



# RIA BANCROFT

THREE DECADES OF SCULPTURE



Robert McDougall Art Gallery

# INTRODUCTION

Ria Bancroft died in Christchurch on 8 March 1993 after a life journey that had taken her in many directions but had denied her, except during the last three decades of her life, the opportunity to fulfil herself as an artist.

Her commitment to art was made early when, as a child, a special ability to work in three dimensions was recognised. In 1918, Ria became friendly with the artist William Harbutt, the inventor of Plasticine, who encouraged her to model animals in this material. He displayed her models in his shop to promote its capability but in the years that followed Ria's skills remained largely untested.

By 1926, she was a full-time musician, living in London. Over the following decade, music and the theatre dominated her life. The arrival of World War II changed her life, as it did for countless others, and it was during this time that her interest in art emerged again. It was strengthened in 1947 when she set up the Bankey Studio, which made ornaments, sold and distributed throughout Britain. Although her commercial artisan activity was undertaken primarily to earn a living, it also allowed the development of skills and techniques in sculpture, largely self-taught, that were to prove invaluable in the 1950s, when Ria lived in Canada, and later in her career.

In 1961 Ria, then aged fifty-four, was living and studying art in Italy. This experience made it clear to her that during the remainder of her life, art must be given priority. When her daughter, Peb Simmons, moved to New Zealand with her husband and children, Ria was invited to join them. She agreed, despite her reluctance to leave the country that she considered to be the cradle of later western art.

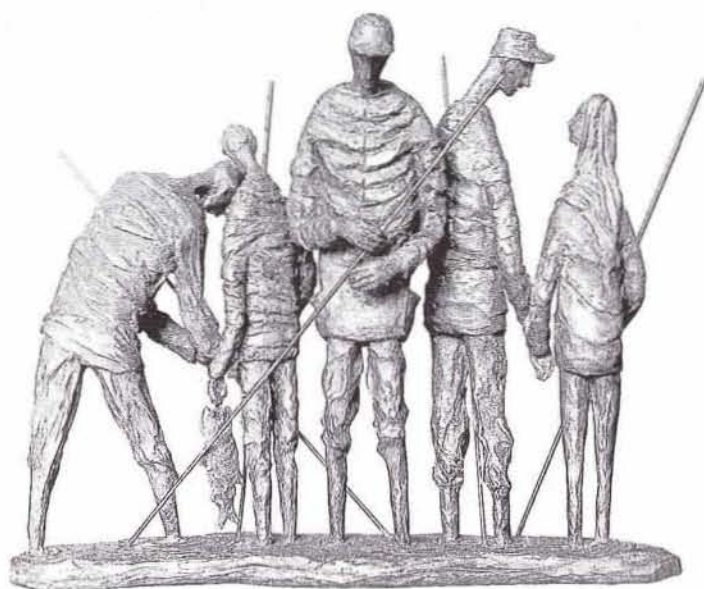
Equipped with a diploma from the Academy of Florence, Ria left for New Zealand. She arrived on 24 May 1962, determined to begin a new life as a professional artist and to reclaim some of the lost time. She realised that, in the past, other activities and people had taken priority over art and that changes were necessary if she was to fulfil her destiny as a sculptor.

Ria gradually settled into the Christchurch art community, which in the early 1960s was on the threshold of renewal. A new generation of post-World War II artists was emerging with fresh ideas and a ready acceptance of international directions. This climate of change was, however, only a small consolation to Ria for the frustration she felt in living in Christchurch rather than Florence. On a practical level, the materials and equipment she was used to were not readily available and the facilities for casting in bronze, as she had for her work *Eclipse* (cat. no. 29), were almost non-existent. As was her habit when problems were encountered, Ria found her own solutions and adapted by using modern resins as an effective substitute material.

