

# Bulletin

THE ROBERT McDOUGALL ART GALLERY

ISSN 0111-1426

Number 95 April/May 1995



*War Makers 1937, Lois White, Auckland City Art Gallery.*

## By the Waters of Babylon. The Art of A. Lois White

14 April-3 July

Providing a new platform from which we can consider her place in the art history of New Zealand, this touring exhibition of 40 works by Lois White, the 'Auckland Symbolist' of the 1940s and 50s, is drawn from a wide range of public and private collections.

A figure painter, social commentator, portraitist and creator of sumptuously decorative allegories, Lois White was born at Mt Albert in 1903. Entering the Elam School of Fine Art in 1923, she studied under A. J. C. Fisher, the Director of the school, who stressed the development of drawing skills and had his students spend long hours in the life class. They then progressed to tonal painting and finally to very carefully worked out figure compositions. These remained the hallmark of Lois White's later work. She became Fisher's star pupil and joined the Elam staff in 1927 remaining there until her retirement in 1963.

Influenced by Thomas Hart Breton and the American Regionalists of the 1930s, Lois White simplified her forms, developed strong rhythms within the landscape and figure works, and frequently set the features within a stage-like tableau. To this, however, she also added the stylistic influences of Symbolism and Art Deco and an earnestness of message which dominated her political allegories. Responding to the events of World War 2 Lois White symbolised and generalised the experiences in a unique way, creating her own charged images of what the war meant to a civilian population.

Her stylised portraits, the compositions based around groups of women at leisure and her Biblical fantasies were also distinctive features of her work.

Lois White's devotion to narrative and to figurative styles put her in opposition to the dominant New Zealand tradition of landscape painting and to the evolving modernist school of abstraction led by McCahon and Mrkusich. This gradually alienated her from her peers and her themes on gender, religion or politics were often ignored during her life.

Director: John Coley, Senior Curator: Neil Roberts, Administration: Zena Cooper, Jenny Barber, Pamela Jarman, Art Annex Curator: Elizabeth Caldwell, Art Annex Supervisor: Simon Mulligan, Conservator: Lynn Campbell, Custodian: Harry Ipenburg, Education: Ann Betts, Judith Hoult, Exhibitions: Spencer Pullon, Gary Collins, Information and Shop: Merylynne Evans, Alexandra Ott, Maintenance: Denise Paulger, Registrar: Anna Crighton, Technician: Martin Young, Weekend Custodians: Merylynne Evans, Susan Leckie, Ben Whyman, John Mottram, Tony Webster, and Gwen Searle.

Christchurch City Council



The Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
P.O. Box 2626 Christchurch  
Fax (03)365-3942  
Telephone (03)365-0915  
Botanic Gardens Christchurch

This touring exhibition gives visitors a timely opportunity to revisit Lois White's works. They will undoubtedly appeal to a wide public and especially to those who lived through the 1930s and 40s. Younger viewers of the 1990s, will be captivated by her luscious colours and distinctive figurative style.

This exhibition has been curated and organised by the Auckland City Art Gallery, sponsored by Ernst & Young and toured nationally by Exhibitour New Zealand. A show not to be missed.

### Kiwiana

30 March-9 July

Small and virtually unpopulated by world standards, New Zealand has developed some internationally distinctive images, the best known of which is obviously the kiwi. Ironically however it took an Australian boot polish and a war in Europe for this bird to gain recognition at home and for its name to be applied to the residents of this land. Other national images or symbols have come from a wide variety of things like the Buzzy Bee, the silver fern and even the distinctive and irregular shape of the country itself.

**Kiwiana** looks at the images and objects which have shaped our national identity. Often we find, when travelling abroad, that it is the little things that are different, that are important signals that we are in a distant country. **Kiwiana** aims to highlight the unique, small and everyday objects which have been part of the development of a distinctly New Zealand culture and those which today can be claimed as truly 'kiwi'. There is also a strong element of nostalgia in looking at reminders of the way we looked, or the way things were.

**Kiwiana** was organised by the City Gallery Wellington, and is toured by Exhibitour with the support of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand.

### Doris Lusk Survey Exhibition

In April 1996 the Robert McDougall Art Gallery will present a survey exhibition of paintings by the well known Canterbury artist Doris Lusk (1916-1990). Over seventy works will be displayed in this comprehensive exhibition which will explore Lusk's reoccurring theme of structures in the landscape.

