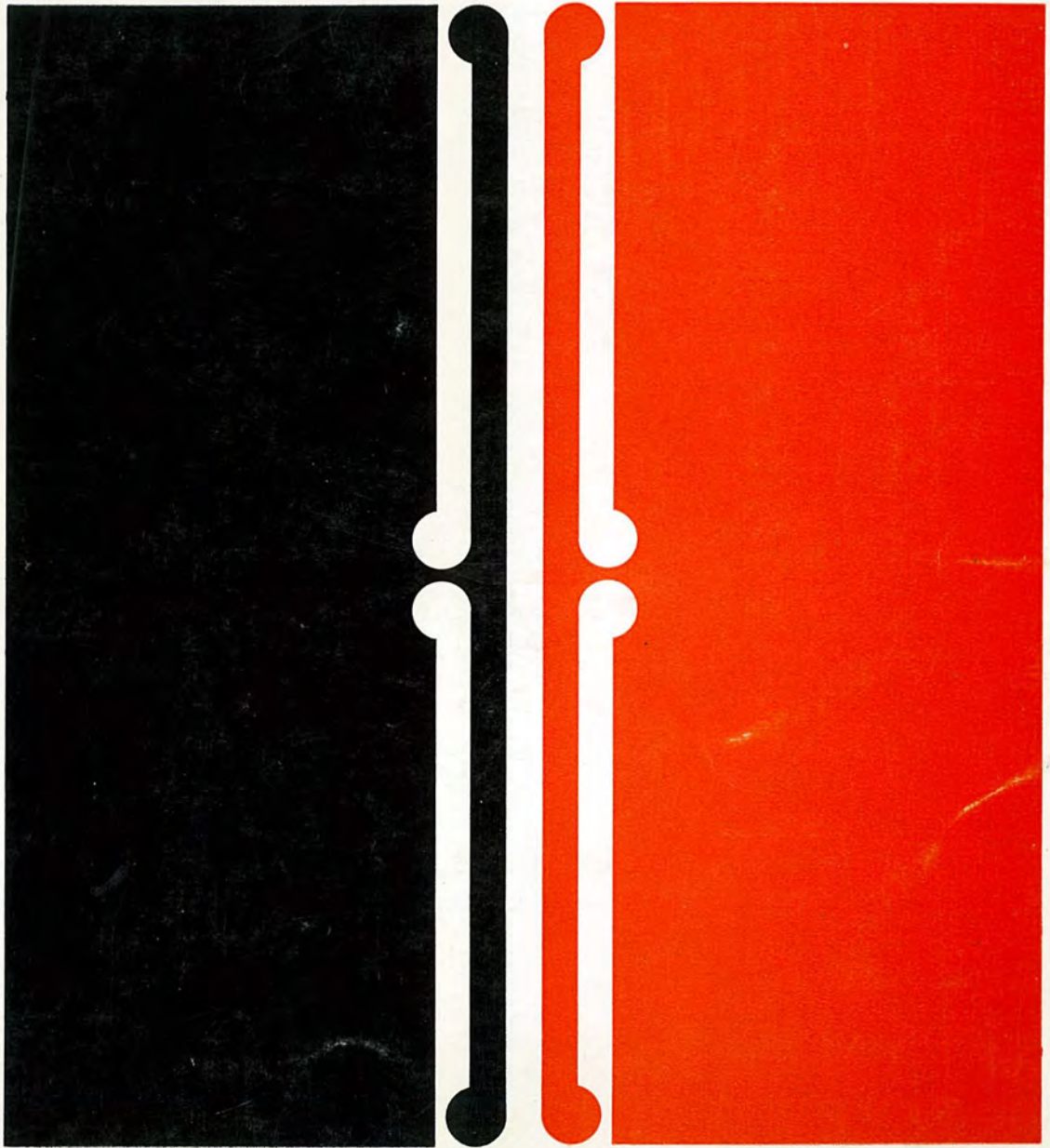


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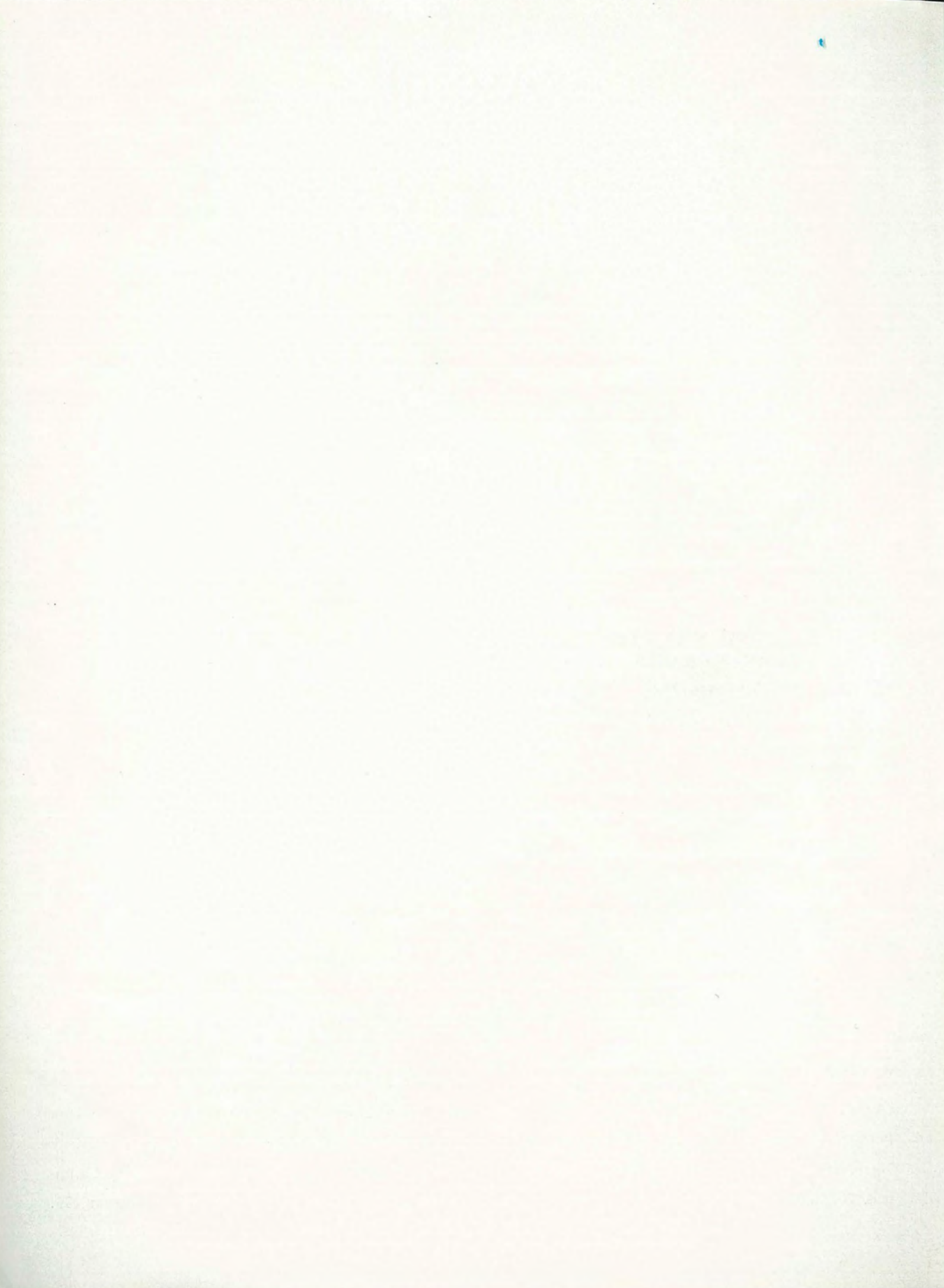


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The Hard-Edge Abstractions of Gordon Walters



P. AE. HUTCHINGS

' . . . There is, after all, only one "principle of ornament"—that it must be *interesting* . . . it must never seem laboured, it must seem to be done with ease. Above all it must be *interesting as an expression of life*, and *invention and individuality*, and yet never confused or hard to understand; it must seem to be full of thought, but thought so simplified and ordered as to be followed without fatigue.'¹

GORDON WALTERS has embarked upon a complex and difficult task, the reinterpretation of the Maori *koru* motif in terms of European abstract painting since Arp, Klee and Mondrian. The

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intentions of Walters' current paintings are formal, but the feeling and the intention of each picture depends, to a great degree, on the nature and origin of the *motif* itself out of which these sophisticated, immaculate, hard-edged abstractions are built: formality is always balanced by the 'overtone' of the motif.

I

The paintings on which Walters has been working since 1954 are all concerned to give an Arp-like clarity and Mondrian-like inevitability to the *koru*² or fern-bud motif taken as the subject of continuous improvisation. To understand these pictures fully we must keep in tension, precisely as they keep in tension, two aspects: pure, plane design; and the affective, national, romantic meaning of the *koru* motif, ubiquitous in Maori art, and lodged firmly in the subconscious of every New Zealand child.

Gordon Walters' achievement lies in the exact balance which he strikes between the analytic, cold, geometrical style which derives from European abstract painting, and the rhythmical, inventive but

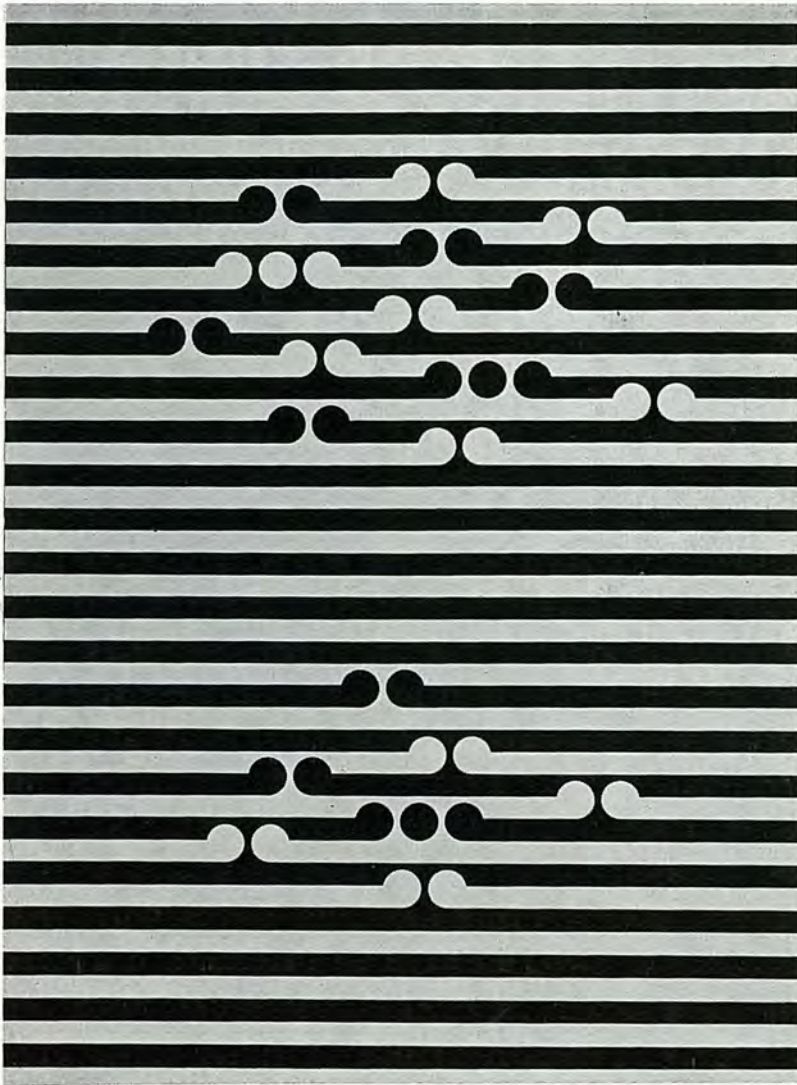


Plate I. Black and White. PVA on hardboard, 1966. 48 x 36in. Private collection.

faintly monotonous exuberance of Maori ornament. Walters simplifies the *koru* motif until it is no more than a bar-stopped-with-coin-spot. He confronts the inherent monotony of the motif by heightening it. His canvasses repeat endlessly and insidiously the theme of bars-and-coin-spots, stopped-bars and free-spots; and the measured repetition sets up an a-temporal counterpoint in which a crucial figure-ground ambiguity provides the necessary movement-in-stasis. Everything is solid and firm: but everything moves, in a kind of dance.

Gordon Walters' designs which, like Eliot's Chinese jar, 'move eternally in their stillness', are interesting in two ways: they satisfy the categorical demand of art, or of ornament, that it be at once ordered and varied; and they engage our feelings

with their reiteration of a motif that is full of strong, if obscure, emotion.

This aspect of feeling is as important, for Walters' fellow countrymen at least, as is the passionate exploration of pure design which is the painter's present concern. And indeed the passionate concern for design comes, one suspects, in no small part from Walters' first struggles with his visual environment.

II

Gordon Walters was born in Wellington in 1919, and the Dominion Museum and the National Art Gallery were for him, as they were for all of us who left off sliding along the floors long enough to look at the exhibits, occasions of an ambiguous experi-

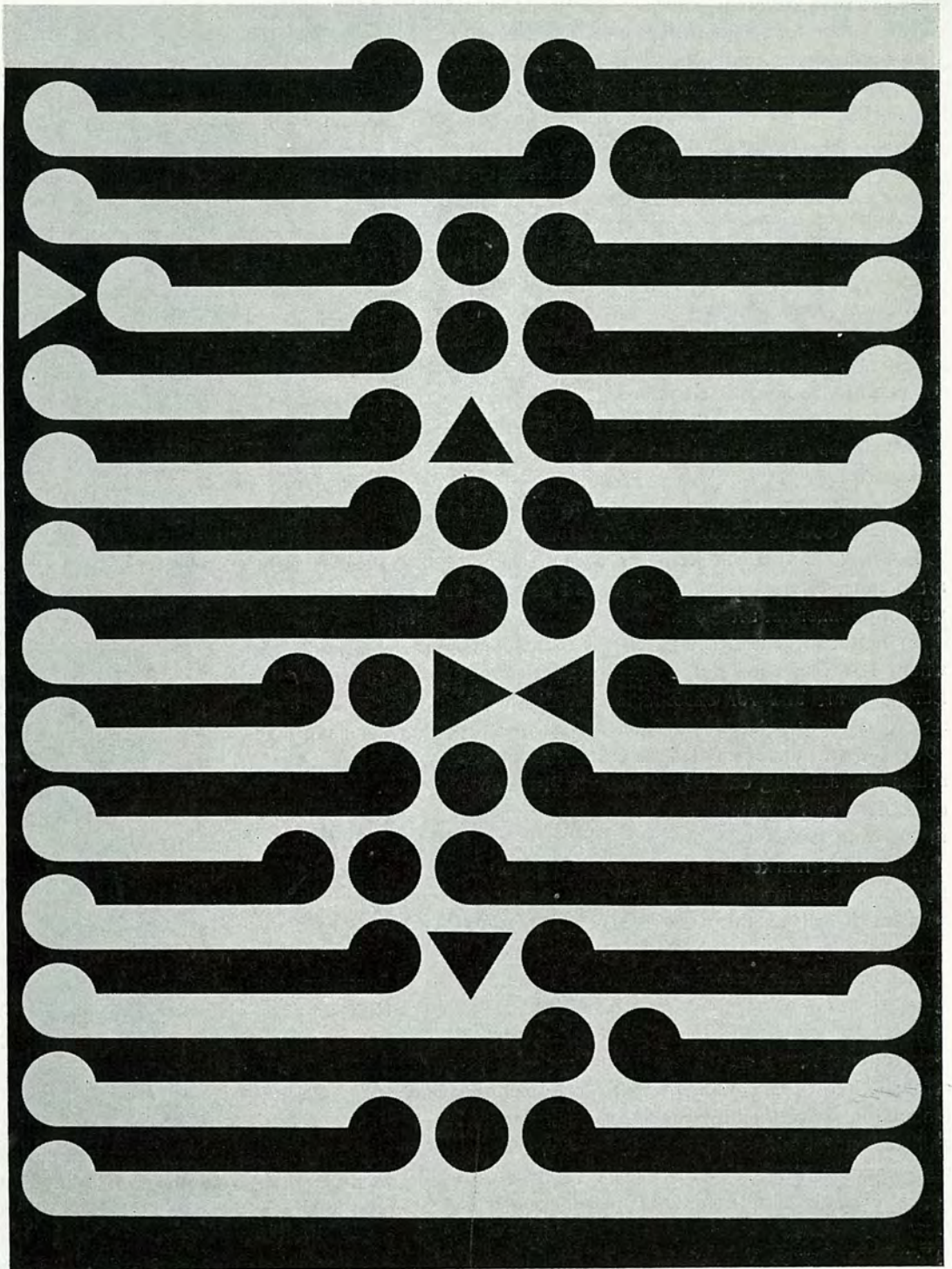


Plate II. Black and White. PVA on hardboard, 1965. 48 x 36in. Private collection.

ence. Even children know, somehow, without having to be told, that European Art is altogether better and more exciting than the National Gallery can show. And they know that the Maori objects, for all that they remain opaque to the uninstructed *pakeha*, must really be rather splendid of their own kind. Excellences that might be understood are not here to be experienced, fine things that are here are not completely intelligible. In one's own country one is cut off from one's proper past, and faced by objects that remain, somehow, alien.

Walters' painting since 1954 has been a working through of just such an ambiguous cultural experience, and it is itself a concrete universal of the sensitive Colonials' situation.

Gordon Walters has set down the following details of his development and career, and they are instructive:

'I received my first art training at Wellington Technical College School of Art from 1935 to 1944. In 1945 I taught part-time at the school of art evening classes. During this time I engaged as well in commercial art work.

'In 1941 I met the Dutch painter Theo Schoon, to whom I was indebted for a wider appreciation of European art and for encouragement and help in seeking a more personal direction in my work. In 1946 I spent three months in Australia meeting artists and studying collections in the galleries. Two exhibitions of my paintings were held in Wellington in 1944 and 1947.

'This work marked the beginnings of a personal style incorporating influences from the European painters I had at this time seen only in reproduction. They were chiefly Klee, Miro and Picasso. My subject matter was mostly landscape and landscape details which interested me, frequently the bare rocky outcrops of limestone country with isolated tree forms and new growth springing up through burnt-over bush. I tried to treat this material in as free and imaginative a way as possible and did not hesitate to depart from naturalistic representation when I felt impelled to do so. A typical example of this work was reproduced in the New Zealand number of *Studio* magazine in 1948.³

'In December 1947 I left New Zealand to study and work in Australia, where I stayed for 14 months; during this time I took part in a group exhibition of paintings in Sydney. Returning to Wellington in March, 1949, I held a one-man show of paintings and drawings. In February 1950 I left for England and worked and studied there and on

the Continent for one year, visiting galleries and meeting artists in France and Holland.

'In 1951 I returned to Australia and lived there for two and a half years. During this time I was occupied in sorting out the many and varied impressions gained during my stay in Europe. I painted in various styles and abandoned most of them fairly quickly. I supported myself by working as a typographic designer and by various other short term jobs.

'Since 1954 I have remained in New Zealand, developing my present style in painting. This work has been produced over a period of seven or eight years and I have withheld showing it until I could present it in as fully realized a form as possible. In March 1966 I had a one-man show at the New Vision Gallery in Auckland. The work has grown in part from a study of Maori and Melanesian art forms. Maori and related art forms have interested me over a long period and I have found this to be a particularly rich field for study. I have tried to carry over and intensify in my work the positive/negative quality of much Maori and Melanesian design and for me this links up and has meaning in terms of current developments in European art.'

The conscious study of Pacific Art and the imaginative reworking of the indigenous *koru* motif comes after Walters has seen Europe: only the returning traveller can recognize the things that he grew up among. Travelled and sophisticated Walters re-presents the crucial motif of Maori art, making it meaningful in terms of a European hard-edged idiom.

Walters' paintings resolve, in their own way, the ambiguity of the experience of the New Zealand European confronted with Polynesian excellences. His paintings assimilate two disparate systems of art into a common context of meanings.

III

The bar-with-terminal-coin-spot motif on which Gordon Walters improvises so elegantly derives, as we have said, from the *koru*, though Walters has been influenced by New Guinea as well as by Maori art.

Among the non-Maori artifacts that have played some part in the evolution of Walters' characteristic form are things like the carved board from New Guinea illustrated in Fig. 1. The free-coin-spots which occur in many of his paintings (Plate I) may possibly owe something to the eyes of the grotesque face on this bas-relief object or to the



Fig. 1. Carved and painted ceremonial board. Papuan Gulf. Auckland Museum.

roundels on shields, just as the occasional triangles which are to be found in some of the earlier pictures may derive from the jaggedness of New Guinea objects, with their shark's tooth dentellations. The chief motifs, however, which took Gordon Walters' eye were the spiral and the serpentine line which function, even in the mask-relief, as independent patterns, and which, even on a carved surface, set up an equivocal relationship between figure and ground.



Fig. 2. Decorated gourds. Dominion Museum.

The Maori artifacts which have had most influence on Walters are, he reports, the big incised serving-gourds (Fig. 2) in the Dominion Museum collection, tattoo patterns, the black-and-white figure on the Maori food storehouse in the Dominion Museum, and, perhaps most importantly, Maori rafter patterns. In all these artifacts, and particularly in the rafter patterns, we find endless variations on the spiral, bar, wave and circle; variations which often exhibit that figure-ground ambiguity which Walters exploits with such consummate skill in his own work.

There is one rafter pattern in the Whare Runanga at Waitangi⁴ (Fig. 3) which I happened to see on a postcard a few days after my first conversation with Gordon Walters. I felt at once that this pattern or one very like it must have had some particular significance for Walters, and he confirmed my hunch when I showed him the postcard. The pattern in question is illustrated in Augustus Hamilton,⁵ though it is not named; and Gordon Walters lent me from his files the photograph in Fig. 4 which shows a barge-board at Waitara which is painted with a design that resembles both the Whare Runanga pattern and the first pattern in Hamilton's chromo-lithographic illustrations.

The Waitara design is related, quite explicitly Walters recollects, to a black and yellow painting, (Plate IV) which he has since destroyed.

There is another early, unsuccessful, essay by Walters, no more than a sketch in black and red on white paper, (Plate III) which shows him

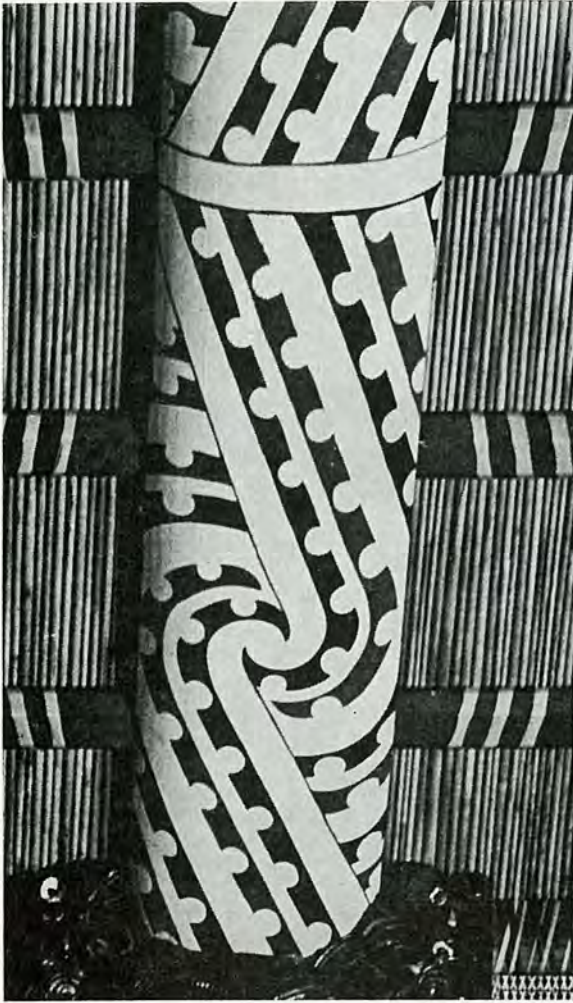


Fig. 3. Rafter pattern. Whare Runanga, Waitangi.

developing this Waitara gable design, or some very similar pattern, for his own purposes. In Walters' essay the lucidity of the Whare Runanga pattern is absent, as indeed it is absent from the Waitara design, and Walters' own kind of European hard-edge clarity has not yet evolved. Walters' sketch, (Plate IV), has the diffuseness of the Waitara gable without its energy, and the tightness and control which one finds in the Whare Runanga pattern and in Walters' mature paintings, are quite lost in this transitional sketch, which represents no

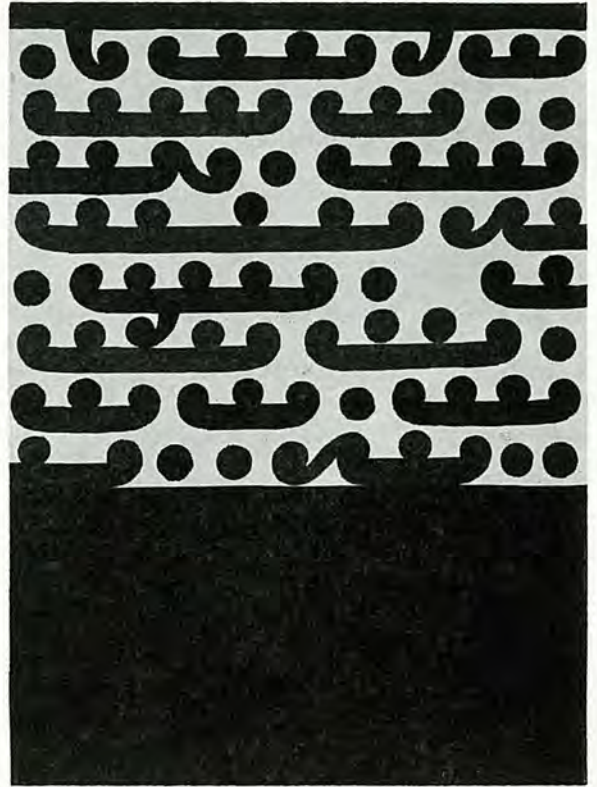


Plate III. Preliminary Study. Gouache, 1959. 12 x 9in.

more than a moment in the long process of the reworking of the *koru* into the bar-with-coin-spot.