Ria became a member of the Canterbury Society of Arts and in 1963 was invited to exhibit with The Group. Among its members then were William A. Sutton, Tosswill Woollaston, Doris Lusk, Michael Trumic, Pat Mulcahy, Tony Fomison, Ida Lough and Tom Taylor. Her early works in New Zealand included *Unicycle II* (cat. no. 32) and *Rocking-horse Ride* (cat. no. 33), both of which she showed at the 1963 Group exhibition.

Many other artists in New Zealand in the 1960s were beginning to diversify, not only in their materials, but also in their discipline. While there were fewer potters and sculptors than painters, their position and acceptance had improved greatly over the previous decade. Architects were also looking to sculptors and commissions for works to enhance new buildings were more readily offered.

As a result, from the 1960s on, Ria carried out her private work and also set aside time for commissioned work. She accepted her first major commission in 1965 – the



*Fisher Folk* 1965

Christchurch City Council invited her to make a sculpture to be incorporated in the design of the new Horizon restaurant at Christchurch. The result was the work *Horizon* (cat. no. 39). Another major public commission during this period was the nine-metre-long mural *Forms*, which she made in collaboration with wood artist, Pat Mulcahy, for the Ministry of Works for the foyer of the University of Canterbury's new science lecture hall. Soon after, in 1966, the two artists were invited to design a mural for the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation's new building in Rotorua.

Ria's status in New Zealand as a sculptor was unquestioned. As early as 1964, she had been invited to join the New Zealand Society of Sculptors, which had among its members Mollie McAllister, Carl Sydow, Alison Duff, Paul Beadle, Eric Doudney and Greer Twiss.

It was also in the mid-1960s that Ria embarked upon a number of sculpture projects with religious subjects, a thread in her work that was to grow stronger as the years advanced.

A commission for the new parish church of St Matthew's Bryndwr offered an exciting challenge for Ria, but the project did not progress beyond the *Angel of St Matthew* maquette (cat. no. 47) because church funding proved to be a difficulty. Ria experienced another, greater disappointment when her design for the Stewart Fountain in High Street (cat. no. 52) was rejected in 1969, after having been formally accepted. Two years earlier, the Christchurch Civic Trust had commissioned the Stewart Fountain project and had chosen Ria's design. Then, in an about-face, the trust changed its preference in favour of sculptor Laurence Karasek. The fountain design eventually failed and attempts to replace it have not succeeded, mostly because of civic indecision. Had the acceptance of Ria's design been honoured, the fountain might have still been in place today. Other commissions of this time, such as the murals *City in Space I* for Manning Intermediate School, Christchurch and *City in Space II* for the Christchurch Battery Company, had a happier outcome.

In her first decade in New Zealand, Ria succeeded in establishing herself as a professional sculptor. This success did not, however, result in a regular income and Ria was obliged to seek other sources of income, reducing the amount of time she could devote to sculpture. By the early 1970s, she had become involved in art education and in 1971 she accepted a position as art teacher at Xavier College. Though she found teaching rewarding, it also drained her of energy

that could have been put into her sculpture and this led to her decision in 1974 to resign.

During her teaching years, Ria had not abandoned sculpture and, although her output was reduced, she continued to be involved in a major project, the conservation and refurbishment of the Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Barbadoes Street, Christchurch. In 1968, Ria had become a member of a project group convened by Bishop Brian Ashby to examine conservation of the cathedral. By the mid-1970s, much work had been carried out, but a great deal more was still to be completed, including the forming of a special side chapel of the Blessed Sacrament within the cathedral proper. The chapel was to include a tabernacle and Ria was invited to design a pair of doors for it, behind which there was to be a safe to hold sacramental vessels.

Ria chose the subject 'Christ has died – Christ has risen' for the tabernacle doors (cat. nos. 58–62). She modelled them in 1975–76 and a British foundry cast them in bronze in 1977. This project was a labour of love for Ria and was to be the most significant work of her second decade as a sculptor in New Zealand. Of almost equal importance among



Horizon 1965

her religious works of the 1970s was *Thy Kingdom Come* (cat. no. 68), made as a result of an invitation from the World Council of Churches to exhibit with other Pacific artists in Melbourne. This work was donated by Ria to the Holy Cross Chapel in Chancery Lane in 1981.