Lusk's paintings will be contextualized by the inclusion of several works by major New Zealand artists of her generation.

Guest curators, Lisa Beaven and Grant Banbury, have recently travelled around the country researching her work and would be grateful for any information as to the current location of the following works

### Don Driver Circular Planes

30 March-7 May

This exhibition from the well-established New Plymouth artist Don Driver comprises eleven recent wall reliefs. Using a circular (tondo) format these assemblages or constructions use found materials such as the wooden end of the telecommunications cable reel, paint tin lids, bones, buckets and signs. Rich colours extend the structural energy of each piece.

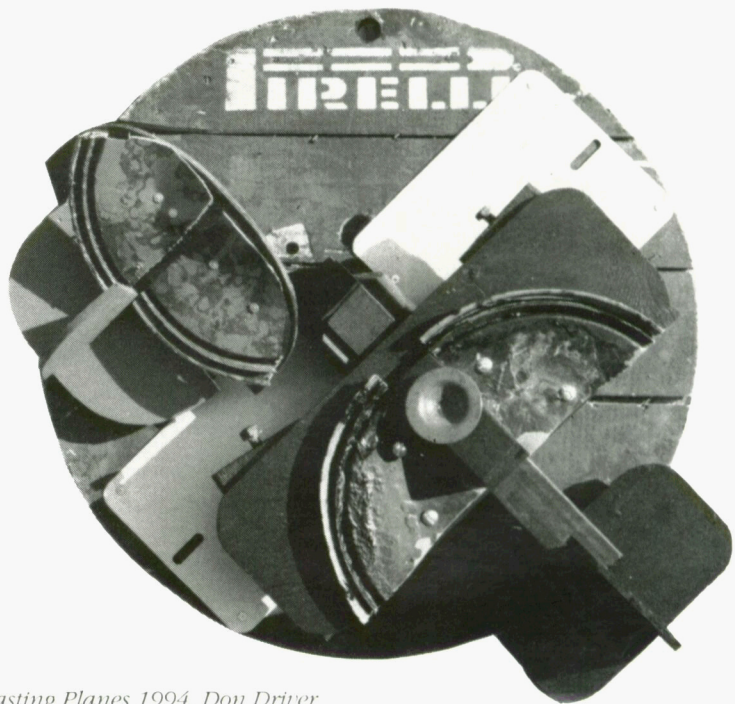
A unifying factor is the concept of air flight, and in a way they revisit an early work by Driver. Almost 30 years ago he painted a mural for the New Plymouth airport, to commemorate Kingsford Smiths' traverse from Sydney.

However, the double meanings contained in the titles such as *Convex Planes*,

*Wheeling Planes II*, or *Clashing Planes* also point to intrinsic aesthetic principles being explored in the selection and arrangement of the diverse and colourful materials. This is an artist who uses materials not to depict something else but to express qualities in themselves, and there can be no doubting Don Driver's quirky sense of fun, or his specific art of selection and placement.

Don Driver, who was born in 1930, first came to prominence in 1951 when he won an award in a national sculpture competition held in Auckland. He has been regularly exhibiting outside Taranaki since 1963. It will be very interesting to see his latest series of work at the McDougall.

The artist will also be visiting Christchurch and will give an illustrated lecture on his past and present works at the McDougall on Sunday 23 April at 3 pm.



*Contrasting Planes 1994, Don Driver.*

Alexandra Bridge, Cromwell oil c.1938  
 On route to Arthurs Pass oil c.1945  
 Pomona Rd, Mapua, After Fire oil c.1946  
 Port Hills from Estuary Rd oil c.1957

If anyone can assist in identifying the whereabouts of any of these pictures please contact Elizabeth Caldwell at the gallery.

### New Gallery Guides Welcomed to the Team

At the beginning of March we were delighted to welcome some new members into the active Gallery Guide team. They are Margaret Duncan, Joyce Edmundson, Elaine Gibbs, Valerie Gilchrist, Robert Kainui, Frances Long, Tomoko McKnight, Margaret Murchison, Jonathan Oakley, Ruby Rutherford, Cheriene Singer, Gail

Steven, Martha Tripp, Jan Turrell and Karen Waine. We also welcome back Olwyn Musgrove who has returned to the team after a considerable period living abroad. We hope they will enjoy their work with us as guides and are certain they will be very helpful to our gallery visitors.