Walters' sketch is, as it stands, bad, but it is highly instructive. We see, in the first place, how the *koru* motif simply had to be simplified to the bar-with-terminal-coin-spots. If the end of the bar turns up independently of the spot, as it does in the essay, all that we get is little canoes with round-headed men in them: Walters falls further into the trap that the Waitara painter has not altogether avoided, but Walters cannot plead the same kind of privilege. Again we can see, from the sketch, how easily a reworking of the basic pattern can lose the beautiful ground-figure ambiguity of those coin-spots which lie half on the bars in the Whare Runanga design. Walters goes still further than the Waitara painter in setting up a clear ground for unambiguous figures, and this will not do. Both



Fig. 4. Rafter pattern, Waitara meeting house.

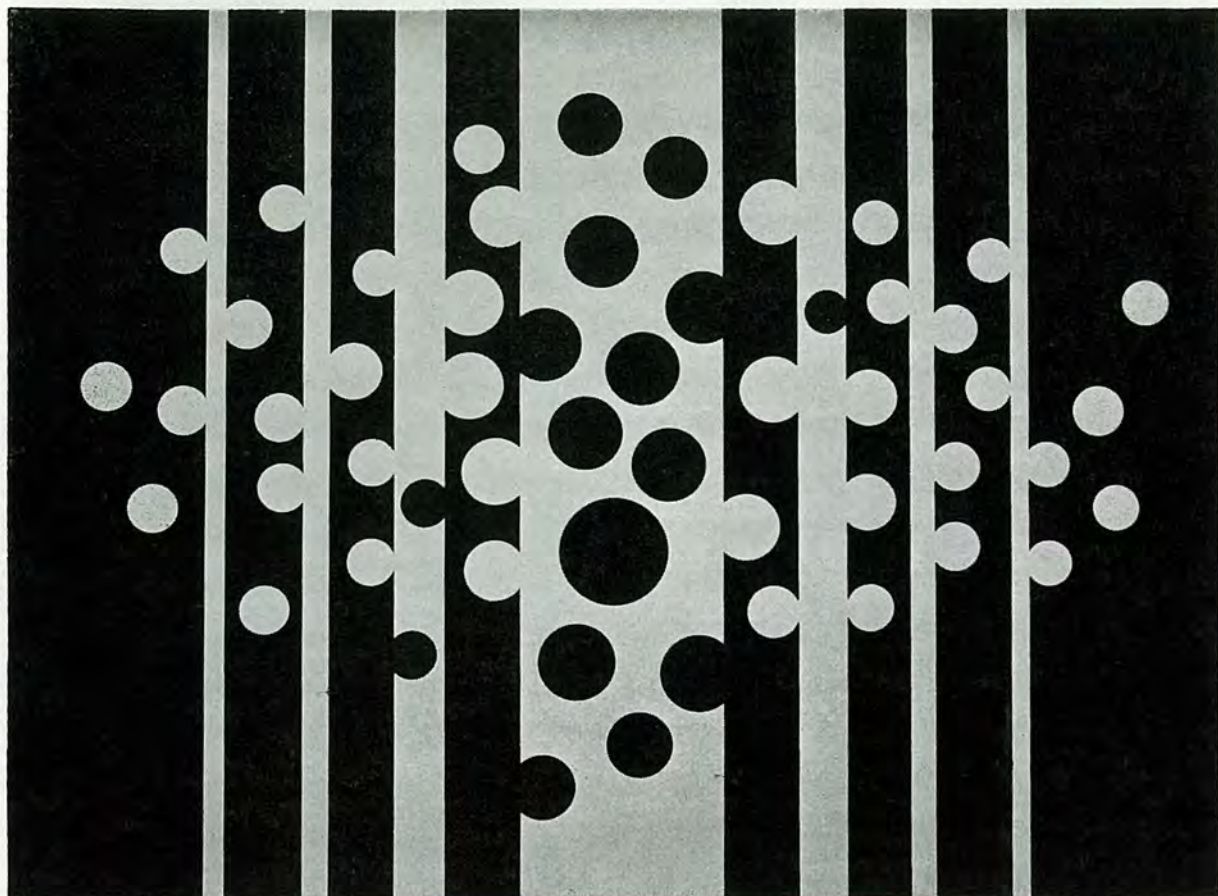


Plate IV. Black on Yellow. 1959-60.

Walters' mature pictures, and the most forceful Maori rafter patterns, derive a whole dimension from the figure-ground ambivalence. The Reverend Herbert Williams saw that this ambiguity was characteristic of these patterns, and he seems to have seen, too, that it had an important rôle in the economy of the designs:

'It is not, in every case, quite easy to decide whether the white or the colour represents the pattern. Without doubt the former is the case in Nos. 3, 5, 6, and as undoubtedly the latter in Nos. 11-14. But in Nos. 1, 2, 4 we have a *more complicated structure* in which the effect is produced by the *happy arrangement and contrast*; in one part the colour, in another the white, seeming to represent the theme of the design'.⁶ (The numbers refer to the chromo-lithographic plates in Hamilton).

The *design* itself, of course, is constituted in part, by just this 'happy arrangement' of ambiguities.

The mature paintings in the style that Gordon Walters has developed since 1954 simplify and re-work the *koru* motif, transforming it into a series of bars and coin-spots, and they re-discover, and exploit, brilliantly, the figure-ground ambiguity which gives a peculiar energy to much Maori design.

The Whare Runanga pattern looks effortless and inevitable, so do the best of Gordon Walters' pictures: but such brilliant simplicity is not achieved without struggle.

IV

In two exhibition catalogues Walters has offered his own account of his work and of the essentially

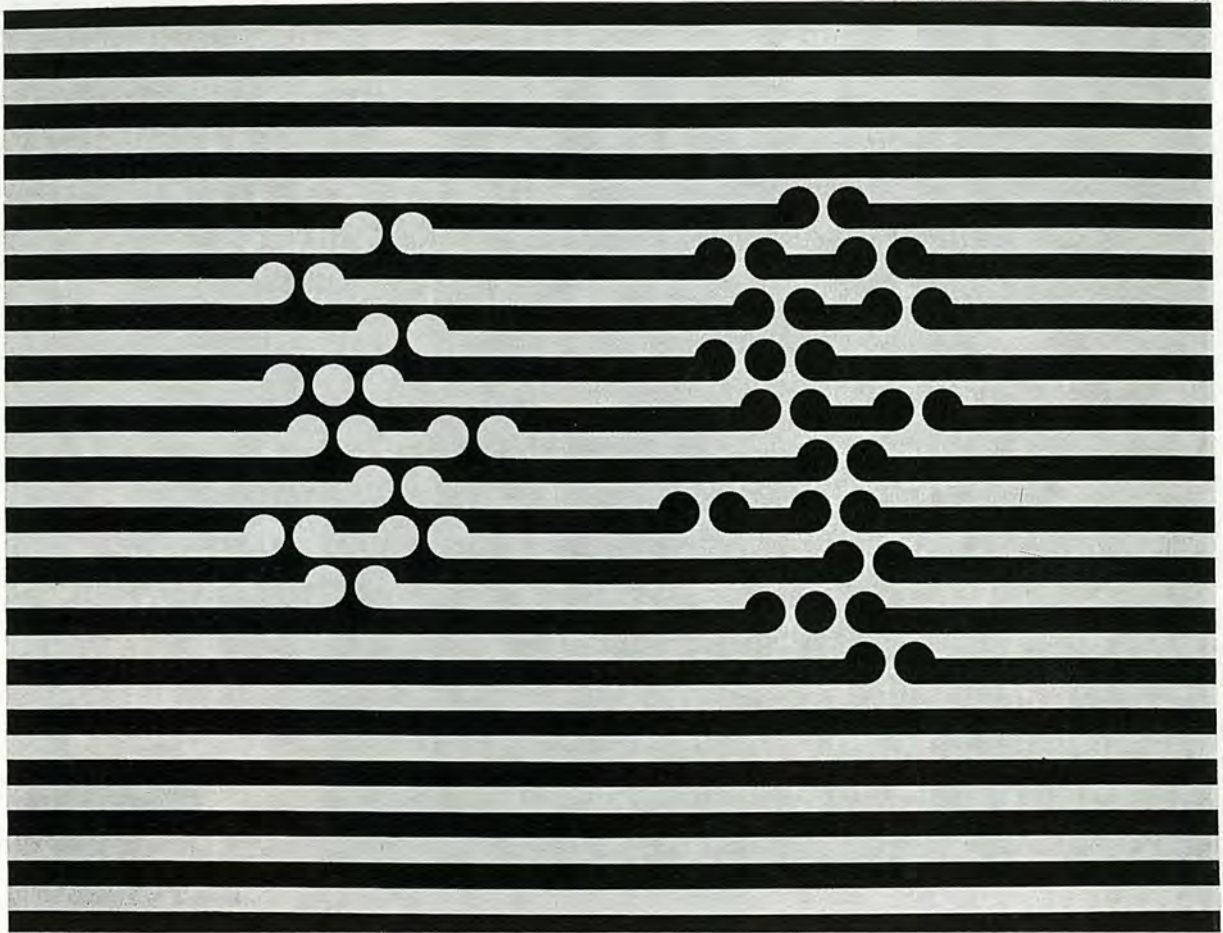


Plate V. Painting No. 1 PVA on hardboard, 1965. 36 x 48in. Auckland City Art Gallery.

formal intentions behind it:

'My work is an investigation of positive/negative relationships within a deliberately limited range of forms. The forms I use have no descriptive value in themselves and are used solely to demonstrate relations. I believe that dynamic relations are most clearly expressed by the repetition of a few simple elements'.⁷

'The forms have no descriptive value in themselves': Gordon Walters' concern is simply formal, and not affective. His aim is pure design, 'thought so simplified and ordered as to be followed without fatigue', and he is interested, primarily, in the exploration of dynamic visual relations which have their own 'self-contained' significance.

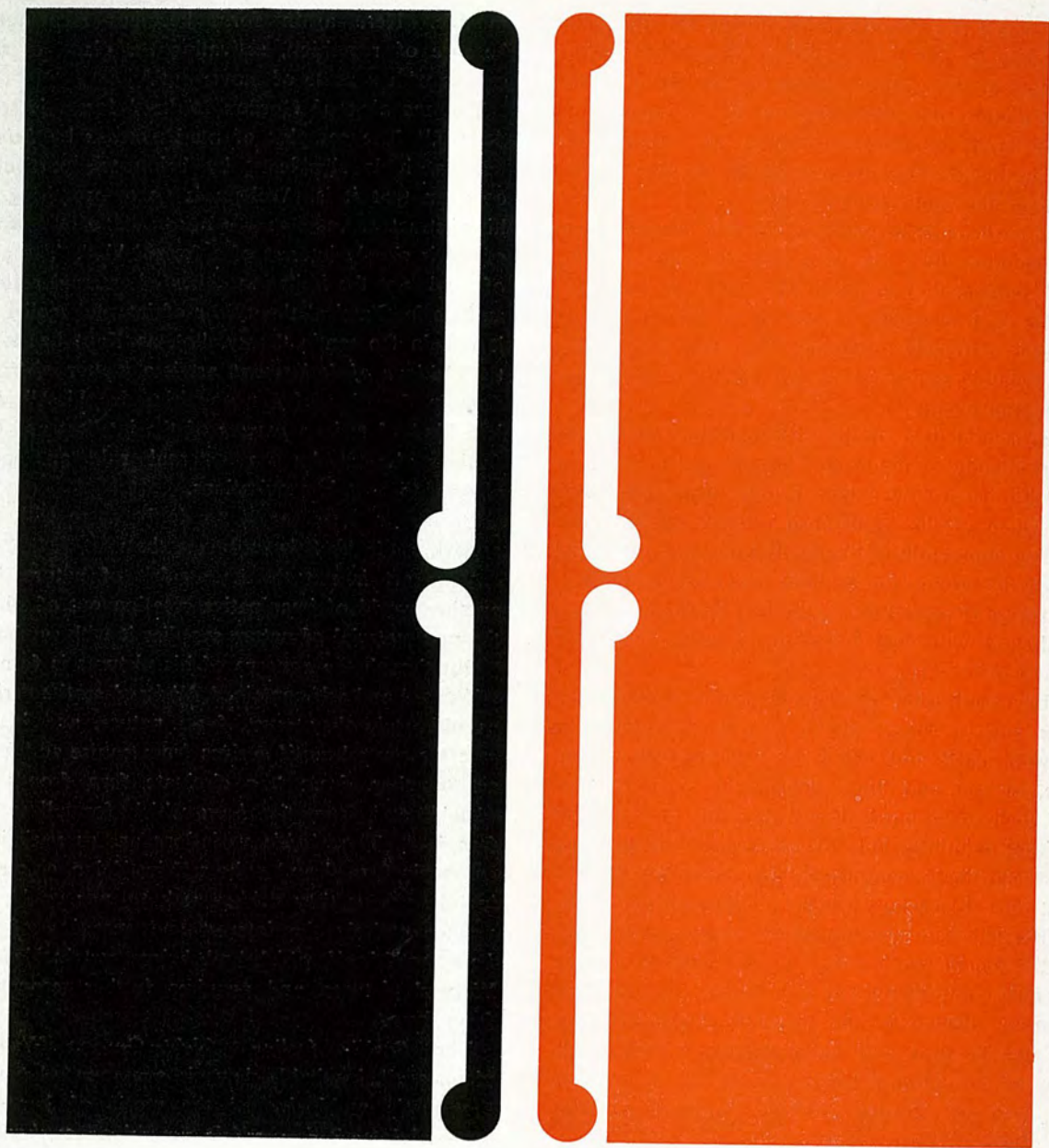
One, indeed, of the sources of Walters' geometrical patterns is the micro-photograph: and Nature, in her smallest structures, repeats elements and constructs patterns which do not 'resemble': they are the conditions on which things *are*. The notion of

the pattern as a thing-in-itself, has a sense in Nature which it is painful, if quixotic, to try to transpose into the sphere of art. Such a transposition invites all kinds of metaphysical and aesthetic speculations⁸ which may be barren enough: but it can produce pictures about which one cannot cavil even for a moment.

The severely abstract intention of his work is stressed by Walters in a quotation from Mondrian which captions the picture (Plate V) on the cover of the catalogue of his first exhibition at the New Vision Gallery:

'Art has to determine space as well as form and to create an equivalence of these two factors'. Walters' pictures create a new space: they do not seek to imitate the world of ordinary experience. Like natural structures, they seek to define themselves no further than by being themselves.

The quotation from Mondrian is an apt commentary on the picture which it captions. The dark



Cover design for Ascent, 1969.

mass which the terminal spots define on the right hand side of the painting (Plate V) contrasts with the mass of the white elements on the left, and the whole picture plane is twisted by the contrast; or it would be if the uncompromising and unmodified bars at the top and the bottom of the picture did not keep the whole structure rigid.

The dark mass, by extending a little further down the painting than the light one, tries to tilt the whole composition to the lower right, but the force of the light elements ensures a stability-in-tension which is extremely satisfying. Here we have space, and dynamic space, set up by the interplay of the simplest elements.

The spatial field of the picture relates always to the ambiguity of figure and ground which helps to establish it: follow a bar through from the black side where a little double *koru* in black sets the tone, and the apparently stable black bar turns out to be merely the ground for the 'real' white bar on the left. The sense of spatial ambiguity can be found, varied subtly and with great invention, in each of Walters' mature paintings.

The organization of Walters' pictures follows the same austere rules, whether the basic contrast is between black and white, or between yellow and blue, or red and blue. Chromatic confrontations add their own particular excitement to some of Walters' paintings, but colours, even when they are most startlingly contrasted, are controlled by the tight formal structure which runs through the whole *oeuvre*. This is a structure which depends, essentially, on the *spatial* reading that the eye gives to certain carefully controlled visual ambiguities. The relations of mass, defined by the simplest of elements, the bar and the spot, and made dynamic by the ambiguity of ground and figure, provide the programme for each of Gordon Walters' ingenious, subtle, variations.

The second of Gordon Walters' New Vision catalogues contains the same note as did the former, with this addition:

'The new paintings continue the exploration of motif begun with the work shown in my previous exhibition. In the present series of paintings there are changes in emphasis. In some, the system of parallel stripes establishes a field for the tensions of the repeated motif. In others, the units tend to form a geometric structure. In all of them, feeling alone dictates the placing of the motif. Some of the works depart from the figure-ground ambiguity to present a curved motif which also functions as a

module. Here again form becomes meaningful because of repetition, activating the plane of the canvas with a sense of movement'.⁹

The meaning of Gordon Walters' forms is self-defined.¹⁰ The complex of motifs *means by being*; that is, it is significant by being the particular complex that it is. Walters is uncompromising in his abstract orthodoxy: the *raison d'être* of a work of art is simply interest of a formal kind. The aim of art is not the imitation either of external reality, as it is in Classical theory, or of internal reality as it was in Romantic theory, but, as Kant has it in the *Critique of Judgement*, art is a matter of 'freedom in the play of our cognitive faculties'.¹¹ Art is a kind of serious *pavane* of the intellect and the feelings, bound by no external rule and open, always, to new improvisations.

Gordon Walters would no doubt agree with the remark made by Selwyn Image that:

'Fine art is not the counterfeit of nature, but another world of imaginative creation out of which the raw material of nature supplies it with symbols'.

But though the concern of his pictures is formal, self-stated and self-contained, Walters' motifs derive, as ultimately they must, from nature, and in his case the central motif derives from nature and from art together, from 'the circinate fern fronds or *pitau*',¹² and from the *koru* which formalizes the fern bud. Though his variations are as variations extremely formal and quite self justifying, as meaningful patterns they neither seek to, nor could, renounce entirely the interest and meaning of the *koru* motif itself, which both brings certain ideas to Walters' pictures, and acquires further resonances from them.

The *Pacific feeling* which Gordon Walters' pictures all, inevitably, have is compounded out of the poetic ambiguity of the motif of bar-with-terminal-dots. This motif is the ubiquitous *koru*; it is the waves of the sea; it is even Kupe's fleet. And the studied, rhythmical, monotony of the reiterated motif is like the long swells of the Pacific.

Gordon Walters' *oeuvre* presents us with a kind of paradox; the feelings which he cultivates are all formal ones, and he does not seek to be a specifically New Zealand painter: but it is just the tremendous success of his formal treatment of the chosen motif that makes him so importantly a New Zealand painter. By taking up a crucial form from Maori art, by reworking it in an entirely new fashion, and by employing it in a system of variations which derive from the most abstract traditions in the art

of Western Europe, Walters has contributed to a New Zealand tradition of characteristic art. We recognize in Gordon Walters' pictures a dynamic that is more than merely visual. His paintings offer us a synthesis of Maori and European elements in a free, independent, system of improvisations. Gordon Walters' formal surfaces take their motif absolutely seriously, treat it with exquisite courtesy and present it in a form that is at once new, yet somehow inevitable.

These paintings mirror new possibilities of seeing, of feeling and of being. They open up new directions: and in their very abstractness they become intensely concrete.

NOTES

¹ *Plant Form and Design*, by W. Midgley and A.E.V. Lilley, London and N.Y., Chapman & Hall and Scribners, Enlarged Edition, 1916, p5. Italics mine. See below, note 2.

² *Koru*: Barrow writes in his *Guide to Te Hau-ki-Turanga*: The rafter patterns of Te Hau-ki-Turanga form the most extensive and oldest set of such designs that has been preserved. The elaborate curvilinear paintings on these rafters are based on a bulb-like motif called 'koru', which resembles the uncurling frond of a tree fern. The origin of rafter patterns is unknown but of the designs that have names there is little evidence that they represent the object to which they are likened. The tendril-like motifs suggest the designs are derived from plant forms, while a comparative study of them indicates a possible relationship with carved and painted patterns found in Borneo and other South-East Asian countries.

A Guide to the Maori Meeting House Te Hau-ki-Turanga by T. Barrow, Wellington, Dominion Museum, 1965, p26: see p27, patterns on rafters 5 & 7, and p28, pattern on second rafter, for possible, ultimate, sources of Walters' simplified *koru*.

There is a useful analysis of the *koru* motif in *Maori Carving Illustrated* by W. J. Phillipps, Wellington, Reed 1955/1966 pp19-22, and two earlier essays by the same author repay study, 'He Koru' and 'Maori Carving Notes' in *Art in New Zealand*, Vol. XI, No. 1, September 1938, pp35-40, and Vol. XIII, No. 3, March 1941, pp129-133 respectively. See below, notes 4 & 5.

³ The New Zealand issue of *Studio*, Vol. 135, No. 661 April 1948 p117 has a small black and white plate of a conté drawing by Gordon Walters, *Composition, Wai-kanae*. This is a picture of driftwood and branches seen against a background of beach and sandhills, and it has a haunting magic-realist, quasi-surrealist feel to it. The formalization of the branches of the shrub gives some, slight, indication of the feeling for geometric decoration which characterizes Gordon Walters' later work, though the change in style is a radical one.

⁴ Rafter pattern at Whare Runanga, Waitangi: see

postcards in the *Colourchrome Series*, photographed by Gladys M. Goodall, and published by Whitcombe and Tombs for the Felicity Card Co: cards W.T.75, pattern on right; W.T.528, pattern on extreme right; W.T.477 second pattern from left. See below, note 5.

⁵ *The Art Workmanship of the Maori Race in New Zealand* by Augustus Hamilton, Dunedin, the New Zealand Institute, 1896. The article on rafter patterns is based on a communication from the Rev. Herbert Williams. Hamilton's illustrations 19 & 20 show fussier versions of the pattern at Whare Runanga. The cognate pattern in 1 is fairly close to the barge-board pattern at Waitara, (see Fig. 4 of the present article), which influenced Gordon Walters.

⁶ Hamilton p119.

⁷ Catalogue of an Exhibition of Paintings by Gordon Walters, at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland, 7-12 March 1966.

⁸ When we ask of a picture (painting or photograph), 'What is that supposed to be?' this is almost always elliptical for, 'What is that supposed to be of/represent?' A great deal of apparently metaphysical talk about art as 'construction of things which are-in-themselves' is, perhaps, no more than a way of putting the point that 'What is this supposed to be?' is not always an appropriate question. This question has built into it notions about *mimesis* which are precisely the notions which are being 'contested' by abstract painters.

The idea of *meaning* in art has, traditionally, been bound more closely to the idea of *imitation* than now seems appropriate. Newer notions of *meaning* have, however, their own difficulties. To remind oneself that 'What is this supposed to be/be an imitation of' is an inappropriate question in some contexts, is to do much less than to define, positively, a notion of the abstract work of art's being, *per se*, meaningful.

The notion of *meaning* which is appropriate to abstract painting and sculpture is more easily defined by *pointing at examples* than it is by talking discursively: the moral of this need not be that such a sense of 'meaning' is empty. After all, it has employment.

Talk about art as '*being* rather than as *imitation*' seeks, no doubt, to make use of the fact that we do not ask of natural objects, 'What is this supposed to be?' (The question, asked of a *prima facie* non-mimetic artifact raises issues which go quite beyond aesthetics).

⁹ Catalogue of an Exhibition of *New Paintings and Drawings*, by Gordon Walters, New Vision Gallery, Auckland May 27 - June 8, 1968.

¹⁰ The problems which Walters' pictures solve are stated by the pictures themselves, and the whole economy of these paintings is internal. One indeed of the technical puzzles with which the *oeuvre* has had to wrestle is the problem of the beginning and the ending of pictures. See Plate II: the pattern contains no rule for the definition of its own upper and lower margins. The Rev. Herbert Williams has some interesting observations on the fact that Maori rafter patterns almost never have 'any definite beginning or ending', Hamilton p119 and of p118. In re-working the motif Walters is forced to work through, again, the problems associated with it.

¹¹ *The Critique of Judgement*, by Immanuel Kant, translated by J. C. Meredith, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923/1961 p167.

¹² Hamilton p118.

With my left hand, I write:

A consideration of Colin McCahon's word paintings



GORDON H. BROWN

'McCahon does not make statements lightly'

KURT VON MEIER 1964

FOR various reasons, some simple, others complex, certain pictures are not always readily comprehended. Colin McCahon's paintings in which the dominant images are written words and numbers present such difficulties, and the inability to understand these works fully is not restricted to laymen. To such viewers, not indifferent, the word paintings are, in one way or another, enigmas. Why?

To answer is not easy. If we are to understand then our enquiry must extend beyond the immediate confines of McCahon's word paintings in order to bring under surveillance certain relevant, but not necessarily obvious, problems arising from a consideration of twentieth century art and relate them back to McCahon's paintings. This is the immediate task.

It has become the established practice, perhaps a uniquely twentieth century practice, now somewhat declined to the level of a habit, sometimes useful, at

other times obstructive, to assert that a painting's meaning is the sum total of what goes on upon its surface. Here the primary consideration is given to such elements as the shapes the painter has used to form his images, the colours used, the roughness or smoothness of the surface texture, the tonal play of light and darkness across the picture, the lineal rhythm and counterpoint of form against form that gives to a painting its visual dynamics, plus an acceptance of images for their mirror value as simile or merely as shapes. This approach may help the viewer to read a great many contemporary pictures, but for other paintings the solution offered is not enough. That it supplies part of this request is true, but in works like McCahon's word paintings their very nature gives rise to a desire to go further in the search for what they are about.

How, then, are we to view McCahon's word paintings?

As these paintings are concerned with words, written and sometimes carefully lettered, a possible relationship to calligraphy cannot be ignored. But rather than turning towards Europe we might find

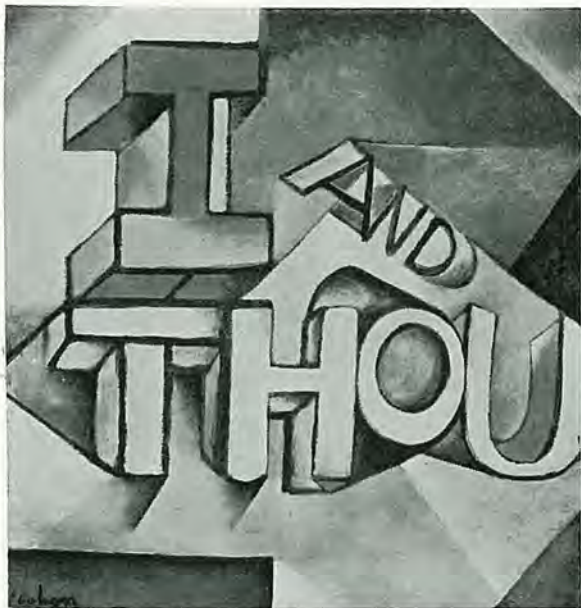


The Virgin compared to a Jug of Pure Water. Oil, November 1948. 41½ x 33 ins. Collection Charles Brasch, Dunedin.

a more likely influence in Japanese scroll paintings with their combination of brush drawing, colour wash and calligraphy, some masters of which, like Tessai, McCahon is known to admire. Yet, and despite the significance that Japanese calligraphy has had for many Western painters over the past forty years, any influence on McCahon in this direction is of little account. Where the Japanese have touched McCahon lies in his adaptation of the hanging scroll format used in works such as *The Wake* and the *Northland Panels*. Other than this, the question of calligraphy in its conventional meaning, whether Oriental or Occidental, is irrelevant, for McCahon's word paintings are not examples of fine or elegant handwriting done on a larger scale than normal.