By this time, Ria had health problems and became acutely aware of how precious her remaining years were. She was a practising Roman Catholic and a member of the community of the New Brighton parish church, which was in the same street as her home. She was closely involved in the refurbishment of the interior of the church, working in collaboration with the sculptor Bing Dawe to redefine many of the furnishing features of the church, such as the altar lectern and font. A cross, which was a feature of the sanctuary, was designed by Ria and carved by Bing Dawe.

Following the completion of the interior refurbishment in 1982, Ria wished to make a more personal contribution and decided on the gift of a sculpture. The church, formerly named Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, had become simply St Mary's, so Ria chose as her subject a seated figure of Mary, the mother of Christ, as a mature woman. The community's opinion and approval was sought and received before she set about her task. She completed the



Dormition of the Virgin 1965

work, *Mary, Mother of Jesus* (cat. no. 77), in 1984. This was perhaps the major work of the third decade. It was a sculpture endowed with religious symbolism, but it was also a personal statement of spirituality and an affirmation of faith.

At the end of the 1980s, Ria continued to work, despite increasingly frail health and advancing years. She accepted an important commission to make a memorial cross for All Saints' Church, Dunedin, which depicted Christ in majesty. This work, *Christus Rex* (cat. no. 80), was a fitting conclusion to Ria's public sculpture. After its completion in 1990 she continued to be offered commissions, including the Kate Sheppard Memorial, but poor health made it impossible to accept any of them.

In 1992, Ria embarked on a final personal statement with the reworking of a life-size portrait head, originally made in 1976, of the Russian writer and philosopher Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Ria had felt great empathy with his battle to fulfil his potential as an artist. The *Alexander Solzhenitsyn* mask head (cat. no. 75) was in a real sense a memorial not only to his struggle and pain but also, more poignantly, to her own.

The artistic endeavour of the city of Christchurch has been enhanced by the contribution of Ria Bancroft's three decades as a sculptor. She was a highly spiritual artist, unique in her activity as a religious sculptor. Each of the commissions she received from various churches was carried out as a true act of faith, synonymous with the values of her belief. Each of her non-religious works was also intended to be a real and meaningful symbol of an idea, rather than a mere tangible representation.

Neil Roberts  
Curator

#### REFERENCES

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— *Ria Bancroft Archive c. 1960–1992*. MS Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

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## ENGLAND 1921–1946

During her early adult years, Ria Bancroft was unable to devote very much time to her art because of her involvement with music and the theatre, the need to earn a living, and the intervention of World War II.

- 1 *Untitled landscape* 1921  
oil on board, 105 X 200mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 2 *Refugees* 1943  
oil on canvas, 205 x 405mm  
Private collection, Christchurch

## BANKEY STUDIO 1947–1951

Late in 1946, Ria Bancroft moved to Mitcham, Surrey where, the following year, she began a small home industry in her second-floor apartment, making nursery plaques and ornamental animals in plaster. She called this business the Ria Bankey Studio.

- 3 *Bedtime* (nursery plaque)  
plaster, 140 x 115mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 4 *Mrs Gosling* (nursery plaque)  
plaster, 140 x 115mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 5 *Cat reclining*  
silver/lead, 80 x 150mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 6 *Cat reclining*  
plaster (painted), 80 x 150mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 7 *Cat sitting*  
plaster (painted), 110mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 8 *Foal standing*  
silver/lead, 110mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 9 *Foal standing*  
plaster (painted), 110mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 10 *Faun standing*  
silver/lead, 110mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 11 *Faun standing*  
plaster (painted), 110mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 12 *Sad Sam*  
ceramic, 130mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 13 *Head of Mary*  
ceramic, 115 x 95mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 14 *Head of Mary*  
ceramic, 115 x 95mm  
Private collection, Christchurch

## CANADA 1951–1960

During the time Ria Bancroft lived in Canada, she worked mostly as a commercial artist, at first freelance then, from 1956–1960, for the department store, The Robert Simpson Company, Toronto.