*New Guides finish their training.*

### Unstretched

7 April-14 May

Emerging from the hidden bowels of the McDougall's basement this April comes **Unstretched**, an exhibition of unstretched canvases from the contemporary collection.

It was Colin McCahon who first shocked the New Zealand art world in 1958 when he discarded not only his easel and frame, but his stretcher as well. Instead he began painting on unstretched canvas, using the floor as a support, and hung his finished works from the rods and eye screws, and later simply by eyelets, declaring:

'I'm finished with frames and all that they imply. I want paintings to pin or nail up or tie with string—I think it gives them more freedom to act.'

Although pioneered in New Zealand in the late fifties, the unstretched canvas did not become a common sight in New Zealand galleries until the 1970s. One of the main reasons for its increased popularity was sheer practicality. Without the weight and constraints of a stretcher, large canvas paintings could be inexpensively made and transported, and stored with ease. The unstretched canvas also provided artists with a format that was highly flexible and full of possibilities. Canvases could be

painted on both sides and suspended in mid-air rather than clinging to the wall, fabric could flop and drape, taking on a sculptural element, bits could easily be added and removed, and paintings could run the length of a roll of canvas if an artist so desired. To leave a work unstretched was also an act of defiance—a subversion of the "institution of the frame" and "the old boys" club of the stretched canvas".

**Unstretched** will feature a rich selection of loose canvases by Philippa Blair, Robert Ellis, Ralph Hotere, Linda James, Robyn Kahukiwa, Don Peebles, Philip Trusttum, Peter Wolden and Jane Zusters.



*Tena I Ruita 1987, Robyn Kahukiwa*

### Christine Webster Black Carnival

19 May-2 July

Youths in wedding lace and veils, suited women and humans with feathered wings and heads of rabbits are amongst the dream-like players and guests at Christine Webster's **Black Carnival**.

Inspired by ancient Roman wall paintings such as the Villa of the Mysteries, Webster began to formulate ideas of her own frieze of human abandonment and decadence during her year in Dunedin in 1991 as the Francis Hodgkins Fellow. Whereas the Romans achieved their efforts with plaster and paint, Webster has created a portable frieze of lifesize cibachromes that totally envelops the space it is installed into.

Drawing upon a cast of local identities in Dunedin, Webster encouraged her models to undress, dress and cross-dress, to don

masks, discard their inhibitions and act out fantastical roles. The lyrical, ecstatic, shy and tormented characters that resulted reveal pagan, classical, renaissance and iconic sources yet have the atmosphere of a circus or mardi gras. Through stance and states of dress and undress the participants challenge conventional definitions of gender and sexuality and stretch and twist those roles. In the middle of this bizarre ballroom stands the viewer—a voyeur from which figures shrink or which they choose to confront, ignore or welcome to participate.

The **Black Carnival** opens to all willing voyeurs and participants on 18 May at 5.30 pm at the McDougall Art Annex.

### Unwined at the Art Annex

The Arts Centre Conservation Trust invites you to 'unwined' at a wine tasting evening at the Art Annex Wednesday 12 April 7-9 pm. This will be a premier tasting of top quality wines including champenoise, light whites, full bodied reds and port. The host will be John Coley the recently retired Director of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery. He will talk about wine and some of its associations with art including companies who use artworks on the labels such as Rothchilds and Giesen.

Tickets cost \$35.00 per head and may be purchased by phoning Vino Fino 365-5134 or by posting a cheque to the Arts Centre Foundation, Conservation Fund, PO Box 845, Christchurch. In addition, a sweepstake will be held during the course of the evening with the prize being six bottles of premium wines and there will also be the opportunity to order wines from the Vino Fino general specials list.

# Friends of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery

President—Chris Brocket 355 7133

Vice-President—Mark Stocker 365 3895

Acting Treasurer—Russell Skinner 379 8150

Secretary—Ann Watt 379 4055



## A Director's Departure

On Sunday 29 January over 400 Friends gathered in the Centre Court of the McDougall for the official closing of the exhibition **Good Works** and the retirement commemoration of John Coley. There were speeches from Brent Layton of the Trust Bank Board, Ian Howe, Chair of the Trust Bank Community Trust Board, Don Peebles, Fay Coley and, of course, John Coley, while Chris Brocket ably co-ordinated the occasion.

