an artist whose works would stimulate the printmaking community in this country, interest a wider public and arouse discussion amongst critics and practitioners of the issues inherent in Orchard's reworking of existing images, and of his working processes.

Under the terms of the residency one work was to be developed and produced for installation to be read alongside a group of works selected from Australia produced since 1986/87.

Each large scale work is the sum of a differing number of 'panels'. All works have been printed from woodblocks directly onto paper or canvas. Each work is an appropriation of an existing image, and reworked, revalued in print allowing a fresh and multi-faceted interpretation.

A preview for Ken Orchard's work will be held at 5 p.m. on Friday December 22.

Nicola Jackson Through the Eye of the Needle continues until November 19

Paul Johnson Landmarks November 24-December 17

Recent work by Wanganui artist Paul Johnson has involved various discipline and media centres on figure/land relationships. The exhibition Landmarks continues this inquiry into land and figure relationships narrated in photography clay, steel and paint. Two series of drawings in paint, pencil, charcoal and pastel precede and follow the sculptures. Johnson says that the emerging images initiate 'something else'; nothing is known - only recognised. A random cycle of gesture and consequence, response and gesture is created encompassing overlapping marks, overlaying forms and related images. Elements of Land, Figure, Time and the Grid are explored with landscape art becoming an activity and figuration the idea.

A preview for the exhibition will be held at 5 p.m. on Thursday November 23.

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS AND NEW YEAR GOOD WISHES

1989-1990

To artists, Friends and
supporters of the Gallery
from the
Director and Staff of the
Robert McDougall Art Gallery

FRIENDS

Reserve Sunday, December 3

5.00-7.00 p.m.

for a

MISTLETOE PARTY

The Friends Annual Christmas Function

Don't Miss It!

Friends of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery Inc.

President – Ian Miles 519-955

Vice-President – Hilary Langer 483-982

Treasurer – Chris Brocket 557-133

Secretary – Gwen Wilton 663-675



Speaker of the Month – August

Our Vice-President Hilary Langer's return from her most recent trip to Indonesia prompted us to ask her to speak to the Friends about her long-term interest in Indonesian textiles and provided us on August 16 with a fascinating morning's programme. Along with an excellent selection of slides, Indonesian music and a table laden with examples of this unique art form, Hilary explained to us how each technique was applied, the elements in the traditional patterns and how each pattern was closely tied to special social functions or situations. She spoke to us of the Batiks of Java, the Ikat techniques of the eastern zones of the archipelago and the Songkets of Sumatra where gold and cotton threads are incorporated, tapestry-like, into the cloth.

Being able to see the samples closely and to handle some of these fabulous cloths was a special highlight of an extremely interesting and instructive session which left us all definitely better informed about the wonderful textile arts of Indonesia.

Speaker of the Month – September

Members attending the September coffee morning found themselves transposed into the magic world of the theatre and opera. In an informal, entertaining and enthusiastic talk Peter Lees-Jeffreys demonstrated vividly how clothes and accessories make a play come to life. Costumes send messages and create an atmosphere. Not only are they essential in theatrical productions, but they are also invaluable aids in play readings, in much the same way as frames and display enhance the impact of pictures. Costume design is an art form of its own, based on careful scholarship and personal research.

Friends' National Conference

It is with regret that the Friends have had to cancel the National Conference planned for 13-15 October here in Christchurch.

Of some 17 organisations eligible to send delegates to the conference, 6 (plus our own group) were able to do so. Another 2 plus the Australian Federation informed us they were unable to attend; nothing was heard from the remaining organisations despite several reminders.

The Friends of McDougall are saddened by the demise of a significant event to which considerable planning had been devoted.

We have been unable to discern whether Friends' organisations fail to see a need for a conference or similar gathering, or whether other factors have prevented them from attending in this instance.

New Members

G.E.F.N. Crafts Co-op Soc. Ltd
Tanya Caldwell
Julian Cope
Helen & John Crowder
Mrs A.J. Harrison
Mrs M.G. Honore – Life
Conrad Heraud
Christina Hughes
M.J. Lazelle
K. Marie Lockey
Sue & Peter O'Rourke
Olga Purves
Mrs H. Rutherford-Jones
Catherin F. Sparrow
Rev. J.L. Wilson

Corporate:

Hurricane Wire Products Ltd
Associated British Cables Ltd
Skellerup Industries Ltd
Goldsmith Fox & Co.

Gallery Shop

The range of cards in the Gallery Shop has been greatly extended by the addition of a new card stand which virtually doubles the card display area. In addition a new range of cards should be in the shop by mid November. Included in this are "The Dutch Funeral", "Teresina", "Relaxation", "Towards the Museum" by Olivia Spencer-Bower, "Clearing up after the Rain. Otrira Gorge" and "Exit from a Cold Theatre" by Alan Pearson. We have our usual supplies of T-Shirts, Sweatshirts, wrapping paper, calendars, diaries, address books, art books and Kaleidoscopes.

Please remember to ask for Friends discount when making purchases at the shop.

Coming Events

- November**
- 1 'Colin McCahon Gates and Journeys' Admission: Adults \$3. Friends, Beneficiaries and students \$2. Exhibition continues until December 10.
 - 1 **Wednesday Club** 10.30 a.m. Art appreciation club for adults. All welcome.
 - 4 **Saturday Club** 10.30 a.m. Art appreciation club for adults. All welcome.
 - 11 **Continuing Club** 10.30 a.m. Art appreciation club for adults.
 - 15 **Arts and Crafts in Ashburton.** A coach tour led by Alison Ryde to visit galleries, artists' studios and craft workshops: \$10. Coach leaves from outside the Canterbury Museum at 9 a.m. returning there at 5 p.m. Lunch at Mill House or bring a picnic. Please telephone the Gallery 650-915 if you will be coming.
 - 23 **Paul Johnson:** Sculpture and Drawings. Preview at Annex 5 p.m.
- December**
- 10 'Colin McCahon Gates and Journeys' closes.
 - 15 **R.N. Field exhibition** until 7 January.
 - 19 'On Loan' selection of works from both public and private collections held by the Gallery.

January 7 **R.N. Field** exhibition closes.

Continuing... Preparation and installation of 'A Canterbury Perspective'.

Exhibition dates and programmes could vary slightly.