- 15 *Winter Scene, Balmy Beach, Toronto* 1954  
oil on board, 190 x 230mm  
Private collection
- 16 *Cat* 1954  
plaster, 460 mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 17 *Display Doll maquette (Woman with a Dog)*  
wire/plaster/fabric, 240mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 18 *Display Doll maquette (Running Girl)*  
wire/plaster/fabric, 190mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 19 *Display Doll maquette (Girl Kneeling)*  
wire/plaster/fabric, 160mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 20 *Display Doll maquette (Woman in a Blue Dress)*  
wire/plaster/fabric, 250mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 21 *Display Doll maquette (Girl Kneeling on a Chair)*  
wire/plaster/fabric, 200mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 22 *Corn Maiden* 1956–57  
polychrome plaster, 250 x 210mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 23 *Father Christmas Head* 1960  
plaster, 200 x 170mm  
Private collection, Christchurch

## ITALY 1960–1962

In 1960, Ria Bancroft travelled to Italy to study art. She enrolled at the Academy of Fine Art in Florence where she took classes for two years as a mature student, graduating in 1962.

- 24 *Storm over Monte Morcello* 1960  
pen and ink/wash on paper, 265 x 330mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 25 *Standing life study* 1961  
pencil, 415 x 315mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 26 *Life drawing – Nella* 1961  
pencil, 315 x 415mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 27 *Seated nude – Nella* (also titled *Woman by the Sea*) 1961  
plaster, 160 x 200 x 165mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 28 *Seated nude – Nella* 1961  
bronze, 160 x 200 x 165mm  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery collection
- 29 *Eclipse* 1961  
bronze, 450 x 300 x 135mm  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery collection
- 30 *Portrait of Franca* 1962  
pastel/watercolour on paper, 400 x 350mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 31 *Sunburst* plate 1962  
ceramic glazed, 195mm diameter  
Private collection, Christchurch

## NEW ZEALAND 1963–1993

In 1962 Ria Bancroft left Italy for New Zealand, arriving on 24 May in Christchurch, where she was to live and sculpt for the next three decades.

- 32 *Unicycle II*  
plastic/steel/bronze, 650 x 360mm  
Christchurch Girls' High School Collection
- 33 *Rocking-horse Ride* 1963  
resin steel/iron, 475 x 155 mm  
Suter Art Gallery collection
- 34 *Mark* 1963  
bisque, 210mm  
Private collection
- 35 *Madonna relief* 1964  
terracotta glazed, 374 x 115mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 36 *Mr Executive* 1964 (commission)  
steel resin/copper inlay, 850 x 220mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 37 *Standing Madonna and Child* 1965  
resin/copper/steel, 610 x 160mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 38 *Prophet* 1965  
bronze, 252mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 39 *Horizon* 1965 (commission)  
aluminium/resin, 670 mm  
Christchurch International Airport Ltd Collection
- 40 *Fisher Folk* 1965  
plastic/steel/iron, 400 x 300 mm  
Private collection, Auckland
- 41 *Seated Madonna and Child* 1966  
steel resin inlaid, 270 x 110mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 42 *Forms* mural preparatory drawing 1966 (commission)  
crayon on linen, 510 x 1105mm  
University of Canterbury Collection
- 43 *Forms* mural maquette 1966 (commission)  
resin on wood, 331 x 915mm  
University of Canterbury Collection

In 1965 Ria Bancroft received a commission from the Ministry of Works to design and make a 9.7 metre mural in collaboration with Pat Mulcahy for the new science lecture theatre at the University of Canterbury.