The sheer size of the gathering was a tribute to John's great mana among the art community. What could have been a slightly sad occasion was made into a happy, positive one. We were treated to anecdotes from John—his treasury of them must vie with Peter Ustinov's—but a serious note was struck when he expressed regret that over the years the McDougall has not received the support it might reasonably expect from elected councillors, a point endorsed by those present.

John was presented with a lightweight Italian easel to facilitate one of the prime pursuits of his retirement, watercolour painting. The Friends wish to remind John that we expect to see plenty of watercolours ensuing, so get working on those washes! We are also privileged to welcome his change of status from Director to a lifelong Friend.



*John Coley at the Friends' Farewell expresses his delight with the gift of the folding easel.*

## Speaker of the Month

These functions take place on the third Wednesday of each month, commencing at 10.30 am with the serving of tea and coffee. The charge is \$1.50 for members, \$2.50 for non-members.

On 19 April Dr Gerrit van der Lingen, Research Associate of the Geology Department, University of Canterbury, will lecture on 'Museum in the Park: The Kröller-Müller Museum' and will show video footage of his recent visit there.

On 17 May Marcie Craigie, arts adviser for Healthlink South Crown Health Enterprise and Arts for Health will give an illustrated lecture on 'The Picture of Health', discussing the hospital art programme.

## Speaker of the Month:

Jonathan Elsom

Coinciding with a highly popular exhibition of his work at the Dobson and Bashford Gallery, the artist and actor Jonathan Elsom treated a large audience to a characteristically witty and vibrant talk as the February Speaker of the Month. Jonathan addressed the theme of his usual—and unusually interesting—life and work. As a young actor his mentor was Dame Ngaio Marsh, while in the studio he belonged to the Keith/Coley/Moffitt era. He briefly served as a cartoonist for *The Press* before pursuing his acting career in London. He sees painting as providing a release from the pressures of stage life. In recent years his portraiture has been popular; among his sitters are Penelope Keith and family (dogs included) and Paul Eddington, who has in recent years received considerably more acclaim as Prime Minister than John Major! Although London remains Jonathan Elsom's base, he clearly enjoys his visits home—as do the Friends.

## Christchurch, England meets Christchurch, New Zealand

On Monday 27 February we had the pleasure of welcoming a group of citizens visiting from the sister city Christchurch, Dorset, England. Councillors, Sister City Committee, members of the Friends committee and some of our Guides joined the group to welcome the visitors and share the *About Town* exhibition with them. Neil Roberts, the acting Director, welcomed them on behalf of the gallery and a framed copy of John Gibbs' *Summer* was presented to them as a memento of the visit. A second group will be visiting later in March and we look forward to also extending to them the hospitality of our city.

# Friends of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery

President—Chris Brocket 355 7133  
Vice-President—Mark Stocker 365 3895  
Acting Treasurer—Russell Skinner 379 8150  
Secretary—Ann Watt 379 4055



*Visitors from Christchurch, Dorset and local artists enjoying the About Town exhibition.*

## New Members

Carol Caldwell and Charley Fleischmann	Mrs Kate Whitehead
Warren Dennis	Mr & Mrs D. H. Booth
J. Lattimore	Cecilia Borck
B. H. Loughridge	Robert W. Conway
Roger and Heather McGowan	Simon Dean Courney
G. W. and P. A. Moore	Julie Cunningham
Bryan H. Palmer	Mrs Rebecca Garside
Julien Pettit	Helen Joy Genet
Gail Steven	Elizabeth Hartrick
Mr & Mrs W. D. Coop	Coral and John Jonesse
D. B. & A. M. Hutton	Mrs Sabina Mahoney
Mrs Irene Malcolm	Rosemary Linterman
Hawwa Moore	Alison Love
Mrs Helen Pickering	Christopher Pole
Peter Scholes	Mr C. Taylor
Shanks Family	Robert Watson
Raymond Tay	Cindy Yeung

## LocArt Visit in June

Grant Takle, painter and sculptor, will show his studio to Friends on Sunday 11 June at 2.30 pm. A maximum of 20 can be accommodated. Please meet June Goldstein at 2.20 pm outside the studio at 115 Fleete Street, Burwood.