The use of written characters, not necessarily

forming words, has increasingly become part of the visual paraphernalia explored by artists in this century. Apart from the use made of printed ephemera as an ingredient in collage and assemblage, or the typographical designs and games devised by the Futurists, Dadaists or Surrealists, there remain a regiment of artists who have introduced hand lettered words into their pictures as an integral part of the painted surface. But there is a basic difference between the purpose for which McCahon often uses words and that of painters like Braque, Severini, Malevich, Jean Pougny, Ben Nicholson, Stuart Davis and certain 'Pop' artists. With these painters words are used primarily as pictorial units within a well ordered composition where the placing of a line of words or the intrinsic shape of individual letters is



I and Thou. Oil, November 1954 - July 1955. 22 x 21½ ins. Collection Miss D. Gilmore, Auckland.

functionally more important than any associational aspect the words might possess, although such associations can conceivably add to the final appreciation of the painting. For McCahon the associations, the meaning of the words in a literal sense, can be the prime consideration but this need not exclude the normal requirements of composition. In his use of phrases, sentences, poems, as the dominant visual entity, or at least equal with the other pictorial elements in a painting, McCahon is not unique in the twentieth century. While similar paintings do not abound, while they differ stylistically and differ in their intended purposes, while they carry to McCahon's word paintings the most superficial of resemblances, they do share in this common usage of words, textually potent, irrespective of whether we accept or ignore the literal meaning of the words when we look at these works as paintings. Let us pause to bring forward some examples.

Francis Picabia, *M'amenez-y: Portrait à l'huile de rhizin*, c. 1920.¹ Paul Klee, *Er küsse mich mit seines Mundes Kuss*, 1921.² Joan Miro, *Le corps de ma brune . . .*, 1925.³ Englebert van Anderlecht, *La Nuit fait l'amour*, 1959.⁴ Robert Indiana, *God is a Lily of the Valley*, 1961.⁵ Roy Lichtenstein, *Eddie Diptych*, 1962.⁶ Gastone Novelli, *Histoire de l'oeil*, 1963.⁷

If the effort to discover in McCahon's early word paintings some stylistic indebtedness to Picabia, Klee, Miro, or other such painters, is likely to be

unprofitable, it would be equally foolish to imagine that McCahon was unaware of any modern painters employing words in a pictorial manner and in this respect the most relevant are the Cubists to whose work McCahon attached, for a period early in the nineteen-forties and later in the 'fifties, a special significance. Early in 1954, when his first word paintings that survive were painted,⁸ Cubism had a general influence upon his work of prime importance. *I Am*,⁹ *I and Thou* and *Sacred to the Memory of Death* bear witness to this fact (just as they are stylistically related to certain of McCahon's *Kauri* paintings from this same period), but the solid letter forms adopted in these paintings, firmly based on Cubist principles, are oddly enough conceptionally opposed to the flat, two-dimensional letters favoured by the Cubists in their own work.¹⁰

Another approach, more simple and direct, is to follow McCahon back to the years before the word paintings ever happened.

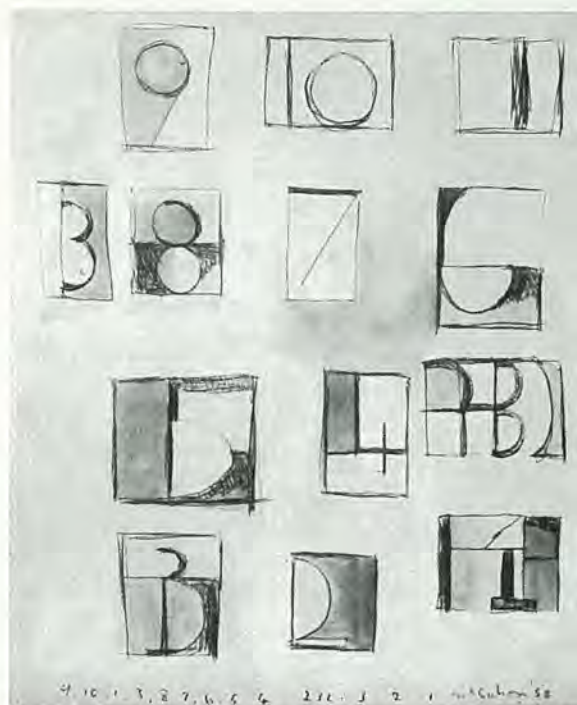
First, and could it be relevant, is the incident of the signwriter. A boyhood memory; an experience germinating in painted words. 'Two new shops had been built next door, one was Mrs McDonald's Fruit Shop and Dairy, the other was taken by a hairdresser and tobacconist. Mrs McDonald had her window full of fruit and other practical items. The hairdresser had his window painted with HAIRDRESSER AND TOBACCONIST. Painted in gold and black on a stippled red ground, the lettering large and bold, with shadows, and a feeling of being projected right through the glass and across the pavement. I watched the work being done, and fell



Sacred to the Memory of Death. Oil, 1955. 25 x 30½ ins. Collection the Artist.

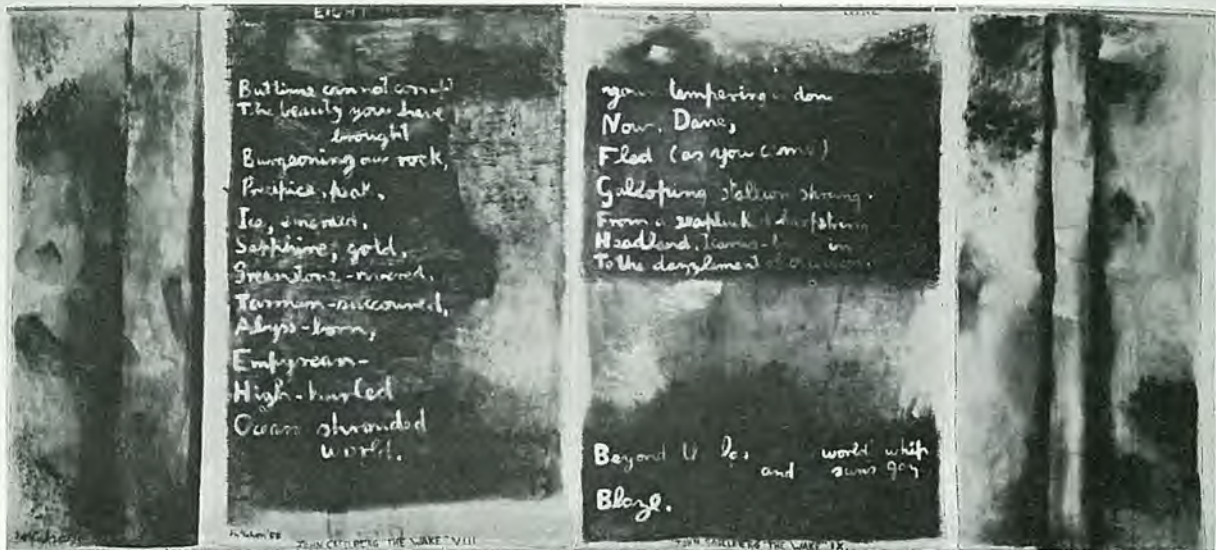
in love with signwriting. The grace of the lettering as it arched across the window in gleaming gold, suspended on its dull red field but leaping free from its own black shadow pointed to a new and magnificent world of painting. I watched from outside as the artist working inside slowly separated himself from me (and light from dark) to make his new creation.¹¹ Is this so far away from the first word paintings? In the development of an idea does not the imagination reverse itself back to where memories do wonders at a subliminal level! Yet, while it is conceivable that the implications manifest in **HAIRDRESSER AND TOBACCONIST** later helped McCahon to clearly formulate and accept the notion behind his word paintings, a more concrete approach is to consider McCahon's work in the years prior to the appearance of the first surviving word paintings of 1954.

The evolution of the inscribed titles to a place of prominence in McCahon's pictures, developed from a point early in his career. By 1945 the inscribed titles were beginning to be noticeable; as in the painting *Spring, Ruby Bay*.¹² More crucial in this respect, and following two years later, are the religious paintings, unusual, strange to many and unpopular except to a few. A deciding factor, although not overtly apparent, yet still the decisive influence upon these works, came from McCahon's interest in the Italian primitives, particularly the Sieneese Quattrocento painters¹³ and Fra Angelico. From amongst the conventions accepted in this period, to which McCahon laid claim, was the method adopted when a Biblical inscription was required as part of a painting: sometimes a scroll was used, but a better example is Fra Angelico's *The Annunciation*, in the Museo del Gesù at Cortona, where the words, issuing from the Angel's lips, fan out their message to the Virgin Mary. With impetus supplied by these Italian works, McCahon further developed the inscribed title, ample evidence of which is seen in *The Angel of the Annunciation*¹⁴ with its bottom left corner devoted to a large triangular shape containing the title. A different response to the use of words, far more dramatic, occurs in *The Crucifixion according to St Mark*,¹⁵ a painting which in other respects is not successful. In this work, words are spoken, bubble up into word balloons and are scattered across the painting; a visual interjection of non-visual speech. Thus it is, Christ is seen to cry 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani', and a bystander say 'Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come and



Numbers, intended end-pieces for 'Landfall': First series. Pen, blue ink and watercolour, 1958. 10 x 8 ins. Collection Kim Wright, Auckland.

take him down'. A similar, much better painting is *The King of the Jews*¹⁶ where the Holy Mother, holding the dead Christ, utters 'This is Jesus the King of Jews', the words being enclosed in a speech balloon the visual origin of which comes from a 'Rinso' soap packet. Another painting, *The Valley of Dry Bones*,¹⁷ as well as utilizing a speech balloon to carry the words 'Come from the four Winds, O Breath and breathe upon these slain, that they may live', also makes use of a scroll, conventionally realized with its edges appropriately curled, on which is inscribed the picture's title, the date when painted and the artist's signature. During the following year, 1948, the scroll type inscription found a more positive manifestation in *I, Paul*,¹⁸ the words being a declaration rather than a title. In another direction, coming earlier that year, in January, McCahon painted a bleak landscape, untrodden by the foot of man, the foreground of which is dominated by a grave. On the headstone, for all to see, is the inscription: 'In loving memory of dear wee June who fell asleep 12th March, 1935, aged 4 years and 9 months. Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven'.¹⁹ While the use of inscriptions in this or similar ways holds no surprise to those accustomed to looking at paintings, it does, for McCahon's



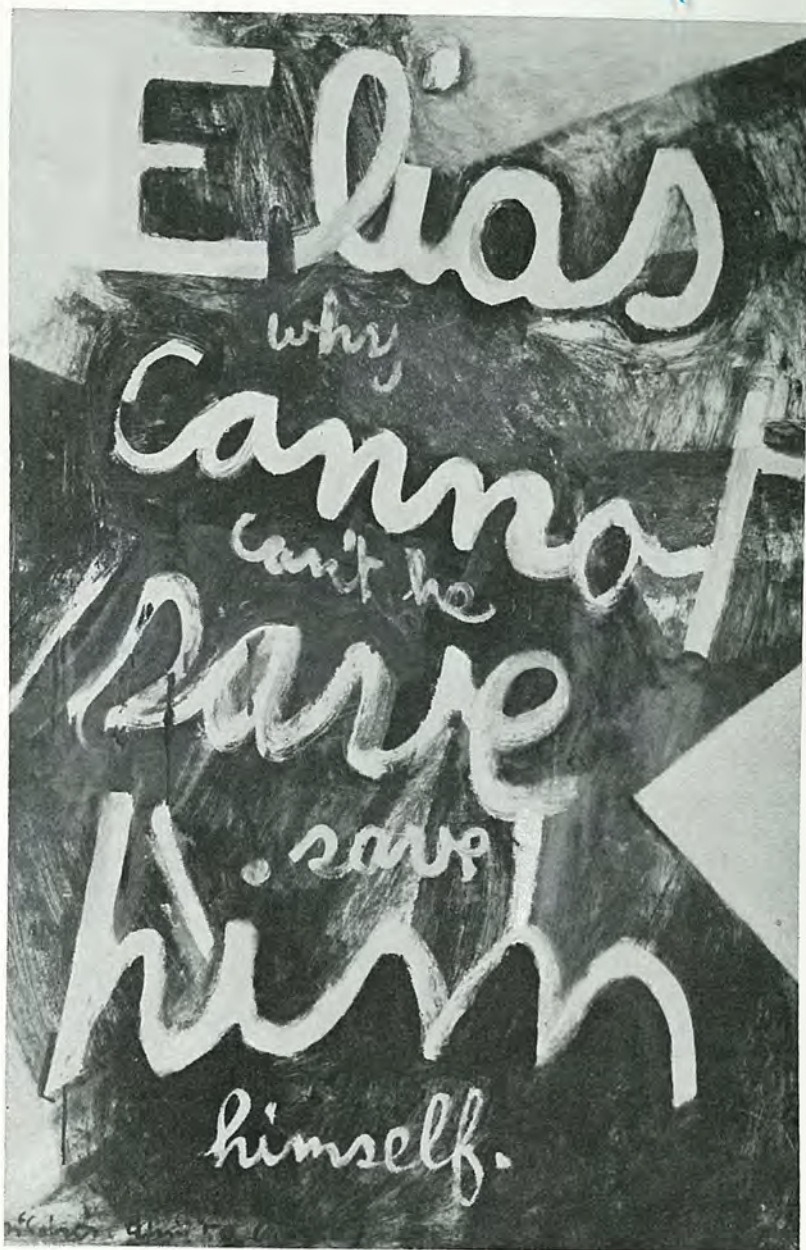
The Wake: Panels 12 to 15. Oil, 1958. Height approx. 70 ins. Collection the Artist.

paintings, emphasize, along with the bystander's question 'whether Elias will come', the mood, apocalyptic by implication, that was to dominate McCahon's choice of words in the years to follow. However, the most fully developed use of words as a visual part of a painting, an important irremovable ingredient in the composition, can be found in another work dating from 1948. *The Virgin compared to a Jug of Pure Water*.²⁰ Here the words are no longer just an inscribed title; they have become a statement that supplements the other images, extends them and makes their meaning explicit. In this work the cycle that advanced with McCahon's usage of words was half complete. When, early in 1954, the first all-word paintings appeared, the cycle was very nearly completed. The remaining link to bring the cycle to maturity happened the following year with the painting *Let us possess one world*.²¹ Words had achieved an ultimate place in McCahon's art, the basic elements established and the freedom to use words, singularly, as titles, statements or inscriptions was assured.

In this direction, and up to this point, enough. We turn now to consider the word paintings in a different way.

Having emphasized the visual and developmental aspects a twist away from appearance to that of the words as actually used is an approach equally open to scrutiny. Indeed, the urge to isolate the words and to remove them from the context of the paint-

ing, simply reading them as words, is probably closer to the normal approach for the majority of viewers than any consideration associated with their quality as paintings. However, this manner of looking at McCahon's word paintings, carrying as it does the temptation to ignore the visual setting within which the words acquire their utmost meaning, can only deplete the painting's content to an insubstantial 'reading' of its message. But behind such a reading lies a serious implication, the ramifications of which cannot be entirely ignored. This rests upon one question: whether or not there is justification in labelling McCahon's word paintings as 'literary paintings'. It is a description I have heard applied to these paintings on several occasions, and amongst those people calling them literary were, interestingly, a few who also painted: a fact pointing to an attitude that has, from its simple origin in the second decade of this century, preoccupied, as well as worried, certain types of painters. For such as these the notion that a painting should rely, for its appreciation, on what are loosely termed literary ideas—either as an episode from a story or as symbols understandable only through reference to some literary source—is a concept that is unacceptable, even repugnant, and one that should be eliminated. In these terms the stigma attached to being called a literary painter implies an inability to cope with painting on a purely visual basis so that this handicap can only be redressed through the introduction, into a painting, of non-

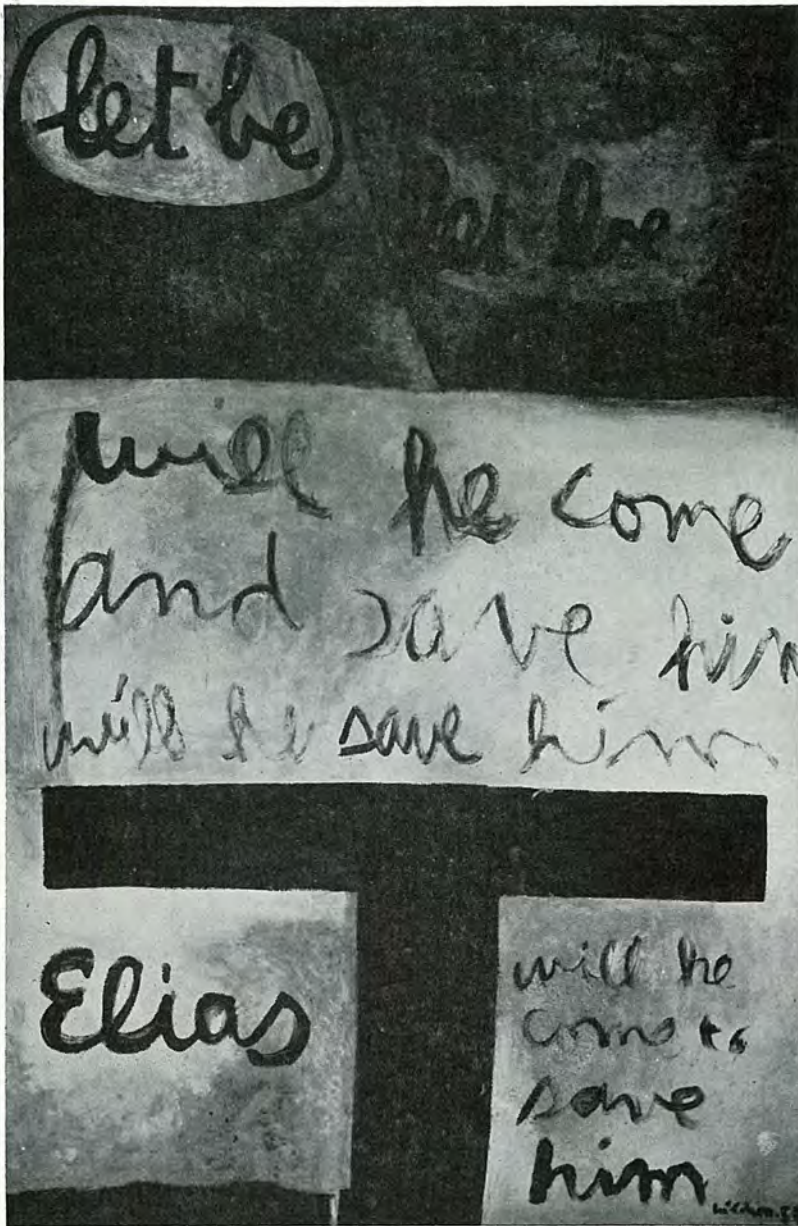


Elias, why cannot he save him.
Butex, April-August 1959. 57 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 39
ins. Collection the Artist.

painterly elements. But consider this accusation. Is it not a purist's argument—idealistic, but when applied to painting in general, somewhat naive? And in looking at McCahon's work, can such an argument cast serious doubt on their validity as paintings! An attitude such as this also swings back to a position similar to that stated earlier: this being the practice of accepting a painting on its face value as if its physical appearance (or in jargon, its aesthetic appeal), and that alone, were the only true criteria

on which to judge its quality as a work of art.

Let us reconsider this question. If the literary aspects of McCahon's paintings are to be discussed then it is obvious that the emphasis towards them must be tilted away from what is commonly called literary painting; that is, the less positive aspects of Victorian narrative painting in which the story-telling elements swamp out artistic considerations. One look at McCahon's word paintings and the evidence confronts the eyes, for it is not only apparent in the



Let be, Let be. Solpah (with sand), 1959. 72 x 48 ins. Collection the Artist.

use made of literary quotations and statements, but also in the fact that the words are required to be read, in a more or less conventional manner, if we are to fully comprehend their significance. Such a requirement makes these works, in a very real sense, literary paintings, but this is merely a label. What is more relevant is bound up in the act of reading the words and seeing whether this has an adverse effect on the intrinsic quality of a painting as a single unit, for in the absence of artistic integration this act could become a stranglehold capable of choking

the life from a painting. To those unfamiliar with McCahon's paintings his use of words might suggest such a weakness but difficulties like this are born from the viewer's inexperience and rarely arise for those who have grown accustomed to looking at them as paintings, for considered as a group these works are just as satisfying artistically as any other paintings by McCahon. However, like any other group of paintings some are more successful than others in the visual solution they offer. If a possible danger of misadventure does exist, then this happens



Elias Triptych. Solpah (with sand), 1959. 60 x 108 ins. Collection the Artist.

when a single panel from one of the larger composite works is withdrawn and studied in isolation. In the set of panels making up *The Curtain of So'omon*,²² the thin dark upright panel that prefixes the first of the three word panels not only gives stress to the opening words 'I am black, but comely . . .', but also adds greatly to the total effectiveness of the work. By itself this panel holds a minimum of visual interest but when removed the impact of the opening words is reduced, and from the same panel, the large 'I' and the triangle across the bottom left corner both lose their relevance as connecting links to the first panel, while the dark band stretching along the base of the fourth panel is robbed of much of its visual justification. This should not be; for such composite paintings as the second *Gate* series or *The Wake* require to be considered collectively as single works and not as a set of isolated pictures that can be studied at random. To do so, without this in mind, is to repudiate the painter's intention.

The same process that chains McCahon to a literal interpretation of the words incorporated into his paintings also conveys a freedom within which the spectator's imagination can seek nurture. This does not imply a straight-forward recapitulation of emotions and ideas previously experienced by McCahon in the act of creating a painting, or a recourse to words as a cover-up for frustrations by a painter unable to get his ideas across, for such analyses are psychologically crude and unrealistic,

but the words frequently do offer a way through—call it a motivative force if you wish—that is capable of steering the imagination towards a desired attitude, a possible insight, no matter how difficult to define with precision. (For very similar reasons the titles given by painters to their pictures, particularly if they are non-figurative paintings, can be either helpful or misleading, depending on the accuracy with which the various associations inherent in a painting have been defined.) With McCahon the most obvious example of a statement used to this end exists in the *Northland Panels*²³ where the phrase 'a landscape with too few lovers' is found. By using such a statement the spectator is drawn into looking at the landscape in a manner that must in some degree reflect the artist's passionate concern for a land so casually taken for granted. These images of the land are ones that tourist organizations would consider dull and uninviting, that most Kelliher Prize painters would find untypical and uninspiring, and which many New Zealanders would ignore because they avoid the picturesque; yet it is against such attitudes that McCahon takes his stand. His statement is a comment about God's own country, New Zealand the Beautiful, where lip service is paid to stock images like Mitre Peake or sights from the Thermal Wonderland—but most of all, it is a comment against disbelief.

In this situation it must be recognized that natural images can go so far and no further. As images

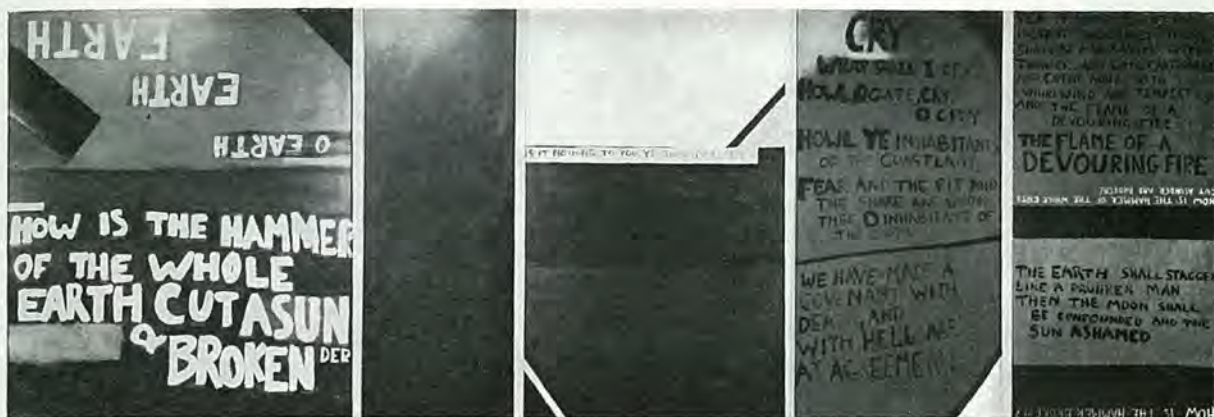
they may fulfil their visual requirements and yet remain partially silent. They are new and untried images lacking the capacity to excite an easily established rapport at a symbolic level. For this to happen the images must be recognized as expressing the same basic abstract idea as similar images used by other painters, no matter how these painters differ in their attitudes or painting styles. The possibility of this happening is made more difficult through the lack of any clearly defined local tradition in New Zealand painting, and although McCahon has, to a greater degree than any other painter, helped to suggest the direction in which such a tradition might lie by isolating certain characteristics in the work of older painters and utilizing these to his own ends, he also acknowledges the limitations of thinking and working in this way. In his early religious works this problem seems less acute, simply because the symbolic overtones found in these paintings belong to an easily recognizable, well established tradition, but in the landscapes produced after his return from North America the situation is entirely different. New values are introduced to these paintings that extend the usual function of landscape painting beyond the normal requirements. So, signposts were added to boost the natural landscape images. These images, while more loosely painted, are just as clearly defined, just as concrete as they ever were. Where these images differ is in their reliance on what are essentially non-visual ideas to make their meaning clear, and for this purpose words prove the most accessible form of communication; a form that makes the social implications behind these works more apparent.