- 44 *Tree of Birds* 1966  
brazen bronze and steel, 760 mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 45 *The Crowd* maquette 1967  
aluminium resin, 200 x 380 x 12mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 46 *The Crowd* 1967  
lead, 215 x 230 x 6mm  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade New Zealand Government Collection, Wellington

The inspiration for this work was the crowds of people who visited the seaside suburb of New Brighton on weekends and holidays. *The Crowd* was purchased by the New Zealand Government to be shown at the 1968 International Craft Show, Stuttgart, Germany. It then went on display at the New Zealand consulate in Geneva, Switzerland.

- 47 *Angel of St Matthew* maquette 1967  
bronze/epoxy resin, 390 x 140 x 70mm  
St Matthew's Church, Bryndwr Collection

By 1967, plans for a new church for the parish of St Matthew's Bryndwr were underway. Ria Bancroft was commissioned by the Roman Catholic bishop to design a work for the west wall of the new church. A planned 4.5 metre figure of the Angel of St Matthew with his left hand raised was decided on. The realisation by the church that there would be insufficient funds available meant that the project never proceeded beyond the maquette stage.

- 48 *Sea Form* 1967  
aluminium/epoxy resin, 300 x 660mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 49 *Dormition of the Virgin* 1968  
cold-cast bronze, 340 x 530mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 50 *Xavier Madonna* maquette 1968 (commission)  
copper resin, 430 x 200 x 20mm  
Private collection, Christchurch

In 1967 Ria Bancroft was commissioned by Xavier College, Christchurch, to make a work for the college. The inspiration for the work was the Book of Revelation 12:1 – 'And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars'.

- 51 *City in Space I* (commission drawing) 1968  
pastel/tempera on paper, 380 x 770mm  
Private collection, Christchurch

Ria Bancroft was invited by the Ministry of Works to design a mural for the foyer of the new Manning Intermediate School to be built in Hoon Hay, Christchurch. The mural, measuring 2.7 x 1.25 metres, was to be made in aluminium resin.

- 52 *Stewart Fountain* commission drawing 1969  
pastel on paper, 285 x 420mm  
Private collection, Christchurch

In 1967, Robertson H. (Sir) Stewart donated funds for the design and construction of a fountain for the High Street triangle. The Christchurch Civic Trust invited Ria Bancroft to design the fountain. During 1969 she prepared working drawings and a maquette. Suddenly there was a change of mind on the part of the trust, who gave the project to another artist. Ria Bancroft was never given a satisfactory explanation.

- 53 *Stewart Fountain* site drawing  
photostat, 500 x 540mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 54 *Two Mourning Apostles* 1970  
Welsh slate/carved, 270 x 255mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 55 *Teilhard de Chardin* 1970  
graphite, 480 x 280mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 56 *Cosmos Genesis* maquette 1970  
bronze resin/patinated, 165 x 270mm  
Private collection, Christchurch

In 1970 Ria Bancroft was commissioned by the Marist Brothers Sacred Heart College, Auckland, to make a mural for a large stairwell in the college. The inspiration for *Cosmos Genesis* was the writing of the French theologian Teilhard de Chardin and his thoughts on the universe: 'It is no longer the atom which lives but the universe within it'.

- 57 *Tree of Birds II* 1975  
brass copper brazed, 710 x 170mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 58 *Tabernacle Screen Doors* 1975  
Pietà, 540 x 420 x 30mm  
Ascension, 560 x 425 x 30mm  
plasters  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery collection
- 59 *Tabernacle Screen Doors* fragment 1975  
terracotta, 270 x 200mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 60 *Tabernacle Screen Doors* drawing  
graphite, 520 x 760mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 61 *Tabernacle Screen Doors* Pietà  
unfired clay, 210 x 125 x 53mm  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery collection
- 62 *Tabernacle Screen Doors* Dead Christ 1975  
unfired clay, 230 x 120 x 45mm  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery collection

In 1974, as part of the refurbishment of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, a new side chapel was formed, designed by Sir Miles Warren, in which there would be a tabernacle. Weaver Ida Lough was commissioned to design a wall-hanging that would surround the tabernacle containing the safe, which held sacramental vessels and elements of the Eucharistic meal. Ria Bancroft's task was to make sculptured doors for the tabernacle. The theme 'Christ has died – Christ has risen' was taken from the words of the Mass. The Tabernacle Screen Doors were dedicated by Archbishop Angelo Acerbi Apostolic Pro-Nuncio to New Zealand on 12 June 1977.