To book (or cancel) please ring the answerphone on 379 4055.

## LocArt Visit to Gennie de Lange

On 9 February Gennie de Lange treated two groups of Friends to guided tours of her home and studio in Cashmere. Gennie is well known for the skills and diversity of her work as a ceramicist, knitwear designer, glass-blower and painter. During our visit we spent time in both her workshops. Especially informative was the discussion of pottery techniques, glazes and firing, which Gennie related to a recent series of works. Her knitwear is both luxurious and subtle. It brings colour to people's lives both here and overseas—Gennie was about to depart for the USA



LocArt visit, Gennie de Lange knitwear.

with a consignment for her admirers there. As well as looking at her role as a practising artist and designer, we admired her art collection, which is complemented by her brilliantly coloured glass. Her garden, woven by a huge grapevine, affords fine views across the Plains and in its colours has the same consistency as her art.

While Gennie's many talents clearly establish her as a 'Renaissance woman', the end product is impressively simple and enhancing. We appreciate her generosity in sharing her vision with us.

### Barbadoes Street Chapel Stained Glass Report

Restoration of the stained-glass window *Christ's Blessing* has been completed by the Rangiora artist and conservator Graham Stewart. The window was recently on display at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery in the major summer exhibition **Good Works**. Although the window was presented in the name of those who are all immensely grateful for the financial assistance afforded us by the Lottery Grants Board and hope that members of the Board were able to admire the window during the course of the exhibition.

The completion of the *Christ's Blessing* restoration means that it will join the three earlier windows from the Barbadoes Street Chapel, *The Three Martes at the Sepulchre*, *The Risen Christ Walking on the Water* and *The Ascending Christ*. Their restoration, also with the generous support of the Lottery Grants Board, was completed by Graham Stewart in 1993.

Only one of the Chapel windows now awaits restoration, a lancet window depicting a female figure kneeling beside an oil jar, probably representing the Mary Magdalene. Graham Stewart has restored its base panels and supplied a frame, but funds available to the Friends do not, as yet, permit its completion. As the whole

restoration scheme is so near completion, however, the Friends hope that further sources of funding will be made available. In the interim, we repeat our sincere thanks to the Lottery Grants Board for its generous support of a superb piece of Victorian New Zealand's artistic heritage.

### Coming Events

#### April

- 1 **Kiwiana - until 9 July**  
**Don Driver Circular Planes - until 7 May**  
**Inside the Solid - Andrea Gerbic**  
*At the Annex until 2 April*  
Saturday Club I - 10.30 am. An art appreciation club. New members welcome.
- 5 **Wednesday Club - 10.30 am.** Art appreciation club.
- 7 **Friday Club - 10.30 am.** Art appreciation club
- 7 **Unstretched - works from the collection. At the Annex until 14 May**
- 8 **Saturday Club II - 10.30 am.** Art appreciation club.
- 12 **Unwined at the Art Annex.** Wine tasting 7-9 pm.
- 13 **By the Waters of Babylon. The Art of A. Lois White - opening 5.30 pm. Exhibition closes 9 July**
- 16 **Art Lecture.** Lois White: An artist without context? Linda Tyler, Faculty of Architecture and Design Unitec Auckland. 3 pm.
- 23 **Art Lecture.** Don Driver will speak on his present and past works. 3 pm

- 25 **Concert.** Hagley Singers - choral concert 10.30 am
- 30 **Concert.** Canterbury Choral School. Music from three choirs. 3 pm

#### May

- 1 **By the Waters of Babylon. The Art of A. Lois White - until 3 July**  
**Kiwiana - until 9 July**  
**Don Driver Circular Planes - until 7 May**  
**Unstretched - At the Annex until 14 May**
- 2 **Concert.** Hagley Singers, 10.30 am
- 3 **Wednesday Club.** An art appreciation club - 10.30 am
- 5 **Friday Club.** An art appreciation club - 10.30 am
- 6 **Saturday Club I - An art appreciation club.** 10.30 am. New members welcome.
- 13 **Saturday Club II - An art appreciation club.** 10.30 am
- 18 **Christine Webster: Black Carnival.** Opens at the Annex 5.30 pm - *Exhibition closes on 2 July*