This practice of adding to the social dimensions of a work through the means of words is not confined to the landscapes, but is, of course, found in combination with other aspects of McCahon's output. At its simplest this is seen in *Golden*²⁴ and *Here I give thanks to Mondrian*²⁵ where the words are little more than a description of the painting's content. In landscapes like *Agnus Dei, dona nobis pacem*²⁶ and the *Northland triptych*²⁷ the social element is easily recognizable and not too difficult to grasp, while on a slightly different level *John in Canterbury*²⁸ and *Now is the Hour*²⁹ reveal implications that are not so obvious. More demanding, partly because of their size and complexity, are *The Wake*, a work based on a poem by John Caselberg commemorating the death of his dog, and the second *Gate* series, a work dedicated to finding a way

through the seemingly insurmountable problem of the present day human situation. In an odd way these two works contrast with another large, much later work, the Convent Chapel *Windows*,³⁰ especially the east window, which not only operate at a different physical level, but also is quite easily understandable if one has a glimmering into the liturgy upon which the words and symbols are based. By their sheer physical size *The Wake* and *Gate* require the viewers to modify the usual way in which they look at paintings, for unlike smaller works, these paintings cannot be taken in as a complete entity from one single vantage point. As paintings they may exist as a series of panels, but each panel is linked with those on either side so that the viewer is compelled to move from left to right along the painting to allow its meaning to unfold. It is also worth noting that the blank or near image-free panels in *Gate*, and the thin Kauri tree hangings in *The Wake*, act as visual punctuation in order to allow the onlooker a few moments of mental rest. While the viewer becomes involved with reading the text, he also grows partially aware that the painting extends beyond the immediate range of his vision: thus a dualism is created between the intimacy of reading and the physical impressiveness of the work's size—a larger than life experience in which the viewer has become involved.

This idea of largeness was a direct outcome of McCahon's visit to the United States and represented a physical liberation from the confinement associated with small scale works that up till then had dominated New Zealand painting. However, without a patron, these large works had certain disadvantages and so, for practical reasons, McCahon returned to painting on a smaller scale. Amongst these smaller works, one or two, like the *Elias triptych*, act as a link between the images-plus-word paintings and those which are exclusively word paintings. Although there are word paintings like *You are witness*³¹ that retain a vestige of landscape imagery, in the better known ones, including *Let us possess one world* and in certain of the *Elias* paintings, the small amount of supporting imagery has lost this obvious affiliation with natural imagery. The *Elias* paintings, the texts of which echo the words from Saint Matthew's Gospel, 'Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him', include some of McCahon's most successful and mature works.

In the remaining group are included the numeral paintings and a few symbol paintings like *XP*.³² If



Gate, Second series: Panels 1 to 5. Monocoat, 1962. Height 48 ins. Collection the Artist.

this last painting, and its like, present the least interpretative difficulty (for the meaning is largely restricted to an understanding of the symbol itself), this is not quite the case when it comes to the number paintings. Here the temptation to indulge in the welter of symbolic overtones that can be associated with numbers is ever present and can lead the mind astray. However, if the social consciousness that conditions so many of McCahon's chosen subjects is considered then it seems likely the later number paintings have a similar connotation. McCahon's use of numbers first emerged in the 1958 *Numbers* which were intended to be used as end-pieces in the periodical *Landfall*. With these the intention is largely decorative, but in a set of watercolours³³ based on these figures a rather ambitious dual imagery appeared that was later simplified and made more direct in the number paintings of 1959. McCahon returned to this theme early in 1965. The number paintings from that year form quite a large collection and display several variations in style, as in *Four*,³⁴ painted in collaboration with his daughter Victoria, *Two*,³⁵ and *Six* (a painting that has since been altered) in which the 6 takes on a form similar to a *koru* pattern, a feature also found in works as diverse as *Now is the Hour* and *XP*. In the *Numerals* series,³⁶ where the theme is fully developed, an understanding of what lies behind the numbers becomes clearer if a connection is considered between them and certain areas of human activity where computer programmes, calculating machines and other cybernetic means of communication dominate, rather than ascribing to them ideas based on the mystic, quantitative, geometric or astrological uses of numbers.

In *Gate* the essentials of McCahon's social seriousness are clearly laid open, revealing the extent of his involvement in the public arena through a text and images that are lucid in their psychological and sociological implications. This becomes clearer still in a letter McCahon wrote to John Caselberg on first conceiving the idea of the *Gate* paintings:

'... I am becoming involved with an idea for a large scale statement on nuclear warfare, this to take the form of a screen ...

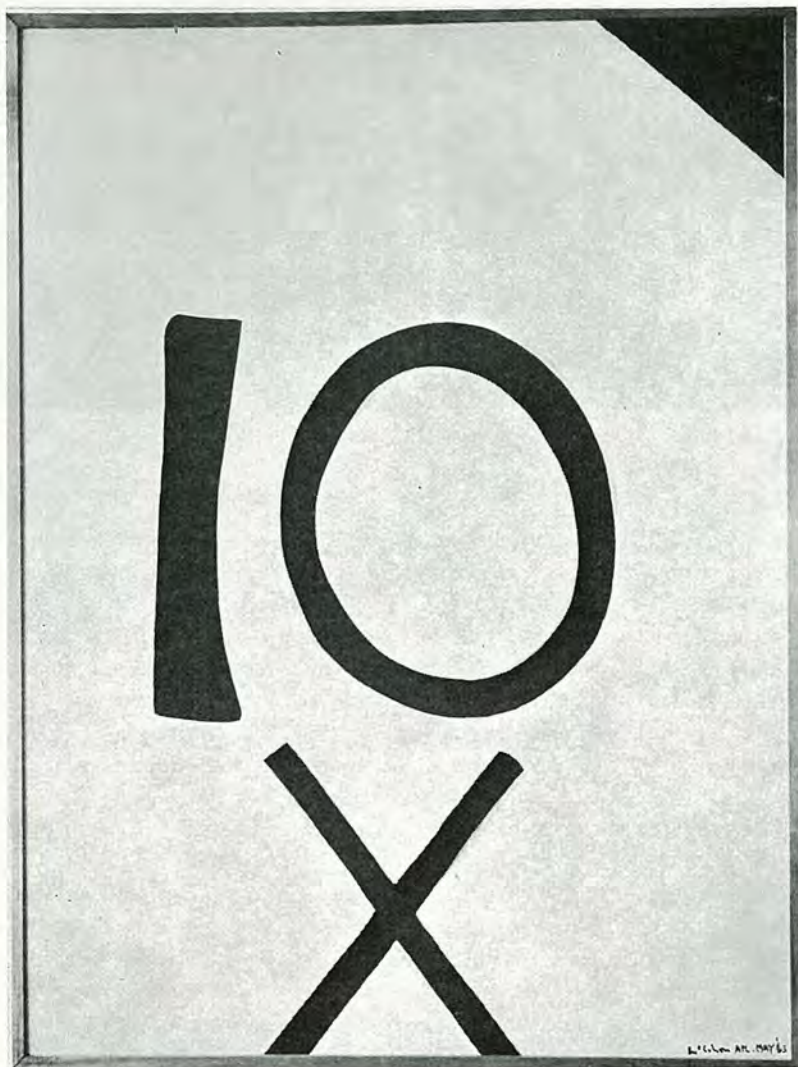
'I will need words.

'The new series goes under the general title of "GATE" by which I mean a way through. What I want with this screen is a way through also.

'Words can be terrible but a solution must be given. In spite of a message which can burn I intend a painting in no way Expressionistic but with a slowly emerging order. ...'

The text provided by Caselberg, based mainly on passages aptly chosen from *Isaiah* and *Lamentations*, was rather long and had to undergo further selection by the painter in order to become more manageable, yet in its final painted form it remains just as convincing. This collaboration was a happy one for the results, while very much to the point, escape any suggestion of outright propaganda. In a real sense, to use Delacroix's definition, the painting has become 'no more than a bridge between the mind of the painter and that of the spectator'.

In such a painting as *Gate* the exploitation of the meaning derived from the words dictates their formal structure as elements within the painting for this structure is inseparable from their readability. This condition applies equally to almost all of McCahon's word and number paintings: yet it still allows for



Ten: Numerals Series (Final panel).
Acrylic, April-May 1965. 48 x 36 ins.
Collection the Artist.

subtlety, a fact clearly found in many of the *Elias* paintings.

The most successful *Elias* paintings allow for a double reading. A reading involved in a dual interpretation, depending upon whose viewpoint is emphasized, the suffering Christ or the contemptuous bystander, for this poses the crucial question as to whether the words are correctly read, or misread. Strengthening this dilemma is the presence, in certain paintings, of a similar ambiguity, in that the placing of the words is such as to allow for more than one reading. This is seen in the play of 'ever' and 'never' in *Will he save Him*,³⁷ or, as in *Elias, why cannot he save Him*, the multiple way the words can be read: 'Elias cannot save him', or 'Elias, why can't he save himself', or, in combination, 'Elias

cannot save him, why can't he save himself'. Another aspect, found in a great many of the paintings in which McCahon uses statements, is seen in the *Elias triptych* where the statement in the left panel is complementary to the statement found in the right hand panel.

One effect, of which the spectator is not consciously aware, is the importance that 'mood' plays in interpreting contemporary paintings, and when pointed out it becomes obvious in the *Elias* paintings. If the sombre acid-like colours and the general dark tonality of *He calls for Elias*³⁸ are considered, then the tragic tone of the words is unmistakable, although the two flashes of white light entering the picture offer an element of hope. *Elias*,³⁹ with its eternal blue and its earth red, places the questioning words

'can he save him—will Elias save Him' within a darker central panel in which the blue and red, heaven and earth, seem to mingle. In the painting *Let be, let be* the words taken alone, with the main phrase repeated, suggests tragic overtones, but these are countered by the bright-light colours that dominate the whole composition, a recognition that out of tragedy joy is possible, and a way out of the human dilemma can be found. With nearly all McCahon's word paintings the underlying mood is an important element contributing to its understanding, and it is also a contributing factor in the general apocalyptic tone of these works, a factor even emphasized in the severity of his black and white paintings.

Whereas some painters give the impression that their ideas are entertained rather than believed, McCahon holds ideas in which he firmly believes; of this there is no doubt. He also has the gift of analogy, with a personal slant on his use of images and phrases that have the capacity to sum up the symbolic embodiment of what he believes. These beliefs have roots entangled in the natural world of the surrounding landscape and the social world of man's behaviour. In his paintings the two overlap: his landscapes containing a sprinkling of social comment, the word paintings turning to the natural world of human responses. In this lies the universality of McCahon's work. It lies in his ability to condition the symbolic imagination, not analytically, for the active imagination extends beyond the limitations of human rationality, but through ideas that are deeply felt and belong properly to the realm of religious experience. With McCahon it is a question of encounter. Man must go outside himself to survive.

Common to McCahon's paintings in which he uses words, is their involvement, directly or indirectly, with ideas that include the human being in society and the values of that society. Sometimes these ideas are stated implicitly, as in the *Elias* paintings, while in other paintings like the *Northland Panels*, the ideas are quite explicit. A further and important dimension is added through McCahon's habit of juxtaposing two strongly felt emotions, as in the *Elias Triptych*, or two sets of values, most apparent in the painter's credo with its emphasis on the play of black against white, of light against darkness; and that when combined, these feelings, these values, give rise to powerful, arresting ideas.

The resulting juxtaposition of opposing ideas such as these, coherently handled and expressed ade-

quately in a visual form, give to the best word paintings a profoundly human connotation: man is a finite creature set in the midst of beauty; he is a being plagued by guilt, made to suffer and yet remain a responsible being for whom the quest for salvation is conditioned by an either/or situation.

In this way human beings are always in a situation in which a choice between several possibilities has to be made, but the way forward is never clearly seen. That this decision must be personal is implicit in the *Elias* paintings. The way through the worldly situation that engulfs us is narrow, as the *Gate* series stresses, for the gate opens out on a fuller life. Thus it is we gain insight to see the situation more clearly. But the awareness that follows the risk taken in any forward move may involve elements of desperation such as the *Northland Triptych* illustrates. This cry may be personal but it is capable of being generally understood. From such a dialogue belief emerges; and the statement 'I believe' is made by McCahon with conviction. For if an act of blind faith precedes the making of any important personal decision, then the will to believe makes the ground firmer for the next inevitable decision. Without the uncertainties that accompany this process man would cease to stumble upon mysteries or be full of wonder or despair at what exists about him. In this situation lies the double meaning behind the painting *Let us possess one World*. Here we must recognize that McCahon hovers between a vision of natural beauty (the word is one he frequently uses) and ethical mysticism: between the personal that sustains his art and the universal which inspires it. His paintings are about this world without strictly being of this world.

'I saw an angel in this land,' McCahon once wrote: 'Angels can herald beginnings.'⁴⁰

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ Reproduced in H. Richter, *Dada: art and anti-art*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1965: fp 179.
- ² Reproduced in *Schrift und Bild*, Frankfurt am Main, Typos Verlag, 1963: fp 58.
- ³ Reproduced in J. Dupin, *Joan Miro; life and work*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1962: p. 218.
- ⁴ Reproduced in W. Grohmann, ed. *Art of our time, painting & sculpture throughout the world*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1966: col illus 86.
- ⁵ Reproduced in L. P. Lippard, *Pop art*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1966: p 123 (illus 101); see also p 124 (illus 103).
- ⁶ Reproduced in *Roy Lichtenstein*, London, Tate Gallery, 1968: p 19.

- ⁷ Reproduced in *Art of our time* (see note 4): col illus 58.
- ⁸ Ignoring as irrelevant some early posters, McCahon recalls his first efforts to paint word pictures as dating from around 1945 when he was living at Mapua, but he remembers that, with one possible exception, all these works were destroyed. These works, painted on brown paper, were small, being about 8 x 10ins in size.
- ⁹ Collection: Charles Brasch, Dunedin. Dated February 1954.
- ¹⁰ The two painters who have done work that is closely related to Cubism and to whom McCahon's word paintings are stylistically akin, are Fernand Léger and Giacomo Balla. In particular, reference is made to certain illustrations by Léger for *La Fin du Monde*, Paris 1919 (reproduced in *Lettering by modern artists*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1964: p 15), and to Balla's *Typographical composition*, c1916 and *Beloved numbers*, c1920 (reproduced in *Archivi del Futurismo*, Rome, De Luca Editore, 1962: vol 2, Balla illus nos 235 and 343). Although revealing superficial similarities, these works would certainly not have been known to McCahon.
- ¹¹ Colin McCahon, *Beginnings*, in *Landfall* (No 80) vol 20 no 4, Dec 1966: p 361.
- ¹² Collection: the artist.
- ¹³ McCahon acquired John Pope-Hennessy, *Sienese Quattrocento Painting*, Phaidon, 1947, shortly after it was published.
- ¹⁴ Collection: the artist. Dated April 1947. Reproduced in *Landfall* (No 4) vol 1 no 4, Dec 1947: between pp 268-9.
- ¹⁵ Collection: R. N. O'Reilly, Wellington.
- ¹⁶ Collection: R. N. O'Reilly, Wellington. Reproduced in *Landfall* (No 4) vol 1 no 4, Dec 1947: between p 268-9.
- ¹⁷ Collection: the artist. Dated November 1947.
- ¹⁸ Collection: Dermot Holland, Christchurch. Reproduced in *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand No 5*, Wellington, H. H. Tombs, 1949: p 86.
- ¹⁹ *Dear wee June*. Collection: the artist.
- ²⁰ Collection: Charles Brasch, Dunedin. Reproduced in *Landfall* (No. 16) vol 4 no 4, Dec 1950: between pp 336-7.
- ²¹ Collection: Auckland University Students' Association. Dated May-June 1955. Reproduced in *A retrospective exhibition: M. T. Woollaston—Colin McCahon*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1963: p 19. *Art and Australia*, vol 6 no 1, June 1968: p 65. *Ascent*, vol 1 no 2, July 1968: p 18.
- ²² Panels 2 and 3 are in the collection of Hamish Keith, Auckland. Panels 1 and 4 have been destroyed. The complete work consisted of four panels, dated August 1962.
- ²³ Collection: the artist. Eight panels, painted 1958. Reproduced in *Art and Australia*, vol 6 no 1, June 1968: p 66-7. A lesser known, but similar statement, even more blatant, is found in *Northland Triptych* where the text reads: 'Oh God God—I Know What you want/New Zealand why does nobody love you/ To Know it is to love it—O William O Catherine O Julian Forgive me for loving this land.'
- ²⁴ Collection: Peter A. Tomory, New York. Painted in 1959. Reproduced in: Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, *Contemporary painting in New Zealand*, Auckland, 1964: cat. entry 40.
- ²⁵ Collection: Auckland City Art Gallery. Painted 1961. Reproduced in *Auckland City Art Gallery Quarterly*, No 31, 1964: p 7. Also in *An encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, Wellington, Govt. Print, 1966: vol 1, illus 11A, between p 352-3.
- ²⁶ Collection: the artist. Dated February 1966. Reproduced in *Five Auckland painters*, Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries for Darlinghurst Galleries, Sydney, 1966: cat. entry 10.
- ²⁷ Collection: the artist. Dated March 1959. See also note 23.
- ²⁸ Collection: the artist. Dated August 1959. Text: 'God, it is all dark. The heart beat but there is no answering hark of the hearer and no one to speak. John in Canterbury.' The text is taken from John Caselberg's poem *Van Gogh*, part III, and is a reference to Van Gogh's painting *Ravens flying over cornfields*, 1890. Reproduced, along with other paintings, in *The New Zealand Women's Weekly*, March 27, 1961: p 2.
- ²⁹ Collection: Hamish and Susan Keith, Auckland. Painted in 1962. Text: 'Now is the hour we must say goodbye.' Reproduced in *Ascent*, vol 1 no 2, July 1968: p 56.
- ³⁰ Windows in the Convent Chapel of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions, Auckland. Painted glass, 1966. Reproduced in *Landfall* (No 80) vol 20 no 4, Dec 1966: between pp 364-5.
- ³¹ Collection: the artist. Dated August 1959. Text: 'He is risen—You are witnesses of these things—He is risen from the dead.'
- ³² Collection: the artist. Painted in 1965. Reproduced in *New Zealand Painting 1965*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1965: cat. entry 37.
- ³³ *Two* and *Three*, both in the Auckland City Art Gallery Collection, are from this set.
- ³⁴ Collection: Victoria Carr, Auckland.
- ³⁵ Collection: the artist. Reproduced in *Eight New Zealand Artists*, Auckland, Hamish Keith for National Gallery of Victoria and New Zealand Dept. of External Affairs, 1965: cat. entry 25. *Dispute*, vol 1 no 11, March-April 1966: between pp 8-9.
- ³⁶ Collection: the artist. Thirteen panels, painted in 1965. The last panel *Ten* is illustrated with this article. It is not without some interest to compare the complete work with Piotr Potworowski's *Electronic Brain*, 1960 (reproduced in P. Selz, *15 Polish painters*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1961: p 50), or McCahon's numeral paintings in general with those by Jasper John whose numbers are even more formal in outline and equally simple in their basic composition, but whereas the starkness of McCahon's figures is very much part of their meaning, John's pictures are rendered in a painterly manner so that the number images merge into a visually tactile surface.
- ³⁷ Collection: the artist. Painted in 1959. Reproduced in *Art and Australia*, vol 6 no 1, June 1968: p 67.
- ³⁸ Collection: William McCahon, Auckland. Painted in 1959. Reproduced in *Landfall* (No 67) vol 17 no 3, Sept 1963: between pp 272-3.
- ³⁹ Collection: Doris Lusk, Christchurch. Painted in 1959.
- ⁴⁰ *Beginnings*: p 364 (see note 11).

Len Castle : Potter



T. J. MCNAMARA

'A superb potter' read the review by Donald Brooks, prominent Australian critic, when his first show opened at the Bonython Gallery in October, 1968, in Sydney—a show that was a complete sell-out in a couple of days. The potter was Len Castle, whose modesty seems proof against the sweeping compliments which have been given about almost every display he ever mounted. For despite the praise his development as a potter has been a continuing process, and he has never been content to rest on a plateau of achievement. He was one of the first in New Zealand to establish himself as a full-time potter, and has remained the leading craftsman in this country where the art of the potter has become highly developed. In his long experience as a potter he has explored a great many avenues, and consistently retained and used the best of his discoveries right up to the present.

Most of the major exhibitions of pottery in New Zealand during the last fifteen years have had examples of his work. He has pieces in the International Museum of Ceramics, Faenza, Italy, has had successful shows in Hawaii, Tokyo and Sydney,

and is in the happy position of being able to sell every piece he makes.

His work shows the effects of disciplines other than aesthetic ones. Castle trained as a scientist, and graduated B.Sc. from Auckland University, and then went as a student to Auckland Teachers' College. It is to the credit of the College that plenty of opportunity was given to the students to experiment with new experiences. The science graduate began to experiment with clay and tried his hand at pottery. What began as an experiment became an obsession. By experimentation and through the exchange of ideas with other equally involved pioneer potters he gained authority in the use of his chosen material. Recognition of the quality of the work he produced came when he was awarded the Associated Art Societies of New Zealand Scholarship and went to England to study under Bernard Leach.

After his return he became a lecturer in Science at the Teachers' College where his interest in ceramics had first been aroused, but finally left teaching to make a full-time career as a potter.

The training in science had given him certain

important advantages. He encountered few difficulties in the technology and chemistry of work with glazes and clays, and the natural sciences that had been his principal interest had left him with the habit of acute observation of natural forms and a clear understanding of the relationship of form and function in nature. At no time is there in his work a conscious attempt to copy the forms of nature exactly, but at the back of many of his shapes and textures is a hint of the animals of the sea shore, of the strata of rock, and the weathered surface of clay. Nevertheless, the jug, vase or platter he makes always has a true ceramic shape that gives the proper sense of fullness or support.

These hints become more and more apparent in his most recent work and the action of the Pacific environment is to act as a catalyst to produce work that has a flavour indigenous to New Zealand—something of national style of the sort that many have looked for in vain in our painting over the years.

The first noteworthy work he produced showed the marked influence of Scandinavian design—clear cut shapes, spare, restrained decoration, but often glazed in intense colour, sometimes deep blue or, as in a tall bottle that is part of the Auckland City Art Gallery's collection, a pale yellow, subtly shading from top to bottom with an irregular decoration of splashes of salt glaze.

At this stage much of the work that Len Castle was making used salt glaze techniques. The bold way he has now of letting the clay body speak for itself, of being satisfied to wash the surface of the pot with ochrous clays to emphasize decoration that is part of the structure of the pot itself, is a courage that did not come easily; it came only after long experience with the more conventional forms and a thorough exploration of their possibilities.

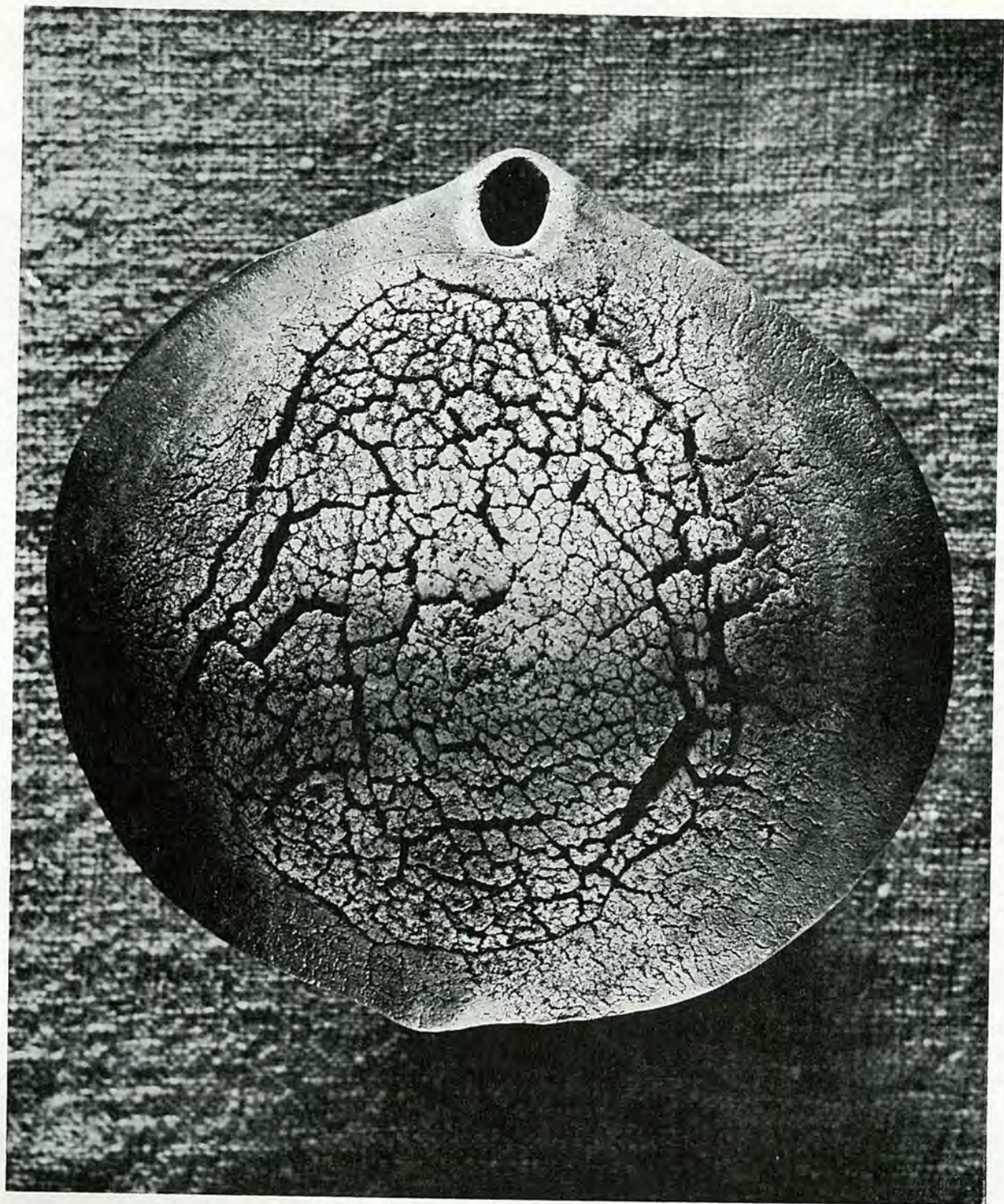
When Castle went overseas for the first time he was already a very accomplished potter. He wanted particularly to see the collections of applied art in Museums, and to work with Bernard Leach, the man who, more than any other man, established modern studio pottery. Leach's position was closely linked with his theories about the virtues of folk art. Wonderfully inventive himself, he still mistrusted work that was too original, that went too far from established areas of traditional ceramics made before mass-, machine-produced goods became common. This emphasis on the craft side of pottery—a good pot as well made as a pair of fine cobbler's boots—can lead to a very self-conscious mediaevalism which



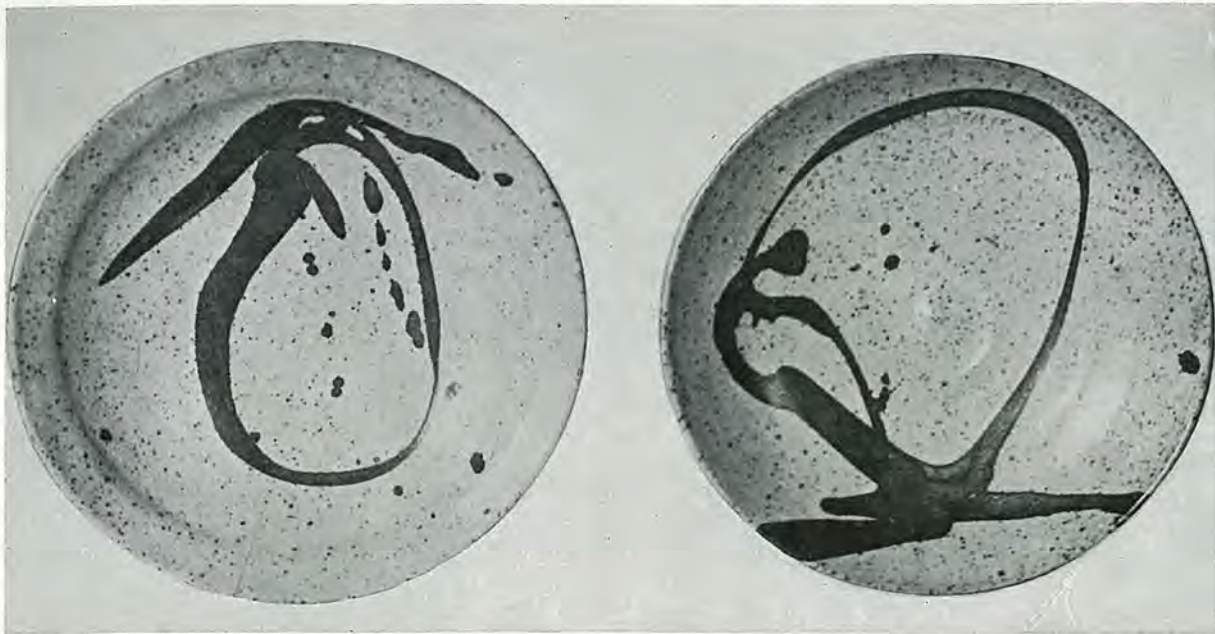
Len Castle at work.