- 63 *Mother Teresa* of Calcutta Tribute bust 1977  
Oamaru stone resin, 395 x 365 mm  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery collection
- 64 *Mother Teresa* of Calcutta Tribute bust maquette 1977  
terracotta, 160 x 155mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 65 *Patrice* 1977  
bisque terracotta, 280 x 150 x 144mm  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery collection
- 66 *Self Portrait* 1977  
terracotta stained/waxed, 240 x 193 x 140mm  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery collection
- 67 *Lord Holy Spirit* 1978 (unfinished)  
iron resin mounted on wood, 190 x 900 x 290mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 68 *Thy Kingdom Come* 1979  
basalt rock/brass,  
mounted on Oamaru stone, 450 x 365mm  
Holy Cross Chapel collection, Christchurch
- 69 *Teilhard de Chardin* Tribute relief study 1979  
terracotta, 310 x 210 x 13mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 70 *Lineage* 1979  
polychrome limestone, 175 x 180 x 130mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 71 *Wendy* 1981  
terracotta, bisque fired, 245 x 140 x 205mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 72 *Crucifix* 1982  
steel resin/stone, 430 x 190mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 73 *Totem* 1985  
brass mounted on a scoria rock base, 1017mm  
Private collection, Christchurch

- 74 *Jubilate* 1991  
metal, 340mm diameter  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 75 *Alexander Solzhenitsyn* mask head 1992  
resin unpatinated, 280 x 180 x 110mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 76 *Mary Mother of Jesus* 1984  
Oamaru stone resin/terracotta, 1350 x 420 x 550mm  
St Mary's Church, New Brighton, Christchurch
- 77 *Mary, Mother of Jesus* maquette 1984  
terracotta, 250mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 78 *Mary, Mother of Jesus* test piece 1984  
terracotta, 170mm  
Private collection, Christchurch

On 14 July 1984, the sculpture *Mary, Mother of Jesus* was unveiled and dedicated at St Mary's Church, New Brighton, after many months' work by Ria Bancroft. The sculpture was her gift to the parish.

- 79 *Christ in Majesty* 1967  
copper resin mounted on wood, 220 x 150mm  
Private collection, Christchurch

Originally made in edition, this work became the idea source for the *Christus Rex* memorial cross.

- 80 *Christus Rex* cross 1989/90  
resin/copper inlay/terracotta mounted on wood,  
1000 x 600mm  
All Saints' Church, Dunedin

In 1989 Ria Bancroft was commissioned to make a memorial cross for All Saints' Church, Dunedin, based on her 1967 *Christ in Majesty* cross.

- 81 *Christus Rex* drawing 1989  
Pastel, 910 x 590mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 82 *Christ in Majesty* figure mould 1967  
synthetic, 190 x 135mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 83 *Christ in Majesty* figure fragments 1967  
clay unfired, 157 x 120mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 84 *Christus Rex* head of Christ (trial piece)  
bronze resin, 200 x 130mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 85 *Christ Medallion* 1967 cast (mounted)  
bronze resin, 100mm diameter  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 86 *Christ Medallion* 1967 mould  
plaster, 140 x 140mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 87 *Christ Medallion* 1967 cast  
bisque fired, 100mm diameter  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 88 *Christ Medallion* 1967 cast  
plaster aggregate, 130mm diameter  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 89 *St Francis Feeding the Birds* relief 1965  
press moulded and terracotta fired, 240 x 160mm  
Private collection, Christchurch
- 90 *St Francis Feeding the Birds* relief mould 1965  
plaster, 360 x 260mm  
Private collection, Christchurch