Pottery, 1968.





Hanging flattened Vase, 1968. 16in.



Stoneware plates. Brush decoration in iron pigment. 8in. diam.

ignores the possibilities for the use of ceramics that modern architecture presents so often.

The repetition work at the Leach potteries made it clear to Len Castle that satisfactory work can only be produced while real joy in working the clay is combined with a freshness of feeling for form. Too much repetition work, or working at the wheel for too long, leads the potter into the habit of not looking at his work with a critical eye and allowing his hands to yield to the rhythm of the clay and the wheel, and not observing the form.

For the clear expression of his own personality and ideas in pottery Len Castle had to wait until his return to New Zealand. Leach had mistrusted work that he felt was too 'cerebral' and had placed a very necessary emphasis on the craft side of the work. This had been good for the New Zealand potter but on his return he found a climate of acceptance here that enabled him to emphasize the original side to his work.

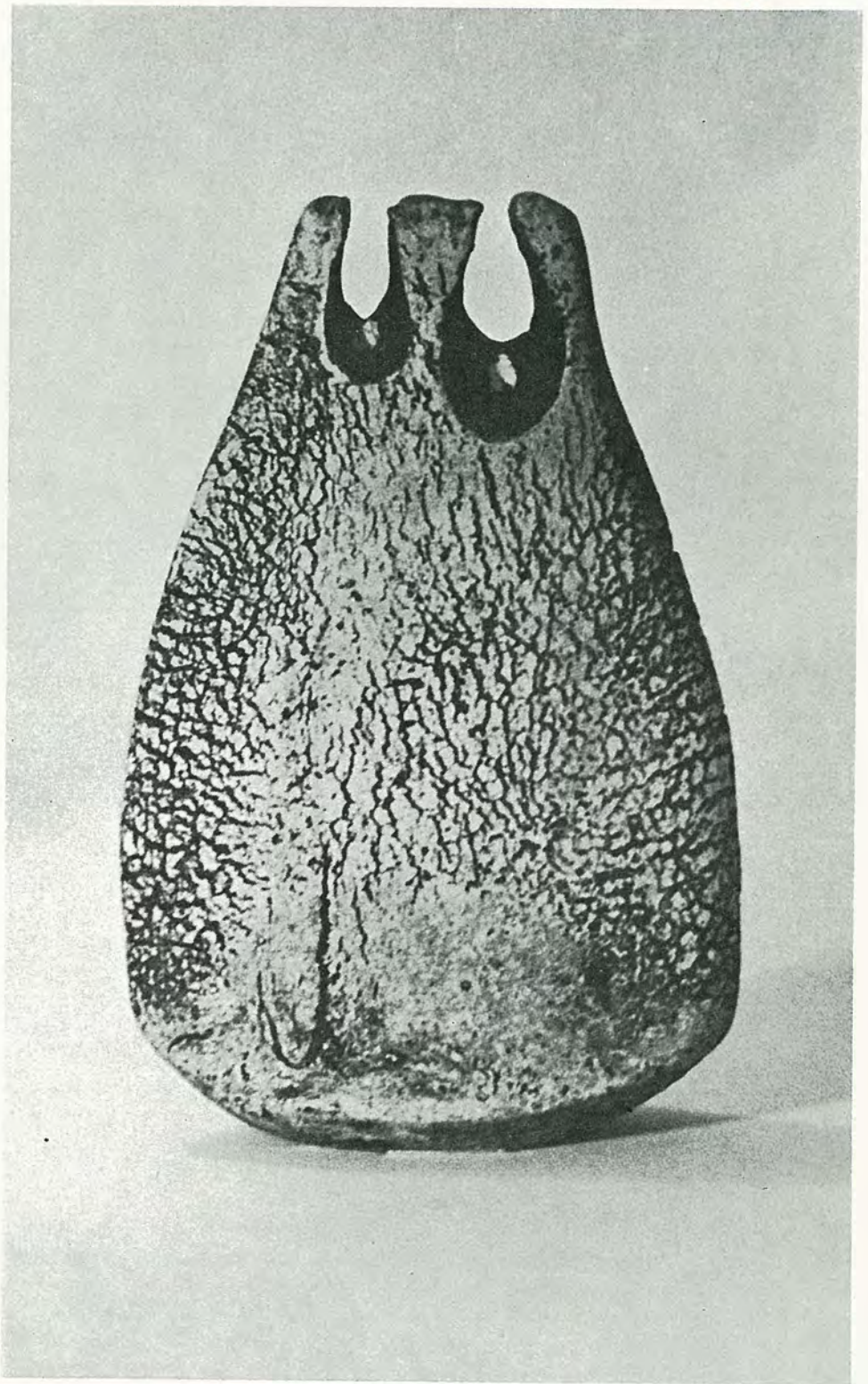
The work in England had deepened his knowledge of the behaviour of clay and using this knowledge he began to develop effects that have become peculiarly his own, particularly a surface texture that is not applied to the pot but is built into the structure by using the behaviour of the clay body which reacts in different ways according to the amount of moisture in it.

The surface texture he uses on the shapes he has

made with his unerring sense of proportion resembles the cracking of earth and rock, under pressure or heat or stress, and it can only be obtained by exercising the utmost control over the clay as it is the result of interaction between the damp, plastic clay of the interior and drier, more rigid clay on the outside. The structural ornament is emphasized by washing the surface with pigments and the effect is a matt finish rather than a glaze. The colour is closely related to local earth colours. Each piece is treated individually, continually turned as the colour is applied with a sponge in various densities in different places, the whole aim being to underline the basic idea of the pot. The whole decoration suggests the work of wind and rain and gives the feeling that the piece has existed a long time without any hint of a conscious archaizing.

The restraint and delicacy of this work make it very suitable for modern architectural interiors as well as emphasizing the uniqueness of each pot. This kind of structural decoration has much more appeal for this potter than applied decoration in the sense of drawn designs—perhaps because it suggests rather than makes an explicit statement.

This does not mean that good use is not made of glazes when the type of ware produced calls for them. Castle uses impressed decoration to excellent effect, particularly devices such as the seal imprint used most notably in many of his splendid big plat-



Holder for an arrangement of fern fronds. 1966. 6in.



Pottery, 1968.

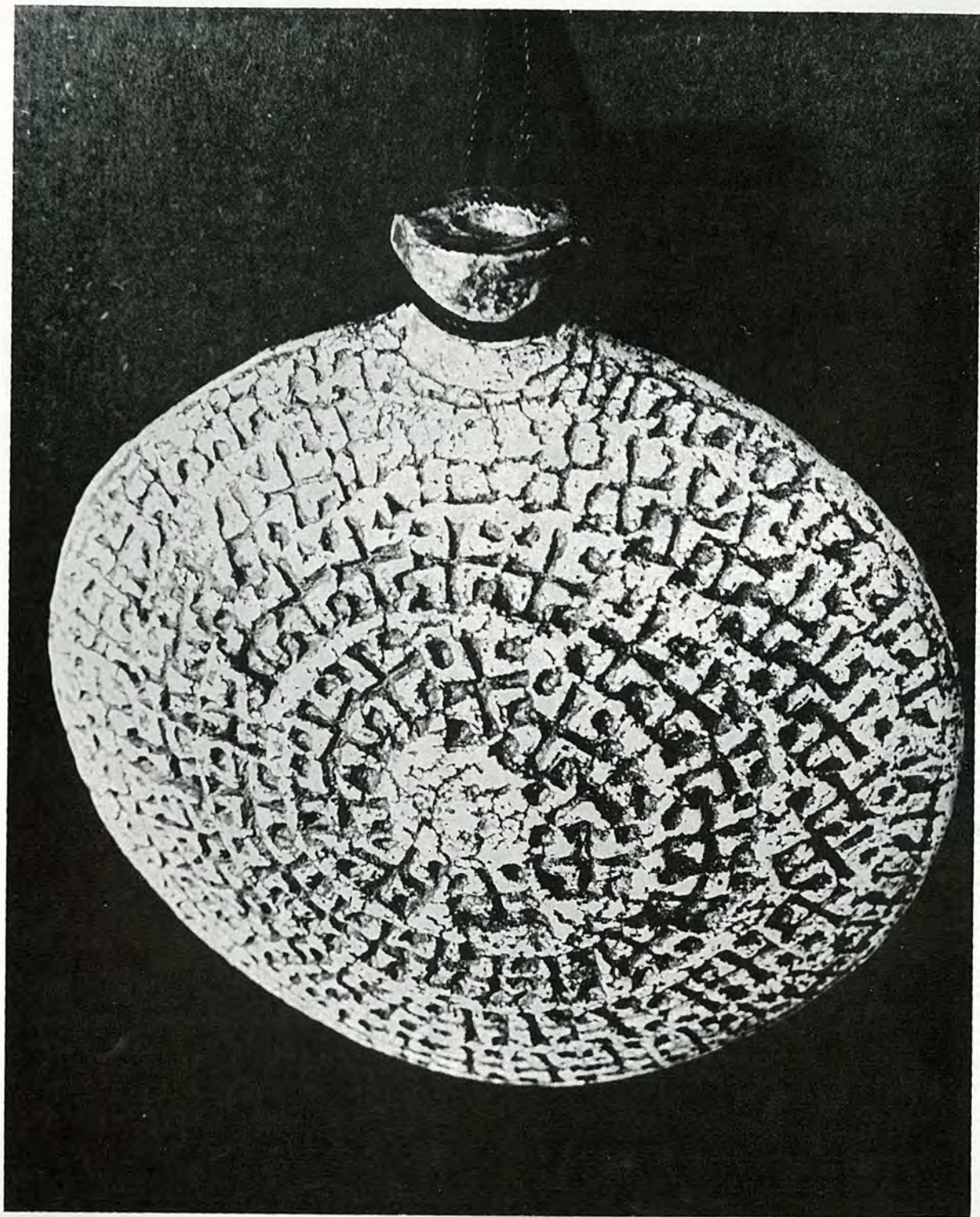
ters which have asymmetrical designs, incorporating patterns made by repeated use of a simple stamp or even textures taken from materials like hessian. Often the decoration comes from something that is part of the pot rather than something applied to the pot, like the texture he produces on the inside of some of his bowls by dragging a piece of wood across the clay that is just dry enough to be pulled up into irregular ridges.

But to someone watching when Len Castle opens his kiln after a firing it is the wide variety of pots that is the most remarkable feature. There is a selection of domestic ware produced in collaboration with the apprentice potter who shares his workshop. Most of this is done with a pale grey glaze with a hint of surface texture. Next, perhaps, there is a slab vase hinting at Japanese influence in its shape; washed, rather than glazed, its rich brown colour speaks of the clay it is made from and the plastic nature of the material is emphasized by a stamped decoration. Other pieces will range in size from a big urn-like vase to fascinatingly miniature boxes for ear-rings, and tiny holders for twigs—highly individual pieces that are the potter's main preoccupation at the moment. The individuality extends to the

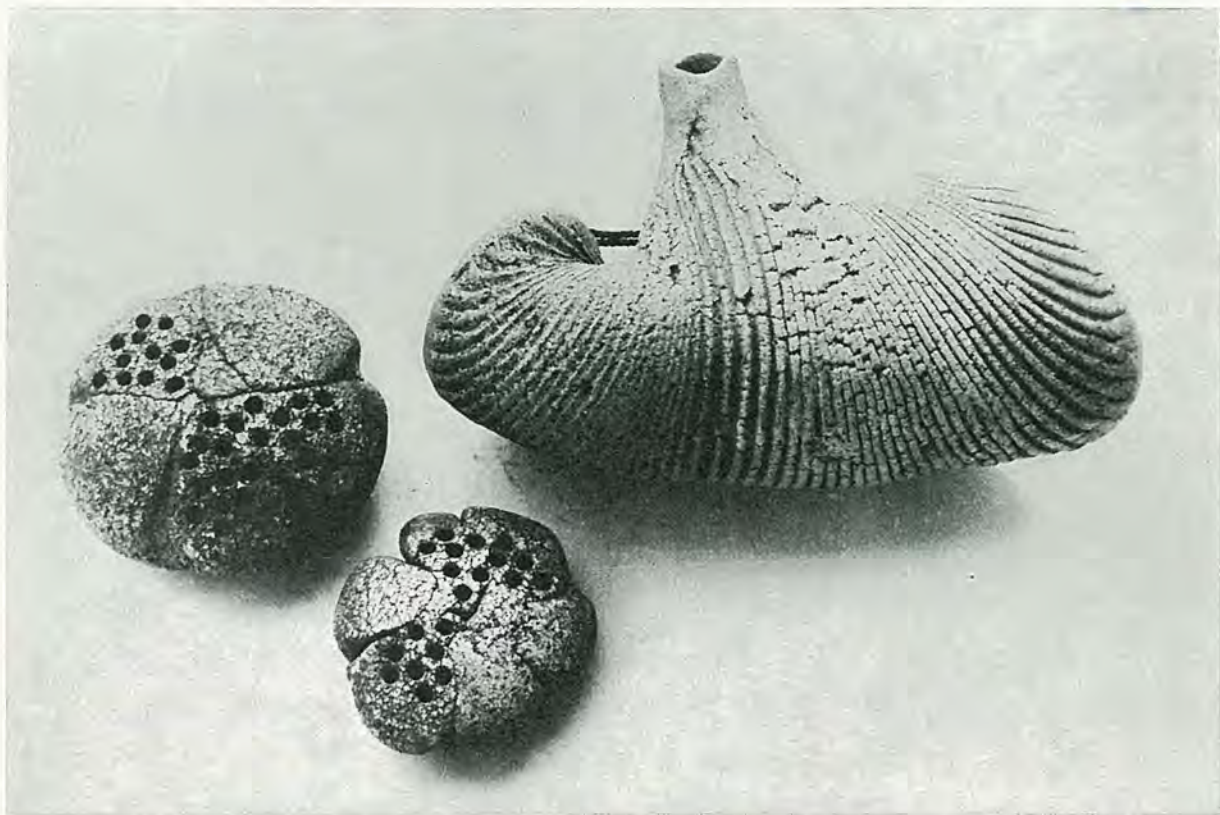
shapes too, which range from simple dishes and big platters to strange shell-like ovoid vases, long hanging bottles, without a foot, and big bladder shapes.

In 1966 Castle received a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Fellowship for studying and working in the United States and Japan. He had developed a warm association with the great Shoji Hamada, the Japanese who has a fair claim to being the world's outstanding living potter, and this gave additional purpose to the visit to Japan. His first stay was in Hawaii, where he took the opportunity to study human artifacts, the ethnology and anthropology of the Pacific area in the Bernice P. Bishop Museum there. Man-made objects, as well as natural phenomena, have been points of reference for Castle—things like Maori adzes and painstakingly shaped stone weights for fishing lines—and the Bishop Museum was an opportunity to study work like this. Also careful observation of natural things like the large cowrie shells which abound in the Hawaiian Islands have had a deep influence on some of his latest work, and added greatly to its Polynesian qualities.

In Japan he found that many of the techniques that New Zealand potters had laboriously obtained



Hanging discoid bottle. 1968. 10in.



Hanging pot and two flattened holders for dry arrangements. Holders $2\frac{1}{2}$ and $3\frac{1}{2}$ diam. 1969.

by empirical methods were identical to traditional Japanese ways of working, although some of the methods had fallen into disuse. He had an exhibition sponsored by Hamada, who wrote an introduction for it, in one of Tokyo's largest Department Stores, and all the pieces in the show were sold. This is a remarkable tribute to their quality, since there is a large section of the Japanese public who are real connoisseurs of ceramics.

Since his return to New Zealand Castle's work has become more and more confident. He is prepared to push a big fruit bowl, made with coarse clay with lumps of quartz rather than the usual grog in it, right out of shape, prepared to allow the rim of such a bowl to remain irregular and to dip and rise, to give the bowl very little in the way of added colour, till a point is reached where one wonders if this is mannerism rather than truth, until fruit is placed in the bowl—bright green Granny Smith apples, for instance, and then the whole thing works and comes alive, colour, texture and use combining to produce something very beautiful.

Castle is producing many small things too: inti-

mate hand-held objects, modelled in the hands and close to nature, yet always retaining the necessary elements of man-made objects, remaining vessels and holders with an obvious use although they may be fluted like a cowrie shell, or the holes may resemble those made in the rocks by sea insects.

But the use of the pot is not considered by Len Castle as much as by some other potters. He pots because he has to, because he derives intense personal enjoyment from working with clay, and to satisfy his own aesthetic needs. He is one of those craftsmen in ceramics who, without forcing his work into pseudo-sculptural areas, manages by incorporating his intelligence and his sensibility into his best pots, to blur the distinction between artist and craftsman, and to express something important about both himself and his environment.

His exhibition in the Auckland Festival this year gave further convincing proof of his ability to do this and re-emphasized that Len Castle must be considered as one of the finest potters in the world today.



PATRICK HANLY. *Love Each Other*. Oil, 48 x 48in.

Five Guest Artists

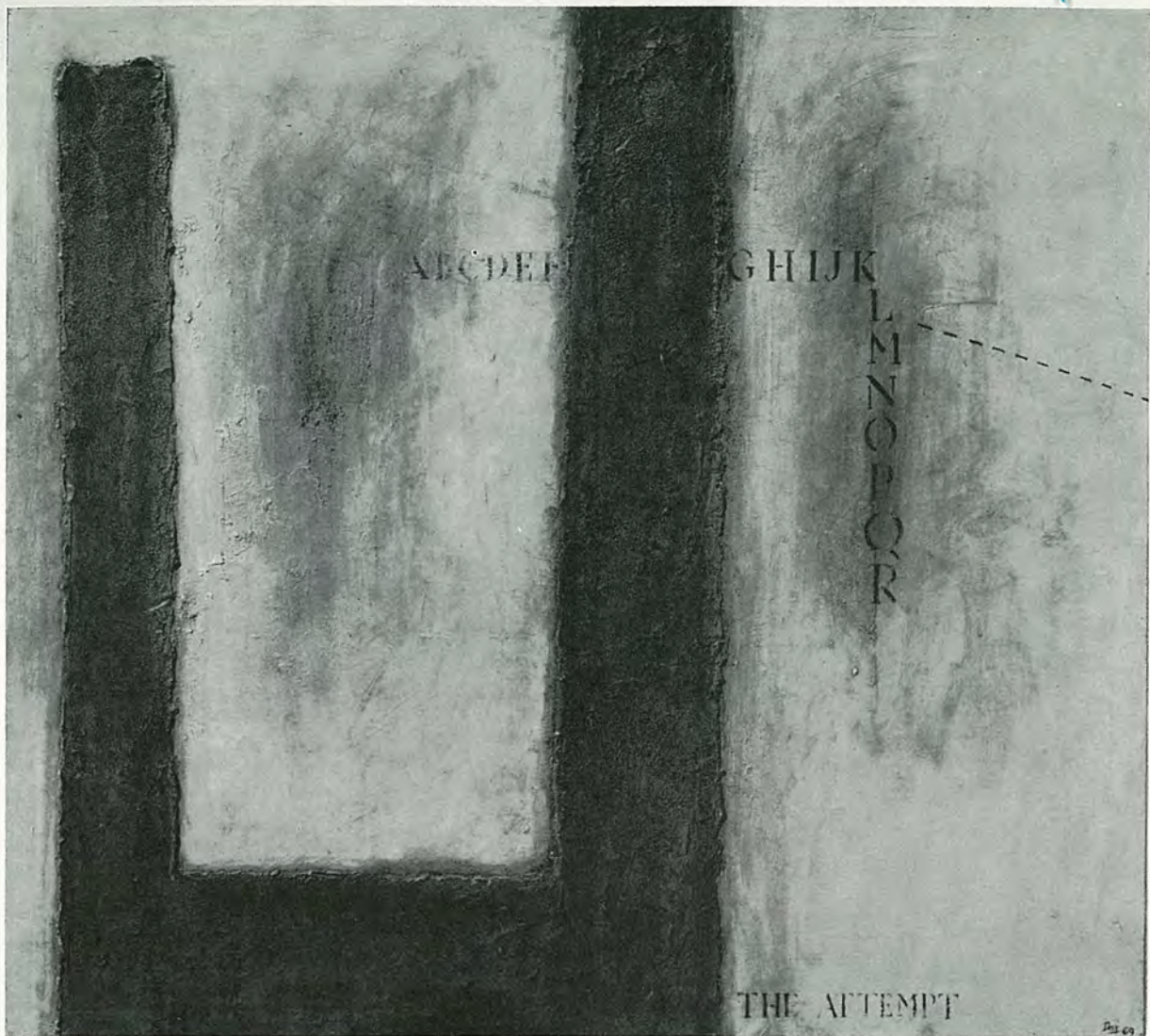
New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts Special Exhibition for 1969

ROY COWAN

In July five painters — Melvin Day, John Drawbridge, Pat Hanly, Ralph Hotere and Don Peebles — exhibited a total of 63 works, paintings and constructions at the N.Z. Academy of Fine Arts gallery, Wellington. This was the response to an invitation in terms which allowed exhibitors to form their own

group and to show, with administrative and financial support from the Academy and the Wellington City Council, their own choice of works, and both current and retrospective elements were present.

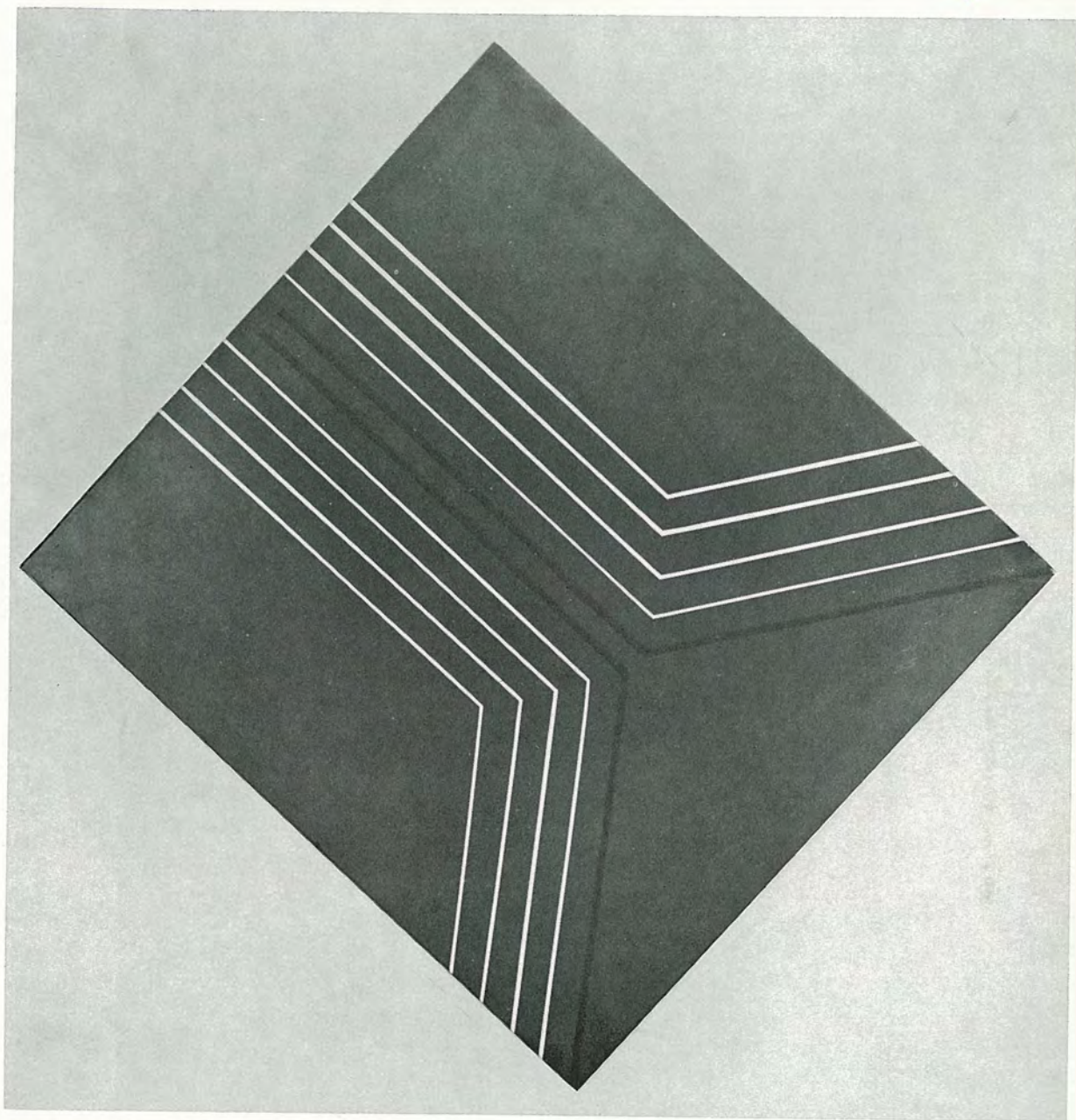
A main intention was to familiarize the public with the work of a group of leading painters. Accep-



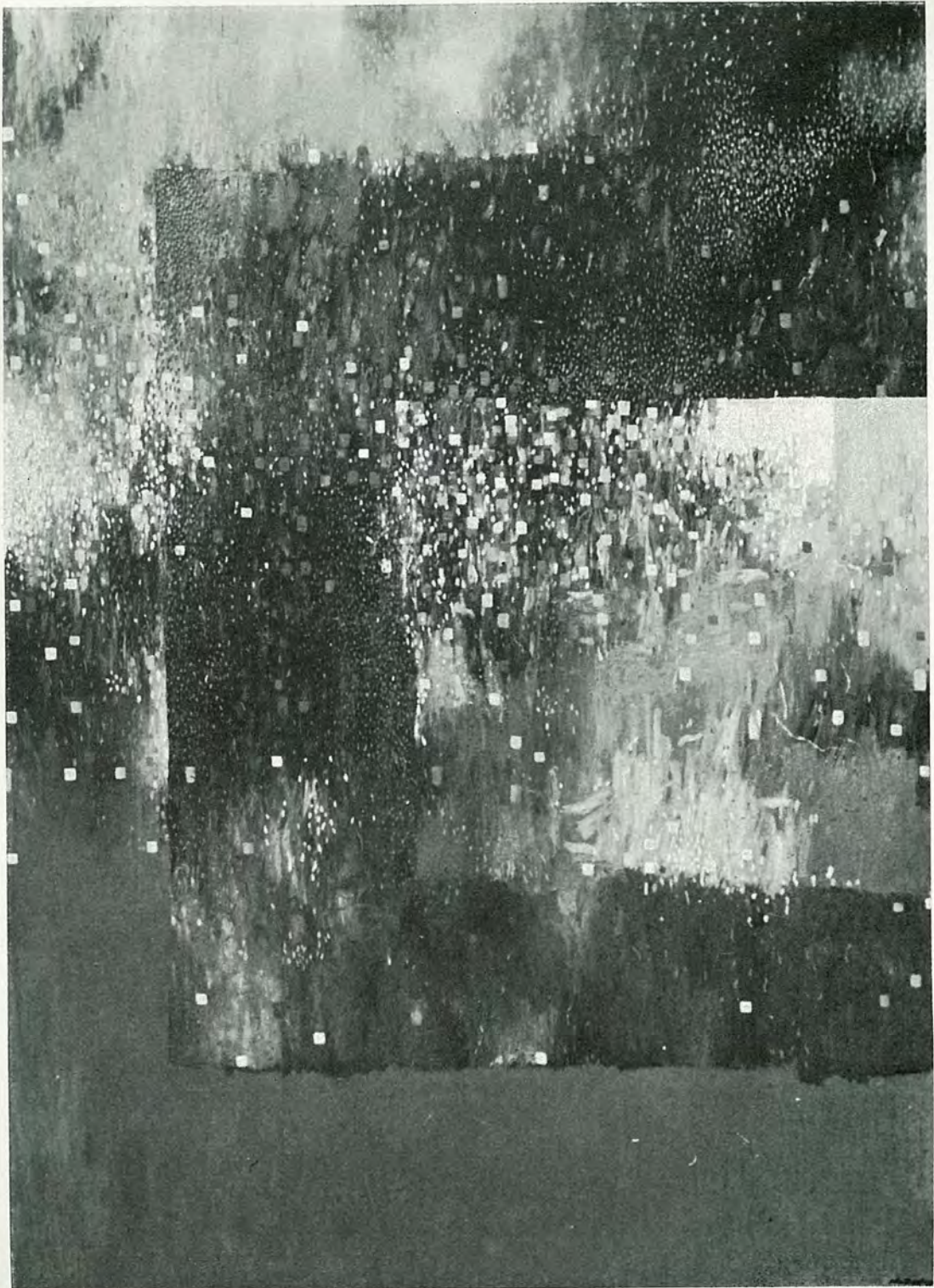
MELVIN DAY. *The Attempt*. Oil, 1969. 54 x 60in.

tance, if not full understanding of all the works, seemed to be the rule (only one Art Lover was seen to stamp out) and the Academy Council was satisfied that further exhibitions of this kind should be arranged. The aim is not to stage shows in the style which might be expected of a dealer gallery but rather to consider forms (such as sculpture) which require sponsorship or a large gallery.

New Zealand lacks an example of a painted interior like the many examples in Europe in which painting and architecture have been planned together to form a larger unity. The rank of massive paintings by John Drawbridge, leading to the *Hotere Black Paintings* and his single-colour series, set up a rhythm with areas and volumes of the galleries, producing an effect of striking power and beauty.



DON PEEBLES. Painting 1967, Linear Series No. 16. Acrylic. 90in.



JOHN DRAWBRIDGE. Quasar. Oil. 90 x 65in.



JOHN PARKER. Pine tree at Bill Roc's place. Charcoal, 1968. 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. Owned by Miss P. Tobin.



JOHN PARKER. Road to Charleston. Charcoal, 1968. 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.

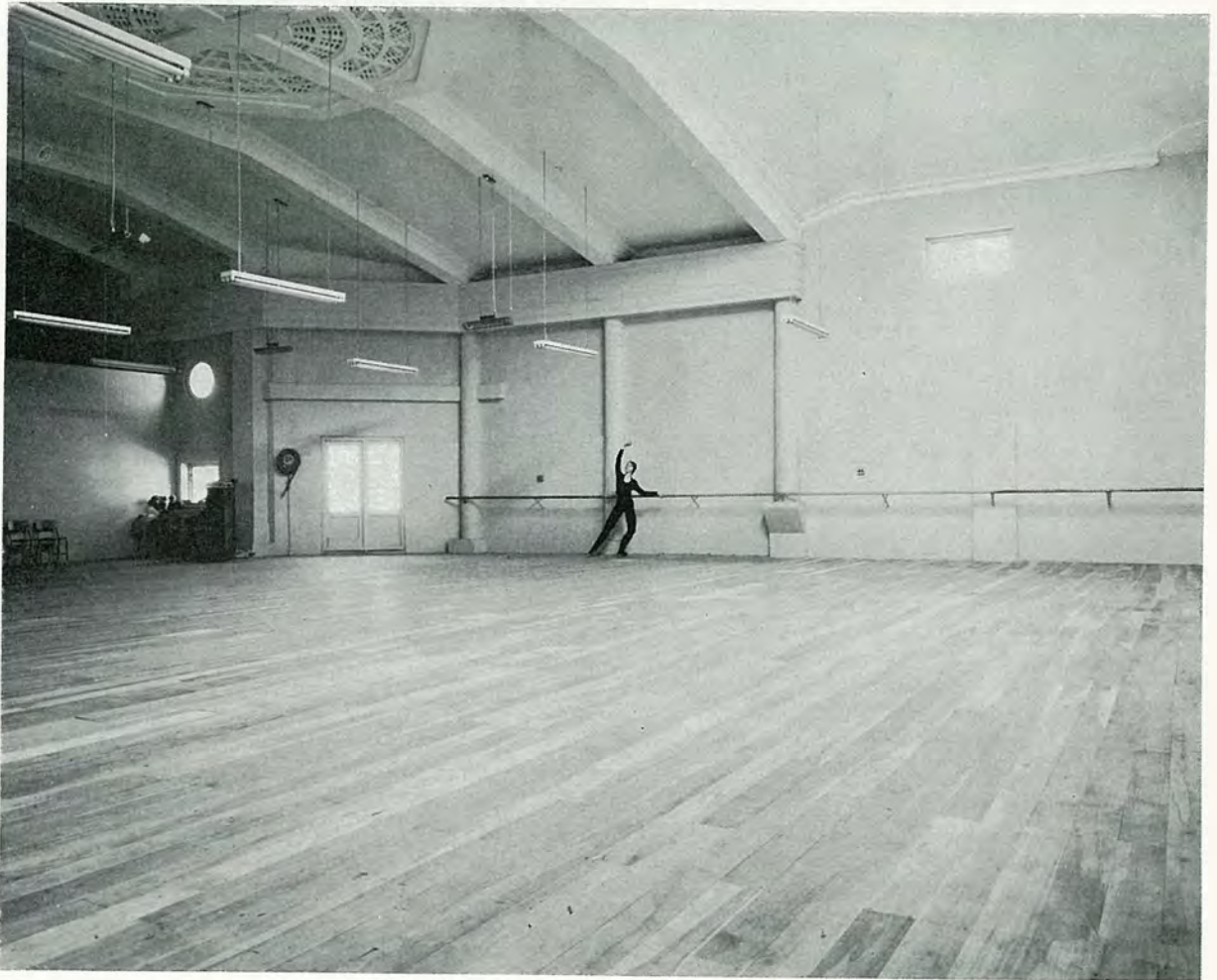


JOHN PARKER. Carter's Beach. Charcoal, 1968. 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ in



JOHN PARKER. Evening-Bush. Charcoal, 1968. 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. Owned by Mr W. M. Somerville.

The Performing Arts in New Zealand



Ballet takes a Grand Jeté

MERVYN CULL

When you arrive at the National School of Ballet in Wellington you think you have come to the wrong address. It lies in a street of warehouses and light industries, and you enter it from a short, narrow alley which runs down beside a drab, two-storey concrete building. The school is in the top storey; on the ground floor is a garage.

The impression you get is one of entering a

cinema from an emergency exit at the rear. This is, in fact, virtually what you are doing, for the school occupies the back of the former Time Theatre, a building which extends from Cuba Street through to Marion Street.

But if the surroundings and exterior of the building are unprepossessing, the site—just a street removed from one of the busiest shopping thorough-



fares in the capital city—and the accommodation—the studio is extraordinarily spacious—are surprising amenities to be found in an institution which has existed little more than two years, which has only a modest enrolment and which has been established by a country not renowned for its generosity to, or support for, the arts.

The National School of Ballet represents New Zealand's only full-time training institution devoted solely to a performing art. Back in 1964 the ballet committee of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council recognized that the establishment of such a school was necessary if the style and artistic standards of New Zealand ballet were to be improved.

One may wonder why ballet was singled out for such seemingly preferential treatment when opera, drama and instrumental music—all three of which were then, and still are, contributing fully and professionally to the national cultural calendar—received no such consideration.

It is true that New Zealand has contributed to international ballet more dancers than might reasonably be expected of so small and so young a country. Rowena Jackson, Alexander Grant, Sara Neil (the first director of the National School of Ballet, incidentally), Bryan Ashbridge and Garry Grant are five who come easily to mind. Moreover, there are

at this moment probably enough New Zealand dancers performing overseas to form a reasonable-sized company of their own.

But New Zealand is making just as great—if not a greater—international contribution in singing. Any company which comprised the finest of the New Zealand opera singers now engaged by other countries would probably be in world class, just as a theatrical company composed of New Zealand actors and actresses working abroad would hold its own with almost any other performing company in the West End of London.

So why ballet first?

One answer, of course, is that, as she progresses toward cultural fulfilment, New Zealand must make a start somewhere in the provision of tertiary training for the performing arts. The claims of ballet are at least as strong as those of any other art form.

Nor should it be forgotten that, although hitherto New Zealand has barely recognized the fact, dance has ever-widening areas of use far removed from the theatre or the ballroom. Overseas it has proved a useful psychological tool in education, it is important in anthropology, aesthetics and sociology, and it has long been recognized as therapy for certain physical defects and ailments. More than 100 universities in the United States offer major courses in dance which



culminate in degrees.

Whether the National School of Ballet will engender such wide appreciation and use of dance in New Zealand remains to be seen. But at least its establishment suggests that we are progressing—either intentionally or unwittingly—toward such enlightenment.

Certainly the acting director of the school, Miss Dorothy Daniels, believes the value of ballet to extend far beyond its importance as a performing art. Miss Daniels, a teacher of acknowledged world standing, says: 'Every child should learn ballet. It gives confidence and poise. Besides, anything which is both physical and artistic, and which stimulates the imagination, must provide a satisfying outlet for many people.'

Whatever the other motives involved, there is no

doubt that the founding of the school tacitly recognizes the work of the New Zealand Ballet Trust, which for 16 years has been taking its ballet company to the highways and byways of the country, teaching audiences to appreciate the art and thereby generating a continued and expanding demand for its presentation. A few years ago New Zealand ballet audiences comprised mostly women and children; today audiences tend to be better balanced. The New Zealand male, while continuing to enjoy his rugby and horse racing, is increasingly developing an appreciation of the aesthetic and technical elements in ballet.

The early years of New Zealand professional ballet were tough. Ballet is probably the art form which the average New Zealander last comes to know, and in its first decade the company existed on

little more than its own enthusiasm and the proverbial shoestring.

In 1960, however, the Arts Advisory Council—the predecessor of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council—recognized the work of the company with a grant of \$10,000. Since then, the Arts Council has made substantially higher grants to the Ballet Trust. In 1967, the council subsidized it by \$130,000 and last year by \$92,500.

The relationship between the National School of Ballet and the ballet trust must be close. Although the school is by no means committed to the production of dancers solely for the ballet company, in practice the company offers the obvious outlet for graduates. Hitherto the company has depended to a large degree on Australian dancers, even for the corps de ballet. Now it has a source of talented material close at hand; of the six graduates from the school last year, five joined the company.

The school educates and prepares students in the fullest sense for careers not only in ballet itself, but also in professional dancing in all its forms. Graduates are also well-qualified to teach. The syllabus drawn up for the school and issued in prospectus form provides a course of training which embraces the various elements affecting technique, the development of natural aptitudes, musicality, acting and mime, and the broadening of artistic and general intelligence.

Work periods are of an hour and a half each, and there are five a day for five days a week. The full training course, which is heavily orientated toward the classical school, lasts two years. But Miss Daniels, among others, would like to see it extended to three years, a change which she believes would enable dancers to emerge technically stronger than they are able to do at present.

Some of the best-known names in the New Zealand arts are associated with the school. For instance, Raymond Boyce lectures the students in the history of the theatre; Nola Millar is the drama tutor; Valerie Bayley instructs in anatomy and the history of ballet; and Joan Fanning teaches art appreciation. Anne Rowse, a former solo dancer with the Festival Ballet in London, is responsible for the classical repertoire.

With such a curriculum—which involves regular written and practical examinations—it is not surprising that the school expects students to hold school certificates or higher educational qualifications before entry. Candidates for admission must also undergo

auditions, unless they hold Arts Council scholarships, for which they would have been already auditioned anyway.

Of the second intake of 15 full-time students, nine hold Arts Council scholarships and three hold outside scholarships. The remainder meet the fees—\$300 a year—from private resources. The Arts Council scholarships are worth \$600 a year for students living away from their home towns and \$300 a year for Wellington holders.

But when their fees are paid and their boarding expenses met—and Wellington is recognized as being one of the dearest places in New Zealand to live—it is obvious that even scholarship students may experience real financial problems. For instance, a pair of point shoes costs about \$4 and a dancer will wear out at least one pair a week. Then there is the expense of leotards and other clothing. However, at least the school is now officially approved by the Social Security Department for the payment of family benefit to parents of students over the age of 16.

One of the disappointments of the present enrolment at the school is that only two of the 15 full-time students, and one part-time student, are boys. New Zealanders, it seems, have yet fully to overcome the belief that ballet is not a manly pursuit. No doubt, too, many youths fail to see it as a financially rewarding career.

But the imbalance of the roll in a geographical sense is even worse than the imbalance between the sexes. Not one of the present students comes from Auckland, the largest city in the country and one which has several fine ballet schools and a strong tradition of ballet appreciation. The result is that a scholarship offered by Sir Robert Kerridge for an Auckland student has this year been awarded to a Tauranga dancer.

Against such disappointments, however, must be weighed the recent award of a Royal Academy of Dancing Scholarship to Mary-Jane McDonald, one of the first class of students to graduate from the school. It entitles her to train at the Royal Ballet school in London. Only six other New Zealanders—including Rowena Jackson and Alexander Grant—have won such a scholarship.

This early success of the National School of Ballet opens an interesting field of speculation. If New Zealand could contribute so substantially to international ballet before the advent of the school, how much more will she contribute now that such a school exists?

The Mercury Theatre in Ascent

1966

April 3rd Public meeting. Over 200 people discussed formation of a professional theatre in Auckland

May 2nd Auckland Theatre Trust Board formed.

June 15th First Trust Board meeting. Appeal for funds and search for suitable premises put in hand. Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Grant received—\$200.

June to October Promises of major donations received. Plans drawn up for Haddon Hall.

November 30th Haddon Hall withdrawn from sale.

1967

February 10th Theatre training. School plans discussed. Possibility that Playhouse for sale.

March 30th Decision made to purchase Playhouse Theatre. Training school open.

May 8th Programme of action produced. Advertisement for Director authorized.

August 21st Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council grant received — \$6,000. Ninety-six applications for Directorship received from New Zealand, Australia, America, Canada, Britain and South Africa.

September 1st Anthony Richardson appointed.

October 16th Fund-raising campaign launched. Auditions for permanent acting company begun.

December 1st Anonymous donation of \$15,000 brings total to \$120,000. Tenders called.

December 13th Auckland City Council match \$1 to \$2. Plans go ahead.

December 20th Building contract signed for \$73,000.

1968

January 8th Wreckers move into Playhouse.

January 25th Theatre re-named 'The Mercury'.

February Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council grant notified—\$18,000 for 1968.

April 30th Builders move out.

May 1st First night—*The Admirable Crichton*.

1969

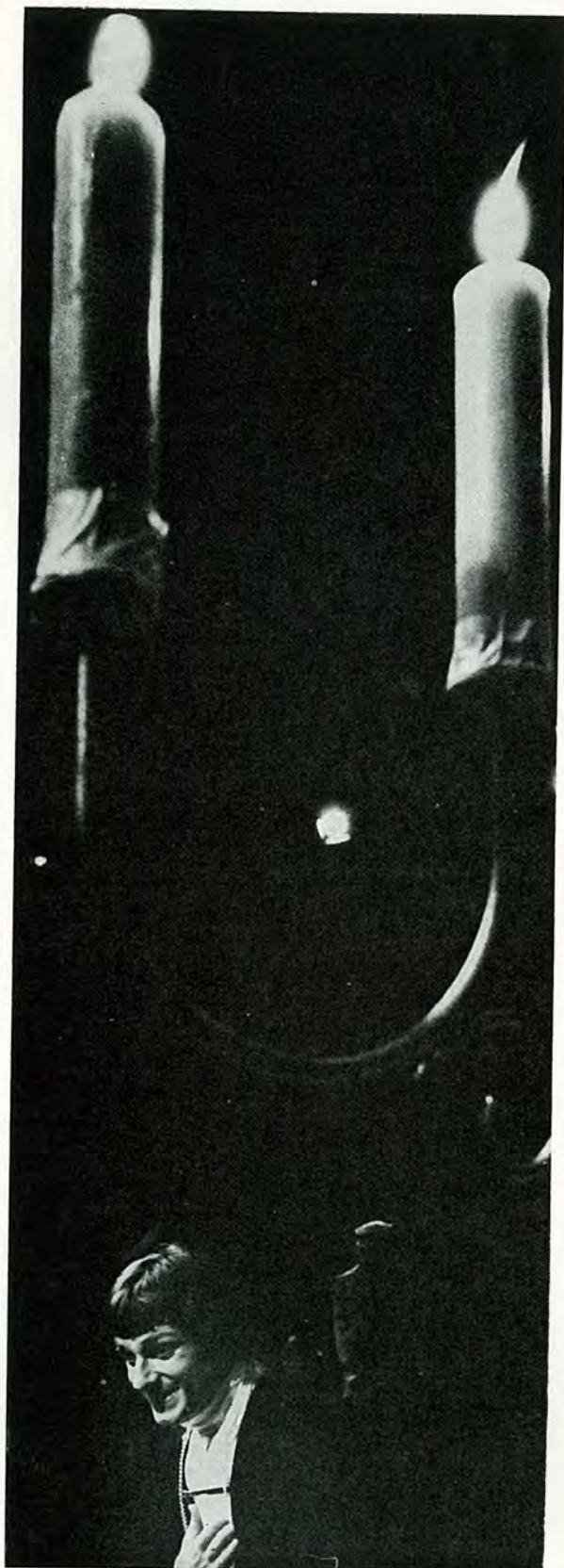
January 25th Final performance of season. Theatre closed for holidays and maintenance.

February 17th Company re-assembles for new season, rehearsals and training.

March 8th Gala opening — *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*.

March 20th Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council grant notified up to \$45,000 for 1969.

July 23rd Second Shakespeare production: *Hamlet*.





The Mercury

ANTHONY RICHARDSON

Just two years ago I was appointed director of the newly formed Auckland Theatre Trust. This anniversary seems an apt occasion on which to look back and to glance into the future. Theatre is an immediate and transient art and for most of the time those of us who are involved in it live from day to day or month to month.

For me, the attractions of coming to New Zealand included spanning the world, being present at a new birth and, I hoped, advising a total theatre enterprise. This was to include not only a main auditorium of 700 seats but a studio-rehearsal room of 130 seats, restaurant and reception areas as well as schemes for training in acting, direction, design and stage-management.

I had worked with New Zealanders from the

moment that I began in theatre, Eric Tayler, Clive Revill, Alan Rowe among others; from this small country there was quite obviously an immense dramatic potential. For several weeks while considering the directorship I discussed the whole New Zealand situation with writers, actors and designers who came from that country or had worked there. From 13,000 miles away I got a confused and arbitrary picture. It was a prudish country, suspicious of professionalism, and judged by past experience, more likely to back rugby than theatre. Strangely, this added to the appeal because it suggested the direct conflict which is at the heart of drama, and which prevents dangerously cosy acceptance. On arrival I found there was enough concern and enthusiasm to make theatre possible.

The old Playhouse was perhaps a depressing place in which to plan policies and hold auditions, but the introduction of a flexible thrust forestage, the swirled grey plastering of backstage walls and the new use of theatre areas left me with a precious feeling of excitement. The company and staff were recruited from New Zealand, and the fact that we began rehearsals for the first season on *All Fools Day* 1968 seemed quite a good omen. From the start we were lucky to have the enthusiasm of

Auckland citizens; the theatre indeed had been purchased and altered from their contributions.

How to begin? Our choice of play—*The Admirable Crichton*—was open to argument. While it had been studied for many years in New Zealand schools and was regarded as 'old hat' by critics, it was still Barrie at his sharpest, and the theme, after all, concerned birthrights and achievement by merit.

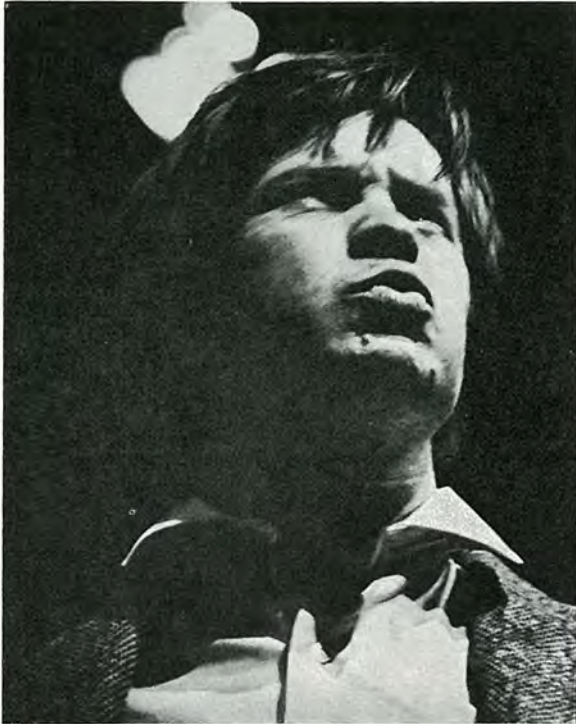
Since opening we have never played down to audiences. It has always been our intention to provide popular theatre in its best sense. The small cast, drawing-room set play no longer has relevance; indeed in our short history this kind of play has proved least successful. So we have presented plays that we felt were worthwhile, that were demanding in use of theatre and company; a total fusion of talents, in movement and music within a three-dimensional setting which forced the belly laughs or tears right into the lap of the audience. A resident musical director and choreographer have been part of the production team from the beginning.

The shows in our first season which succeeded, at least in part, included the American folk drama *Dark of the Moon*, in which we were able to involve music, movement and mask work; *Alfie*, which took a penetrating look at the contemporary dilemma of individual satisfaction and sex; *Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'be* which, in spite of its romantic overlay, has guts; *Flea In Her Ear*, an expert piece of hard comedy; *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, harshly opening up the question of justice; and *Lock Up Your Daughters* as an end of season romp. Meanwhile, younger audiences had been drawn to *Winnie-The-Pooh* and *Toad of Toad Hall* as an introduction to theatre-going.

In the studio, sessions were organized to lead people towards an understanding of Brecht, a preview and discussions on Shakespeare were held, examples of mime and theatre training were shown. We were fortunate in having visits from Max Adrian, Margaret Webster and the Die Brücke company as well as a Maori Theatre Trust performance of *He Mana Toa*.

At the end of our first season we were \$161 in profit on working costs. The two hundred enthusiasts who met to discuss the formation of a professional theatre in Auckland were now up to two thousand theatre-goers a week. Our company, design and technical teams were beginning to know their own building, and more importantly, their audiences. In 1969 we have been able to do plays





by Tom Stoppard, Dylan Thomas, Arthur Miller, Aristophanes and Shakespeare. Within the last few weeks we have with our own company presented *Lysistrata* and *Hamlet*; we have hosted an expert French company in *Tartuffe* and *Waiting for Godot*; we are rehearsing a sharp satire in *Semi-Detached*, reviving a children's show in *Toad of Toad Hall*, and producing a new documentary on the first effects of the hydrogen bomb.