# CHRONOLOGY 1907-1993

- 1907 Born Violet Ivy Wack on 3 January at Lyncombe, Bath, England. Lives in London in her early years, returns to Bath in 1918 and begins modelling with river clay. Meets artist William Harbutt (the inventor of Plasticine) and commences to make small models with this material.
- 1924 Following the family's move to Bristol, Ria and her mother form a musical duo, performing at country fairs and in professional theatre. In 1926 she contracts what proves to be a disastrous marriage, which is dissolved in 1934, the year in which she meets her second husband, Eddy Bancroft (Bankey). By the summer of 1939 they are living at Weston-super-Mare where Ria commences war work with the General Post Office and earns her electrical engineer's ticket.
- 1942 Returns to London and begins serious oil painting, including *Refugees* (cat. no. 2).
- 1946 Moves to live in Mitcham, Surrey, where Bankey Studio is opened for the commercial ceramic production of animals and nursery plaques (cat. nos. 3-14) that are sold throughout England.
- 1951 Emigrates to Toronto, Canada with her family. Employed by the T. Eaton Company to make display figures for their Christmas parade. More commercial work follows, including commissions from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.
- 1956 Invited to join the commercial display staff of The Robert Simpson Company, a leading Toronto department store. Work includes preparing for displays (cat. nos. 17-21 and 23).
- 1960 Her first important work, *Unicycle I*, is exhibited. The response to this work encourages Ria to travel to Italy and enrol at the Florence Academy of Fine Art to dedicate her remaining years to sculpture.
- 1961 Makes *Eclipse* (cat. no. 29) in response to the lunar eclipse of 16 February 1961.
- 1962 Awarded the Academy of Fine Arts diploma. Decides to leave Italy and departs for New Zealand at the invitation of her daughter and son-in-law.
- 1963 Sets up her first studio in New Zealand in Cashmere and commences work. Invited to exhibit with The Group, and continues to do so until 1977. Makes *Fisherboy*, *Rocking-horse Ride* (cat. no. 33) and *Mark* (cat. no. 34).
- 1964 Moves to 79 Lonsdale Street, New Brighton where she establishes her studio. *Rocking-horse Ride* (cat. no. 33) is purchased by the Suter Art Gallery, Nelson.
- 1965 Invited to become a member of the New Zealand Society of Sculptors. Commissioned, with carver Pat Mulcahy, to design and make a mural, *Forms*, for the foyer of the new science lecture hall at the University of Canterbury. Also commissioned by the Christchurch City Council to make a sculpture, *Horizon* (cat. no. 39), for the restaurant at the Christchurch International Airport. Exhibits at Suter Art Gallery, Nelson. Also makes *Fisher Folk* (cat. no. 40), *Prophet* (cat. no. 38) and *Standing Madonna* (cat. no. 37).
- 1966 Commissioned with Pat Mulcahy by the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation to make a mural for the foyer of its new building in Rotorua. Exhibits at South Island World Craft Council, Nelson. Also makes *Tree of Birds I* (cat. no. 44) and *Seated Madonna and Child* (cat. no. 41).
- 1968 Commissioned to design and make a mural for the new Manning Intermediate School, *City in Space I* (cat. no. 51). Commissioned by St Matthew's Bryndwr to design a work for a new church. Lack of finance prevented this project from proceeding but the maquette *Angel of St Matthew* (cat. no. 47) is made. *The Crowd* (cat. no. 45) is purchased by the New Zealand Government for the New Zealand consulate in Geneva. Also makes *Sea Form* (cat. no. 48) and, in limited edition, *Christ in Majesty* (cat. no. 79). Invited to become a member of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament conservation project committee.
- 1969 Commissioned for the Stewart Fountain, but the design of another artist is later given preference. Makes the *Xavier Madonna* (cat. no. 50), on commission for Xavier College, Christchurch, and *Dormition of the Virgin* (cat. no. 49) in an edition of four castings. Commissioned by the Christchurch Battery Company to make a 1.25 metre mural, *City in Space II*.
- 1970 Works include a relief carving on Welsh slate, *Two Mourning Apostles* (cat. no. 54). Commissioned by Sacred Heart College, Auckland, to make mural *Cosmo Genesis 1970-1971* (cat. no. 55) in expression of the universe inspired by the writings of the French theologian Teilhard de Chardin. Exhibits with the Christchurch Sculptors at the Canterbury Society of Arts. Decides to supplement income by teaching.
- 1971 Begins teaching at Xavier College.
- 1974 Resigns from teaching to devote more time to her work. Invited to make a pair of sculptured doors for a tabernacle to be incorporated with a weaving by Ida Lough in the new Blessed Sacrament Chapel in the cathedral, designed by Sir Miles Warren. Exhibits in the Commonwealth Games Art New Zealand exhibition in Christchurch.
- 1975 Makes *Tree of Birds II* (cat. no. 57).
- 1977 Completed *Tabernacle Screen Doors* (cat. no. 58) are cast in bronze and installed at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. Included in the National Film Unit production *Three Women* with artists Yvonne Rust and Alison Duff. Works include the *I Am* cross for the cathedral and a number of portrait masks, including *Self Portrait* (cat. no. 66) and bust of *Mother Teresa* (cat. no. 63). Awarded Pope Paul VI Peace Medal.