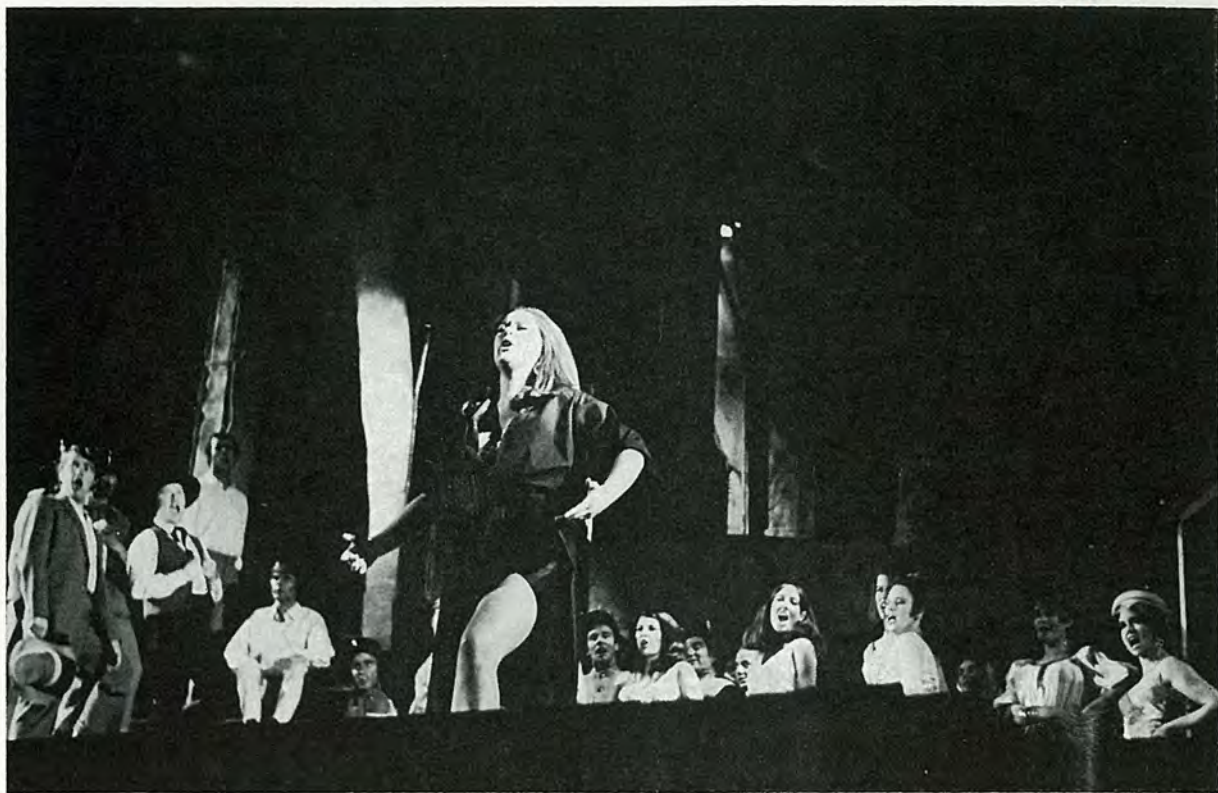
The problems that must face any professional theatre in New Zealand are the lack of tradition and of experience, although in some ways these can be strengths. Our main line has been to introduce a new public and as far as possible to compel them to acknowledge the power of the theatre. Many of those who had a preconceived idea of theatre may not like the demands now made on them, but the new audience, largely a young one, approves.

For the future we need finance and support to extend experiment and training within the limits set by career opportunities. We need to attain a standard of achievement that will enable us to demand as of right support equivalent to that given to libraries, art galleries and education in general.

I do not believe that a professional theatre can be developed from scratch in less than four years.

I can only hope that in that time the Mercury will establish itself as strong enough and attractively ugly enough to make its individual contribution to this changing world.

Production shots by Michael Tubberty from 'Hamlet,' 'Under Milk Wood', 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead'.



Kiri te Kanawa as Carmen, 1969.

New Zealand Opera Company

RUSSELL BOND

Whatever grounds for envy and frustration it may have given exponents of other art forms, the New Zealand Opera Company's recent season of *Carmen* and *The Mikado* has been a highlight in this country's musical history.

For the first time an opera produced by local effort so caught the imagination of the public that it clamoured for tickets to an extent that could not be accommodated. This was the company's particular achievement—not that it produced a *Carmen* worthy of critical acclaim, though it did this too,

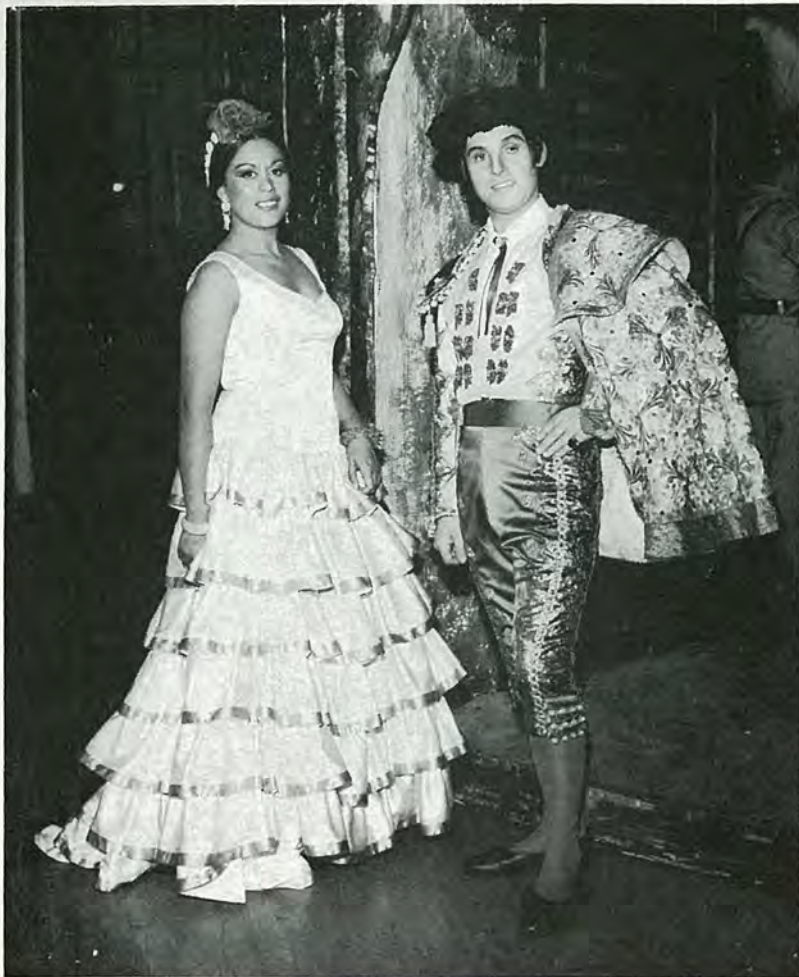
but that it made the public aware of opera as popular entertainment.

At the present stage of its development this must be the primary objective of New Zealand opera. It involves building up a repertoire of stock works that have fully established their popularity abroad. It is unfortunate that this means presenting a lot of old war-horses that have long since lost their appeal for the established opera-lover.

In Wellington the latter can find consolation in the more intimate productions now possible at the Opera Centre, the recent successful presentation of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, for instance.

But for the public generally this is caviare, unfamiliar and unwanted. Till the public taste becomes more cultivated, the major productions must be of accustomed fare—*Faust*, the popular Puccinis, the earlier Verdis.

It is tempting to regret that such exciting and enterprising proposals as productions of *Boris Godunov* and *Aida* have fallen through. But it may



Escamillo (Paul Neal)
and Carmen (Kiri te Kanawa).
Carmen, Act IV, Finale.
N.Z. Opera Company, 1969.

have been for the best. *Boris* would have needed a singer with a world reputation to draw the crowds. *Aida* would have required an emphasis on the spectacular that could have bankrupted the resources of the New Zealand company.

Whatever the company offers to the public at large, as opposed to what it presents at the Opera Centre, must also contain the attraction of 'name' singers. This has been amply demonstrated by the outstanding success of the company's latest *Carmen*.

Internationally famous singers are not easy to attract to New Zealand for a season of opera. Yet they come readily enough for concert engagements.

One reason is that whoever engages them, usually the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation, can plan its programmes sufficiently ahead to bridge the period during which their services are already booked. This can be anything up to three years.

In the past the opera company has been unable to do this because of not knowing the extent of

financial support available from one year to the next. The position is rather better now, though the company still cannot make big commitments ahead.

It was fortunate on this occasion to be able to command a drawcard like Kiri te Kanawa, who as a personality has somehow caught the imagination of the New Zealand public. This is in spite of Kiri's still having some way to go to establish herself as an operatic singer and in spite of her being temperamentally unsuited to the role of Carmen.

The standard for Carmen was set for me, and I could say for New Zealand, 37 years ago when the Williamson Imperial Grand Opera Company toured the country. In vocal quality it was as grand and imperious as its name.

In the scope of its productions it was astounding. Here are the operas it performed in Wellington in the one relatively short season: *Carmen*, *Butterfly*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La Traviata*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Bohème*, *Rigoletto*, *Cavalleria Rusticana* and



The Mikado, 1969. Ko-Ko (George Henare), Nanki-Po (Ken Casey) and Yum-Yum (Kiang Hiwa).

Pagliacci, The Tales of Hoffman, Tosca, Faust and The Barber of Seville.

A list like this is a clear indication of the ground our present opera company has to make up in retrieving losses first to the 'talkies' and then to television.

The Williamson company included in its cast a young contralto, Bruna Castagna, from Milan's La Scala and later to have a ten-year reign at the Metropolitan. My initial dismay at the sight of her plump and floppy-breasted figure turned to rapturous attention.

It was generally agreed that hers was the most electrifying Carmen seen in New Zealand and certainly there has been none since to match her. This performance also had the advantage of a first-class Escamillo in Apollo Granforte.

There was no dismay at the first sight of Kiri, quite the opposite, but she had too much innate dignity for the role. Still remembering Castagna's

intense darkly brooding card scene, I found Kiri's a throwaway.

The last act, in which a measure of dignity sits well on Carmen, saw Kiri at her best. This was altogether a brilliant finale. Donald Smith's magnificent singing as Don Jose reached its peak in this act and Kiri was fuller voiced than she had previously allowed herself to be.

Raymond Boyce's set, the size of which alarmed me when the curtain first rose upon it, also came into its own in the last act.

Richard Campion's production and Boyce's mixture of modern and traditional costumes offended some regular opera-goers. For me they were splendidly in keeping with the spirit of the opera and again they achieved a climactic effect in the last act.

So far as Kiri was concerned, this *Carmen* revealed a highly attractive-looking young singer of great promise, but as yet no more than promise.

Though her voice is beautiful in quality, it was well cushioned by James Robertson's attentive conducting and she rarely sang at full volume.

Her restraint was probably wise, though it contrasted with the full-blooded singing of Donald Smith. Her peak, I feel, is still some way off. May she have the courage and perseverance to attain it.

Of *Carmen's* companion piece, *The Mikado*, I can say that it was in itself an almost unqualified success while doubting the suitability of its choice.

This is being wise after the event. It seemed at first a good idea to offer a professional Gilbert and Sullivan production. But once it became apparent that *Carmen* was being rushed, it was also obvious that those who could not buy their way into *Carmen* should have had an alternative grand opera offered them. *Carmen* and *The Mikado* were too disparate in such circumstances to make a seasonable pair.

Yet without *The Mikado* we would not have known the true extent of the capabilities of George Henare, the so lively and appealing Ko-Ko. And we would not have known the lyrical grace of Dick Johnstone's production.

Arts Conference '70

(Policy into Action)

April 10, 11, 12, 1970, at

Victoria University of Wellington.

During the past year, leaders of all sections of New Zealand's economic life, participating in the National Development Conference, expressed their unanimous agreement that the setting of economic targets for the future was insufficient and that the achievement of higher material standards was accompanied by the creation of a social and cultural environment conducive to the attainment of a fuller and more satisfying way of life.

Specifically, Clause 93 of the Social and Cultural Committee reads:

While the Government provides a substantial part of the finance for cultural activities it does not dictate cultural policy. It is reasonable to expect that Government will contribute more to cultural activities. **The Committee recommends that an assessment be made of the amount of state sup-**

port necessary for the development of the arts. This should have regard for the need for these activities to grow both in breadth and depth over a period involving a growing commitment on a long-term basis.

The Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council has decided to call a conference, to be known as Arts Conference '70, in the week-end April 10, 11, 12, commencing at 7 p.m. on the 10th.

The aim of the Conference is to:

- 1 Make an assessment of the arts in New Zealand as they stand today and to prepare a blueprint for the next decade;
- 2 Quantify objectives and define these as falling within the scope of the Council itself, government departments, N.Z.B.C., local authorities and other sectors;
- 3 Provide information on the degree of public and private involvement in the arts;
- 4 Provide an open forum for the exchange of ideas;
- 5 Make projections into the future on the basis of the information obtained;
- 6 Endeavour to reach agreement on the broad needs of the arts in general;
- 7 Endeavour to set the arts within the general economic picture as an integral part of our development as a nation.

People from the broadest spectrum of the arts are being invited to participate — creative artists, practitioners, teachers, administrators, and people who are concerned with the 'quality' of life. They are being asked to submit recommendations for procedures which they consider will contribute to the health and strength of the arts in New Zealand and meet the short, middle and long term needs. These recommendations will be asked for in the form of remits, with explanatory notes, which can be voted upon.

Papers on a variety of topics will be presented at the conference and time will be allowed for discussion. Background material will be supplied.

Conference members will split up into working parties to handle remits which will have been consolidated and grouped under appropriate headings. The recommendations of these working parties will be discussed at the end of the conference and resolutions will be called for.

A report of the findings of the Conference will be published.

Sir George Grey's Paintings

JOHN STACPOOLE

SCHOLARS who have written about Sir George Grey as a collector have all restricted themselves, except for a few passing references, to his activities as a collector of books. Dr E. H. McCormick (*The Fascinating Folly*, 1961) searched the Grey letters in the Auckland Public Library, for evidence of book buying, without apparently finding anything worthy of remark in other fields. But in 1887 or 1888, Grey gave the people of Auckland more than fifty paintings with which to establish an Art Gallery, and 507 other items, including such things as a superb jade water-buffalo from the summer palace at Peking and a gold frog from Mexico, which are now held by the Auckland Institute and Museum. These are in addition to the 14,000 books, manuscripts and miscellanea given to the Auckland Public Library, which are only surpassed in quality, if not number, by the similar collection he gave the people of Cape Colony. The paintings cannot match the manuscripts and incunabula but they include about twenty fine works in the Gallery's permanent collection. Of the remaining thirty, some were copies and others were of minor interest or related specifically to South Africa.

Almost no direct evidence has been found, either in the letters or elsewhere, for the source of these paintings, but inferences may be drawn from statements by his contemporary biographers and from his own correspondence. Nothing has been found to bear out Mr P. A. Tomory's 'reasonable hypothesis' (*Old Master Paintings from the Private and Public Collections of New Zealand*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1959) that some of these pictures were acquired by Grey's father, Lieutenant-Colonel George Grey (Plate 1), during his service in Portugal and Spain. 'The origins of Sir George's pictures are still shrouded in doubt,' wrote Mr Tomory, 'for although he certainly bought several himself, these do not conform to the taste that determined some



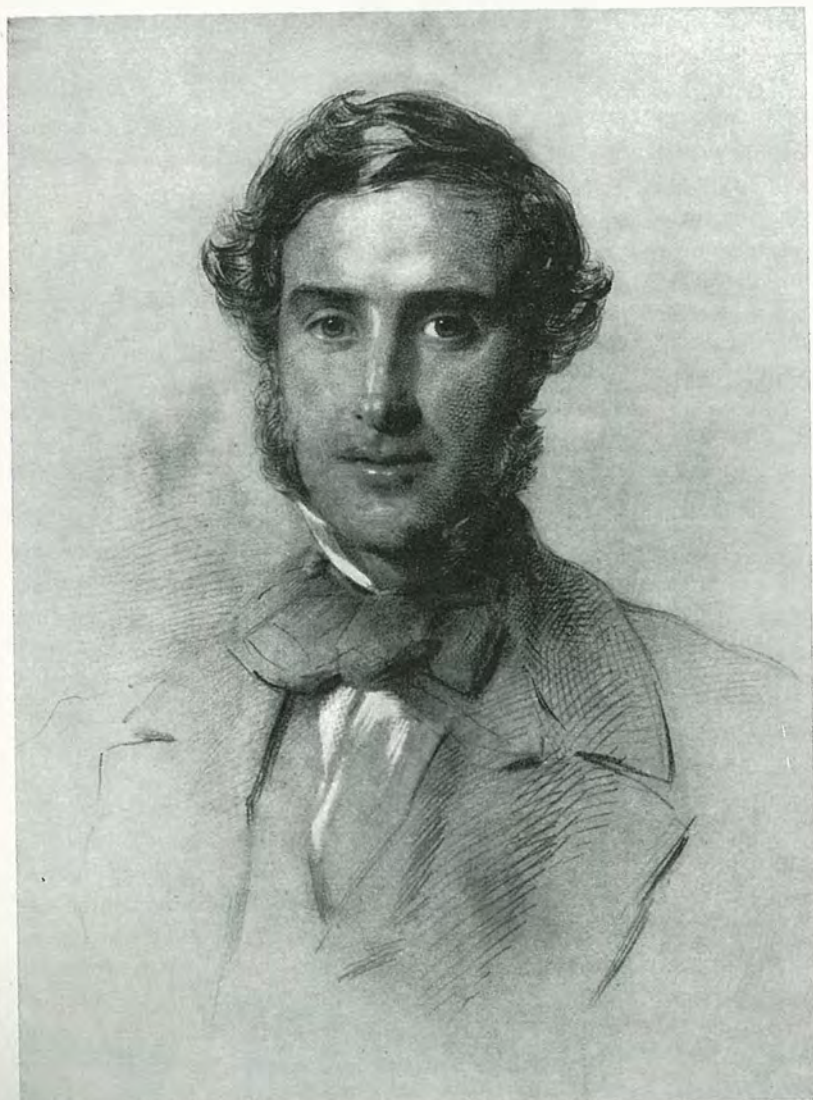
1 Lieutenant-Colonel George Grey (1778-1812). Miniature on ivory. Artist unknown, possibly Portuguese. Auckland Public Library.

of the others . . . two panels . . . were some time ago ascribed by Professor E. K. Waterhouse to the Portuguese school.' But the Portuguese and other paintings may have had quite different origins and were probably acquired by Grey himself.

Grey said that the three men who influenced him most were Archbishop Whateley of Dublin, Thomas Carlyle and James Stephen. Whateley is described (*Dictionary of National Biography*) as having no feeling for historic antiquity, beauty of nature, music, sculpture, painting or architecture, so to him we may ascribe Grey's strong faith in the Christian religion but not any love of the arts. To Carlyle we may ascribe his early belief in the rule of the strong and just man not to be got by popular election, and to Stephen his fondness for finesse. But it has been suggested that Grey's book collecting began in New Zealand during his first term as Governor, in emulation of Bishop Selwyn who then had the only library of consequence in the colony. Grey and Selwyn were the two outstanding men of the time, the 'two mighties' as Henry Williams called them, mutually respectful. Some emulation of the older by the younger would not be unexpected, and perhaps some



2 Lot and his Daughters. William Blake. Wash drawing. $7\frac{1}{4} \times 11\frac{3}{4}$ in. The Grey Collection.



3 Sir George Grey (1812-1898). George Richmond, 1854. Conte and white chalk, $23\frac{7}{8} \times 18\frac{3}{8}$ in. Auckland City Art Gallery. It was said of Richmond that he made all his sitters look as they would in the next world.



4 Saint George. Bernadino Lanino (1512-1583). Oil on panel, $46\frac{1}{2} \times 20\frac{1}{2}$ in. 5 Saint Sebastian. 6 St. Catherine of Alexandria. Both attributed to Juan de Juanes (c. 1523-1579). Oil on panel, each $35\frac{1}{8} \times 11\frac{1}{4}$ in. The Grey Collection.

rivalry. As if to encourage him further, Grey received in 1853 a bequest of books from Captain Sir Everard Home who had been the senior naval officer in New Zealand waters and who hoped that his private library might eventually form the nucleus of a public library for the capital of New Zealand which was then Auckland. Grey went on to buy books for half a century. Many of his purchases were recorded and others can be traced in sale catalogues. Still more books were given by learned institutions abroad in exchange for artifacts or natural history specimens which Grey sent from Australia, New Zealand and Africa.

No such records exist for the paintings in the Art Gallery, and the very few exhibition and sale catalogues preserved in Grey's pamphlet collection do no more than tell us that he did, on his visit to England in 1868, attend some exhibitions. None of his own paintings is listed in the catalogues. Similarly we know that he had his portrait drawn (Plate

3) during his earlier 1854 visit, by the same George Richmond who had painted Bishop Selwyn thirteen years before. That he bought paintings on each of these visits is highly probable; but those he is likely to have bought, such as the Blake watercolour of *Lot and his Daughters* (Plate 2), the Fuseli, the Stothard *Group of Dancers* or Barker's *Chatterton*, differ greatly in choice from some of the old-master paintings. It was this difference which led Mr Tomory to suggest that the old masters were inherited from Colonel Grey.

The extent of Grey's private fortune is uncertain but he is unlikely to have inherited more than a few thousand pounds. Even this, however, with the high rates of interest usual in those days, would have grown to a tidy sum during his long minority. His mother's sister was married to the banker, James Martin, who would have helped, and in later years his own half-sister married Ormus Biddulph of the banking firm of Cocks and Biddulph. Ormus Bid-



7 Saint Ursula. Guiseppe Cesari called d'Arpino (c. 1568-1640). Oil on panel, 9½ x 7¼in. The Grey Collection.

dulph became Grey's agent after putting up a large sum he urgently needed in South Africa. In Africa, Grey's salary was £6,000 a year and during his second term in New Zealand he received £3,500 a year for the first nine months and then £4,500 a year. His establishment was always more modest than other Governors' so that he almost certainly saved considerable sums from his salary. But quite plainly his resources were never great and they must have dwindled rapidly as he lavished money on his house and estate on Kawau Island. At different times he spoke of having a few thousands in the bank but he claimed never to be much concerned with riches. He died with only £800 left.

Since Grey's chief concern as a collector was for the establishment of libraries, he is unlikely to have spent any great sums on paintings and so it is suggested that some of the old-master paintings were presents to him in return for assistance given or for gifts he himself had made. He was not above occasional barter and, late in life, advised the Auckland Public Library to exchange some of his modern autograph letters for more useful material from the British Museum. William Rees, whose *Life and*

Times of Sir George Grey was written with his hero's co-operation, says:

The vast extent of the literary, scientific and artistic treasures which fell into the hands of Sir George Grey, and were divided by him between Capetown and Auckland, represented not merely the result of great industry, knowledge and the expenditure of money in purchasing. It proceeded partly from the widely scattered gifts and contributions which during so many years he bestowed upon different races and repositories of learning. The natural consequence of his own boundless liberality was the return to him of many curiosities of a like nature. Thus from all quarters and all classes, from savage chiefs and men of letters, from scientific discoverers and kings of the earth, he continually received acknowledgements reciprocal to his own generosity.

When Grey was in London in 1854, he met the King of Portugal who was visiting his cousin the Prince Consort. Because of his own birth in Portugal and his father's burial there, Grey may be thought to have felt particular interest in this monarch. He presented him with a rare New Zealand bird—presumably stuffed—and offered him the fossil bones of a moa which he expected soon to receive. Don Luiz, to whom Grey no doubt appeared as a romantic figure comparable with the explorers of Portugal's great past, was pleased to accept these gifts. A few years later Grey sent him, from the Cape, parts of the marble cross set up by the Portuguese Bartholomew Diaz in 1486. In 1859 the King, grateful for some service in Mozambique, made Grey a Commander of the Ancient Order of the Tower and the Sword. Grey's friend, the Vicomte Duprat, who seems to have been at the Portuguese Embassy in London and before that in Mozambique, wrote soon afterwards to tell Grey that during his four months' leave in Portugal, the King had constantly asked for news of him. *'Je suis allé, plusieurs fois, voir mon Souverain D Luiz, qui sans cesse m'a parlé de vous, me demandant de vos nouvelles avec le plus grand intérêt.'* Duprat himself presented Grey with the death mask of Napoleon, now in the Gallery, and it seems very likely that his sovereign may have made a gift of two sixteenth century paintings, *St Sebastian* and *St Catherine* (Plates 5 and 6), now attributed to Juan de Juanes.

In 1853 the Vatican also wished to show its gratitude to Grey for helping the Roman Catholic



8 Portrait of a Girl arranging Flowers, 1683. Gaspar Netscher (1639-1687). Oil on canvas, 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. The Grey Collection.

Mission in New Zealand. He had cleared Bishop Pompallier of the charges of trouble-making which Governor FitzRoy had relayed to England, and had materially assisted Bishop Viard with his establishment of schools in Auckland and Wellington. So it was arranged to make him a Knight of the Second Class of the Order of Pope Pius IX. But this honour Grey thought it wise to refuse. And what would then have been more natural than the Vatican's substituting a gift of paintings from its vast collections? The painter of the little *St Ursula* (plate 7) Guiseppe d'Arpino, received his training at the Vatican and enjoyed continuous papal patronage. It is a charming, rather modest painting, so let us suppose that, if it came from the Vatican, it was accompanied by others. Other Italian paintings in the Grey collection are by Amigoni, Lanino, Sassoferrato, Taruffi and a Caravaggio follower. Any of them, except perhaps the Amigoni *Bacchanals*, may have come from the Vatican, but the Lanino *St George* (Plate 3) would have seemed a particularly appropriate gift to a destroyer of Protestant dragons. 'All your Eminence needs to know', Viard had

written to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda, 'is that the firmest supporter of your diocese of Wellington is a Protestant Governor.'

It is possible to go on speculating like this, as to what may have come from London or Berlin where Grey made frequent gifts, or what he inherited, or what he bought on visits to Europe or in New Zealand itself. For he occasionally received letters asking him to look at unidentified paintings owned by somebody in Auckland or Wellington or Whangarei. In the same way the several Dutch paintings in the collection, the Netscher (Plate 8), the Aelbert Cuyp follower or even the Cipper (since Grey believed it to be by Frans Hals), may have been acquired from settlers at the Cape.

It seems fitting to conclude with the concluding paragraph of an address Grey gave, 5 June 1883, at the Theatre Royal in Auckland, on 'The principles which should guide the citizens in founding a Free Public Library'.

Let us separate ourselves—in one important respect—from the instincts of an old country. There the rule is to try and found families and aggrandise them by their surroundings. . . . Let us not try to found families here on the old-fashioned principles. Let us every one assist in founding one nation. . . . It has been held . . . that those who dispense Government funds are worthy of great honour, and niches were left in the walls of public buildings in which the statues of such benefactors were to be set up. Let us have no such niches . . . Let us have great and magnificent halls if you please; let them be the depositories of works of art; let them be full of the treasures of literature which shall cultivate the true instincts of a great nation. Let the people of that nation, who shall wander through these halls, if they are asked where are such statues, reply: "circumspice—these works of art, these treasures of literature, are the statues which our founders have set up for themselves" . . . let whole groups of families, and not only an eldest son, say—"An ancestor of ours was one of those to whom these treasures belonged, and who did great things for this country, thinking of its welfare and not of the maintenance of a family name."