- 1978 Inspired by J. K. Baxter's 'Song of the Holy Spirit', makes the sculpture *Lord Holy Spirit* (cat. no. 67). Exhibits at the Christchurch Arts Festival.
- 1979 Invited to exhibit with other Pacific artists at the World Council of Churches assembly in Melbourne on the theme 'Your Kingdom Come'. Her work, *Thy Kingdom Come* (cat. no. 68), is chosen for the cover of the conference publication. The work is later given to the Holy Cross Chapel. Makes *Teilhard de Chardin Tribute* relief mask (cat. no. 69) and *Linage* (cat. no. 70).
- 1980 Exhibits in 'Boxes' exhibition at the Canterbury Society of Arts and IKON at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery. With Father Pat Crawford and sculptor Bing Dawe, plans the redesign of the interior of the New Brighton Catholic parish church.
- 1982 Works on the redesign of St Mary's, New Brighton. Makes *Crucifix* (cat. no. 72).
- 1983 Begins work on a sculpture of Mary for St Mary's, New Brighton.
- 1984 The sculpture *Mary, Mother of Jesus* (cat. no. 77) is unveiled and dedicated on 14 July.
- 1985 Ill health limits work output but does slate relief *St Luke and Totem* (cat. no. 73), which is exhibited at the Canterbury Society of Arts the following year.
- 1989 Commissioned to make a Christus Rex as a memorial for All Saints' Church, Dunedin.
- 1990 *Christus Rex* (cat. no. 80) is completed and dedicated.
- 1991 Exhibits *Jubilate* (cat. no. 74) at the Canterbury Society of Arts Christmas exhibition. Invited by the Kate Sheppard Memorial Committee to consider designing the Kate Sheppard Memorial. Ill health prevents acceptance. Also invited to make a tabernacle for St Bede's College chapel, which she declines.
- 1992 Reworks a life-size head of *Alexander Solzhenitsyn* (cat. no. 75), originally made in 1976.
- 1993 Dies in Christchurch on 8 March and is buried at Memorial Park Cemetery.

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Photography: Lloyd Park and Aldren Simmons

front cover: *Christus Rex* cross 1989/90  
right: *Ria Bancroft working on Mary, Mother of Jesus* 1984