Such noble sentiments seem to invalidate mere questions of provenance, but the questions inevitably arise. In Grey's case, the exact answers may be obscured for ever.

Sydney Parkinson in New Zealand

GIL DOCKING

AMONGST those who sailed with Cook on his first Pacific voyage in the *Endeavour* were two commissioned artists, Alexander Buchan and Sydney Parkinson.

Topographical artist Buchan was charged with the responsibility of making drawings and paintings of Pacific scenery and natives which naturalist Joseph Banks could use after the voyage as conversational pieces to engage the interest and wonder of his friends in England. But the unfortunate Buchan, who suffered from epilepsy, died at Tahiti.

Parkinson was originally employed by Banks to be his natural history draughtsman. He was to specialize in making drawings of plants and animals discovered on the voyage of exploration and these were to serve as records for the scientists. But after the death of Buchan, Parkinson was given the added burden of being the topographical artist as well. Thus, as Bernard Smith expressed it in his book *European Vision and the South Pacific*, Parkinson was torn between 'the needs of the scientist and the tastes of the grand tourist. And in this he foreshadowed the experience of many artists who were to follow him into the Pacific.'

As the slowly-moving ship probed new coasts, Parkinson made linear drawings of the littoral areas of coastlines, sometimes setting down—in an almost continuous diagrammatic form—mountain profiles, cliffs and coastal plains, as seen from the deck of the bluff-bowed *Endeavour*.

When landings were made, the botanists eagerly collected specimens. Whilst the plants were fresh, Parkinson carefully studied them and made drawings which delineated the structure and essential characteristics of each specimen.

Parkinson proved to be a superb botanical artist and his studies, which are remarkable for their veracity, liveliness and grace, delight both botanical scientists and art collectors. During the voyage, Parkinson made hundreds of botanical sketches, but



Portrait of a New Zealand Man. Wash drawing. British Museum.

landscapes and portraits of natives were also produced.

As a significant part of Parkinson's work was based on New Zealand subject matter, it seems that a study of New Zealand painting in the European tradition can quite properly begin with this painter. Furthermore, as far as we know, he was the first professional European artist to visit these shores. (This may be maintained despite the fact that the earliest existing European drawing of a New Zealand subject pre-dates the arrival of Cook's party by one hundred and twenty-seven years. On that occasion, in 1642, an unknown member of Abel Tasman's crew made a drawing in the ship's journal which describes a Maori attack on the *Zeehaen's* cockboat when the vessel was anchored in Golden Bay).

In addition, although Parkinson was not an established landscape painter, it was, curiously enough, one of his landscape themes which made an impression on European taste.

Sydney Parkinson, the son of a Quaker brewer of Edinburgh, was born about 1745. By the time he reached his early twenties, Parkinson was beginning to make a name as a flower painter. Some of these had been exhibited in Society of Arts



A Perforated Rock in New Zealand (Tolaga Bay), 1769. Pen and wash drawing. British Museum.

exhibitions in London. Sir Joseph Banks, who was really only interested in artists who were capable of very precise drawings, was attracted by the work of Sydney Parkinson as being a botanical artist of great ability.

At that time, in the eighteenth century, a taste for exotic and rococo subjects developed amongst the cognoscenti. In respect to landscape this taste took the form of being delighted by certain aspects of nature—especially waterfalls tumbling into dark ravines, rocky archways, tunnels of trees and natural grottoes. Wherever such scenes could be found in Europe, men of taste and learning took great pains to search for and visit these places. Some travellers went so far as to employ artists to accompany their parties on Grand Tours of Italy in order to have a record in line and wash drawings of natural phenomena which gave them pleasure.

The empiricist Banks was quite capable of enjoy-

ing these romantic subjects too, but he was averse to doing the usual Grand Tour. When asked before his Pacific voyage, why he did not prefer travelling the safer trip to Italy he replied: 'Every blockhead does that; my Grand Tour shall be one round the whole globe.'

When the *Endeavour* arrived at Tolaga Bay, New Zealand, Joseph Banks was intrigued by the sight of a subject close to the spirit of romantic yearnings—a natural archway of huge dimensions. His enjoyment on seeing this monolithic arch is recorded in his journal: 'In pursuing a valley bounded on each side by steep hills, we suddenly saw a most noble arch or cavern through the face of a rock leading directly to sea, so that through it we had not only a view of the bay and hills on the other side, but an opportunity of imagining a ship or any other grand object opposite to it. It was certainly the most magnificent surprise I have ever met with; so



Unpublished copper-plate engraving of plant (Kowhai) collected by Banks and Solander after watercolour made from sketch by Sydney Parkinson. The original engraved plate is in the British Museum (Natural History).

much is pure nature superior to art in these cases. I have seen such places made by art, where from an inland view you were lead through an arch 6 feet wide and 7 feet high, to a prospect of the sea, but here was an arch 25 yards in length, 9 in breadth, and at least 15 in height.'

As we read this extract and look at Parkinson's monochromatic watercolour of the same natural archway titled, *A Perforated Rock in New Zealand (Tolaga Bay)*, we can readily participate in the kind of pleasurable thrill which delighted the virtuosi of the eighteenth century.

Parkinson served under Banks, rather than Cook, and being aware of Sir Joseph's enthusiastic response to this splendid archway, Parkinson composed a vignette to repeat the shape of the arch, with a tunnel of framing trees and a winding pathway

leading down to the bay where an imaginary boat lay at anchor. All the picturesque formulas listed by Banks in his journal entry are restated by Parkinson in his depiction of the scene.

As Bernard Smith points out, it is interesting to speculate that the *natural* arches on the New Zealand coast were the first phenomena of this land to make an impact on European taste and it appears that Banks and Parkinson played a part 'in promoting the *natural* grotto, as a popular item in romantic taste'. The prevailing fondness for rococo ornament in Europe provided a receptive audience for the 'grottoes' of New Zealand.

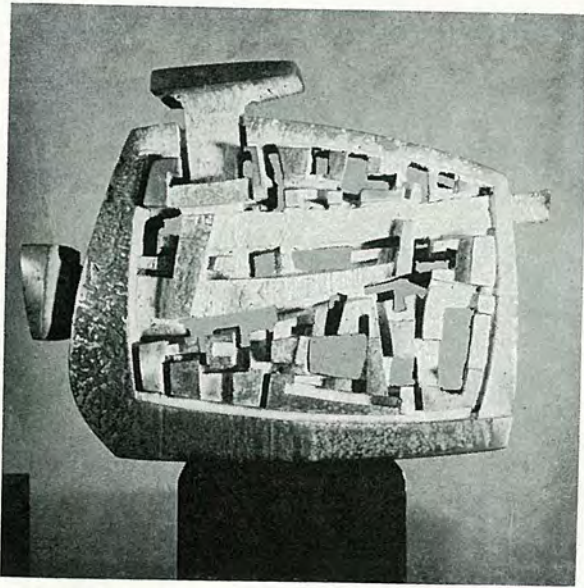
Parkinson's watercolours were delicate, but it would be unwise to consider the influence of his work to be so fragile as to have no consequence compared with the more robust paintings of Hodges and Webber, who accompanied Cook on his second and third Pacific voyages respectively.

In the 1760's, when Parkinson was painting landscapes in watercolour, the medium was undeveloped as an art form. So Parkinson usually resorted to the then current practice of laying simple monochrome washes of tone over a drawing. In the coming years, watercolourists had the benefit of the pioneering work of Thomas Girtton (1775-1802) and J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851), both of whom revolutionised landscape painting in watercolours by making it a vigorous medium capable of stating atmospheric effects with power and subtlety. Yet, within the limitations of the watercolour medium as it existed in Parkinson's day, he painted some works which merged a descriptive account of geological curiosities with a romantic feeling for the exotic.

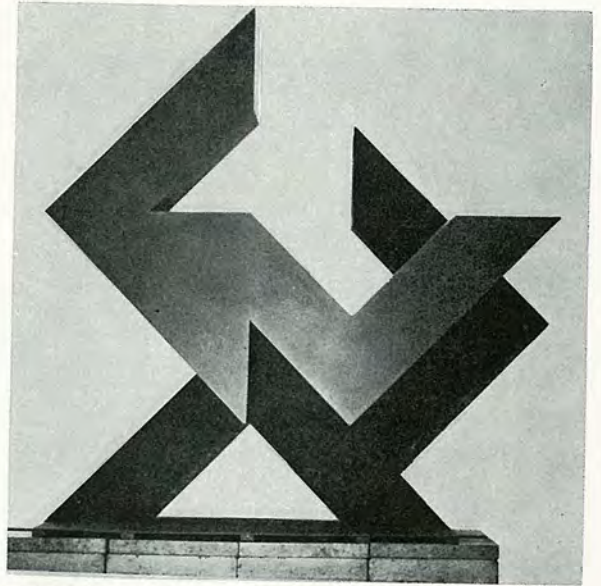
Parkinson's double activities and responsibilities of working as a topographical artist whilst at the same time painting picturesquely composed landscapes, was a practice which persisted in the Pacific. One aspect of Parkinson's work served the cause of science in a documentary way; the other provided works which appealed to popular romantic taste.

But, Parkinson was not to enjoy the fruits of his observations and labours. He fell a victim to malaria shortly after the *Endeavour* left Batavia on the way home to England.

In 1773, his brother Stanfield Parkinson, published his *Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas*. When the Journal finally became available to the public in 1784, twelve of the twenty-seven engraved plates were illustrated by New Zealand material and helped to introduce New Zealand and the South Pacific environment to the British public.



GUY NGAN. Bronze, 1969. Height 12½ in.



TERENCE TAYLOR. Circle corporate. Wood, 1969. Height 5ft.

GUY NGAN. Bronze, 1969. Height 10 in.

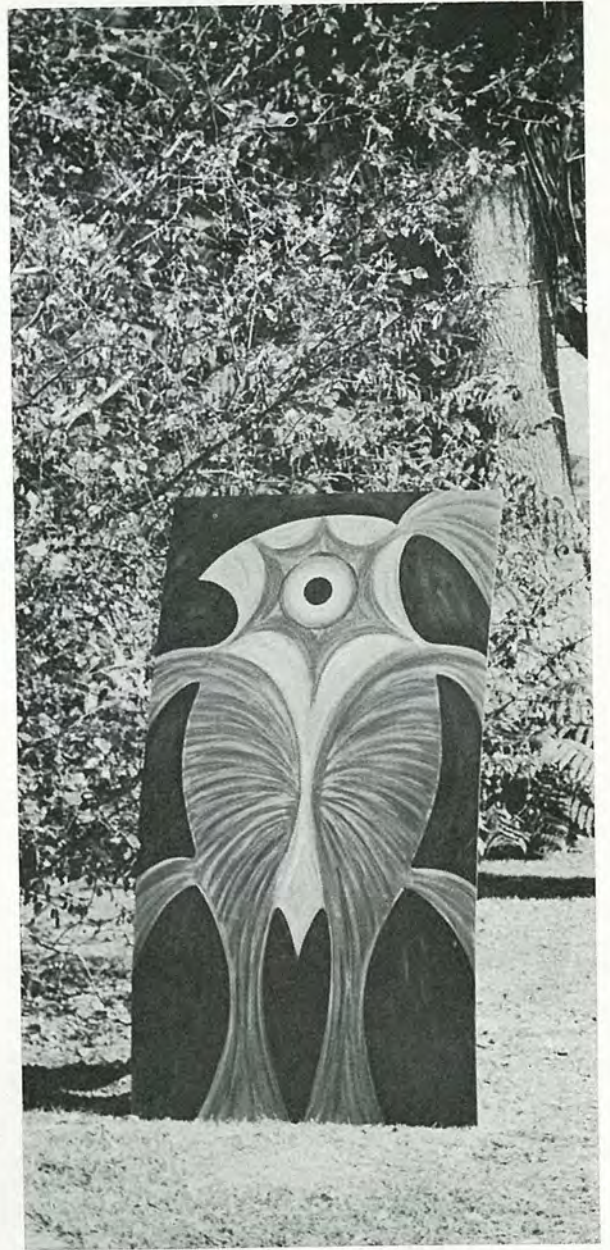
JULIET PETER. Terrace pot. Stoneware, 1969. 28 in.



1969 Exhibition of Sculpture, Pottery and Graphic Arts, arranged by the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington, 23 August to 14 September.

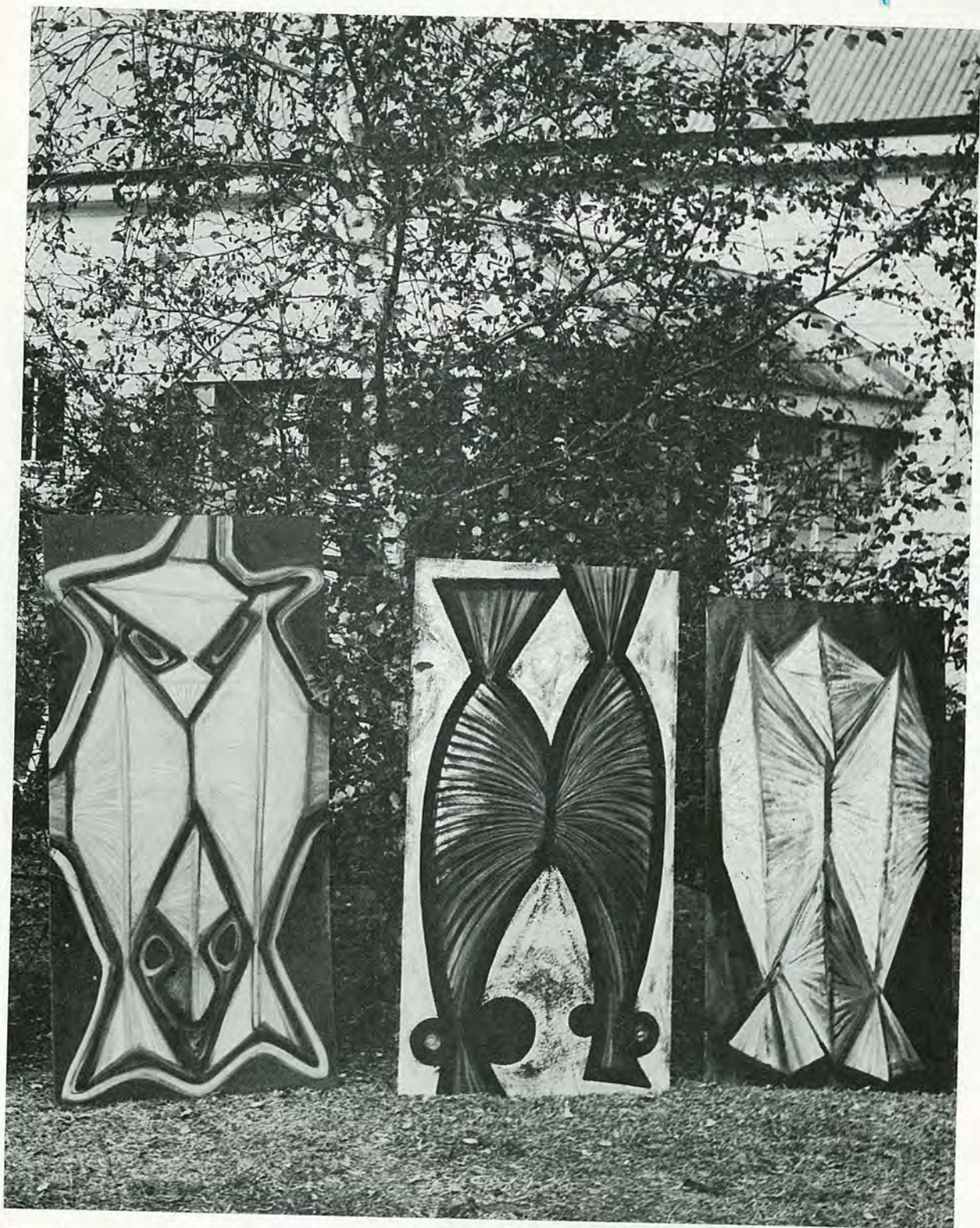


Double Figure. Acrylic on hardboard, 1964.

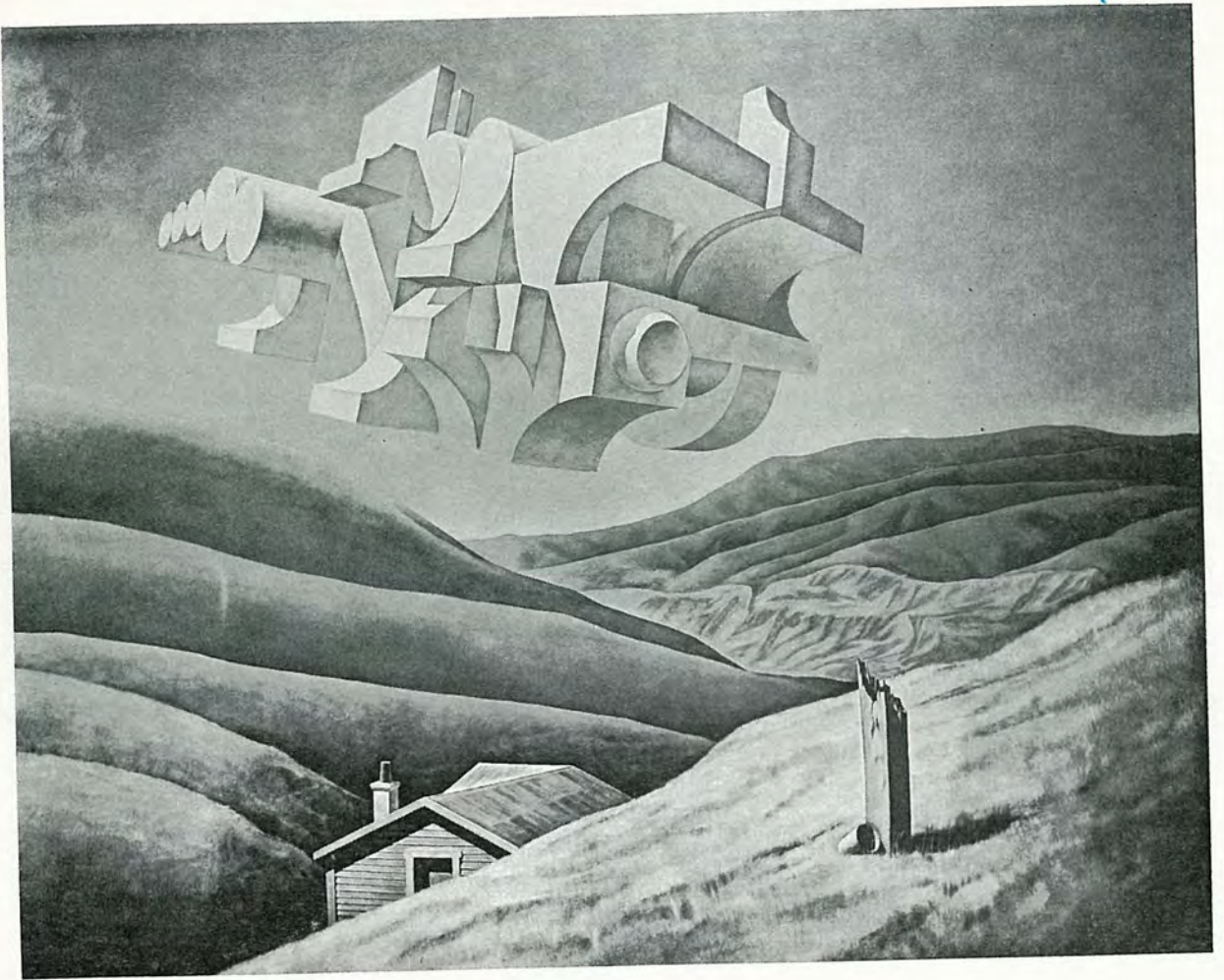


Green Bird in my Garden. Oil on hardboard, 1965.

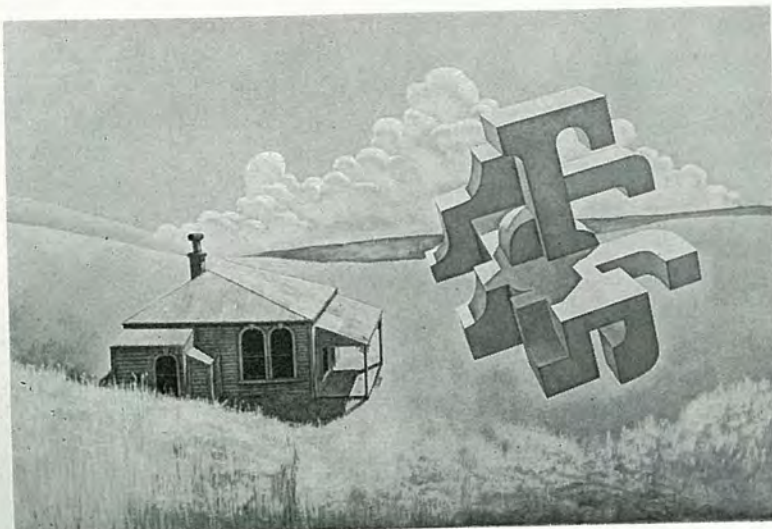
Eric Lee-Johnson : Five Paintings



Three Figures in Garden at 'Riverbank', Waihi. Acrylic and oil on hardboard, 1966.

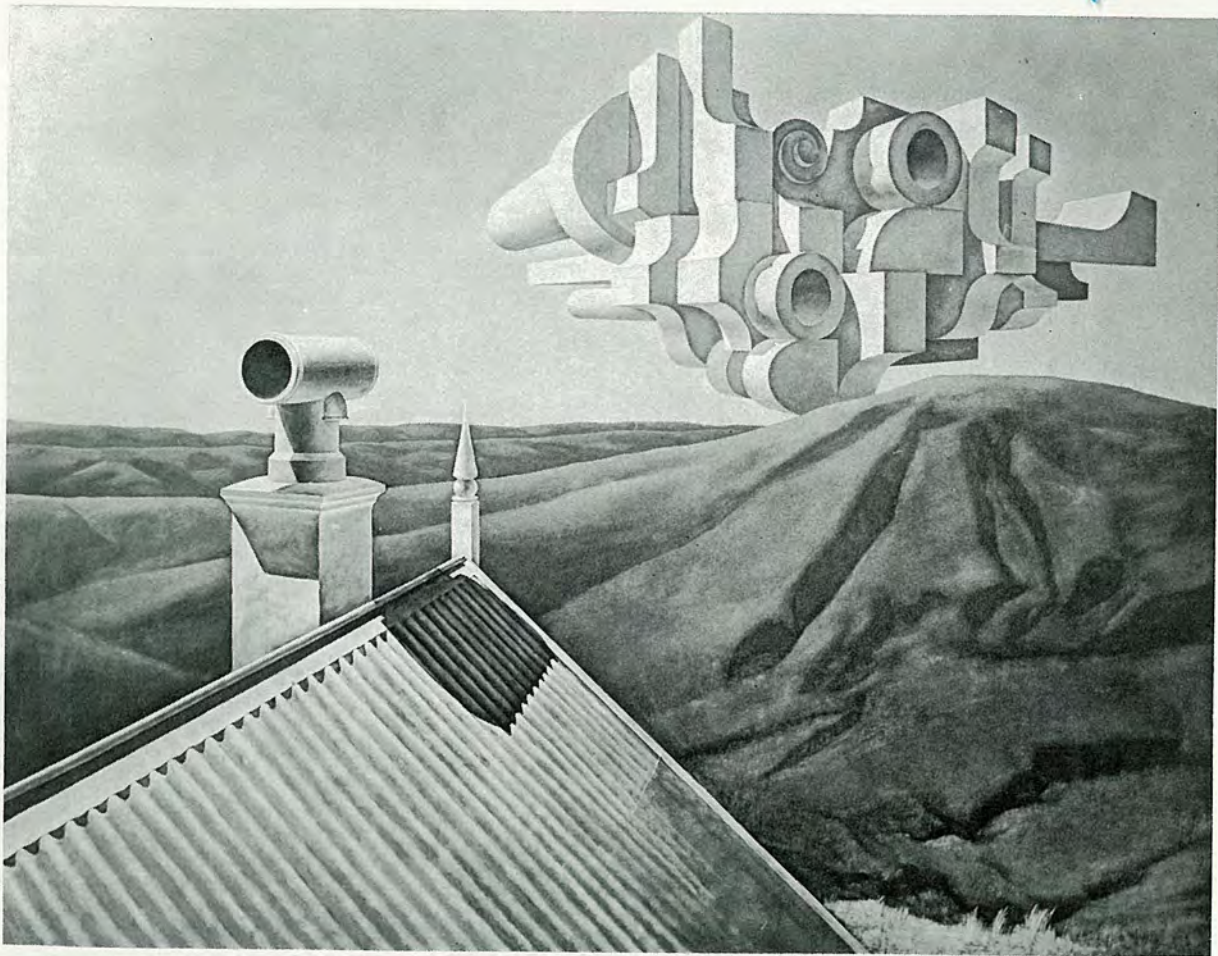


External Reverberation. Acrylic, 1969. 36 x 48in.

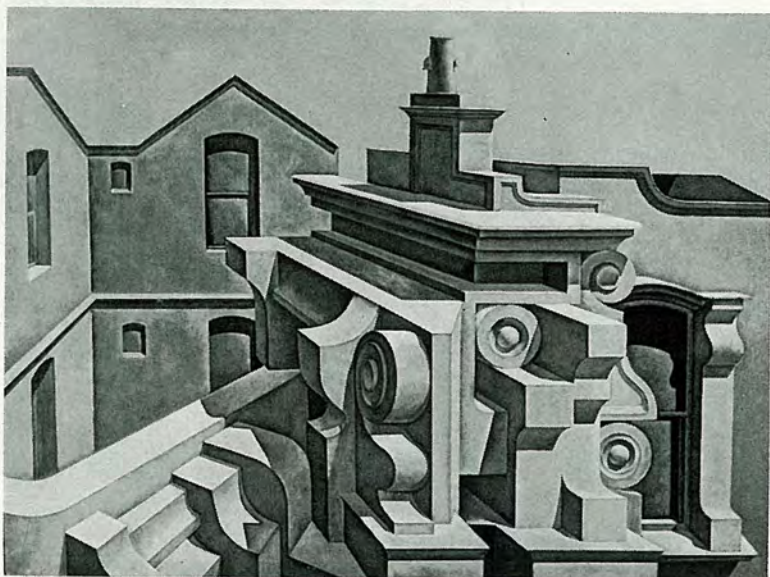


Brent Wong
Four Paintings

Colonial Summer. Acrylic, 1968.
36 x 54in.



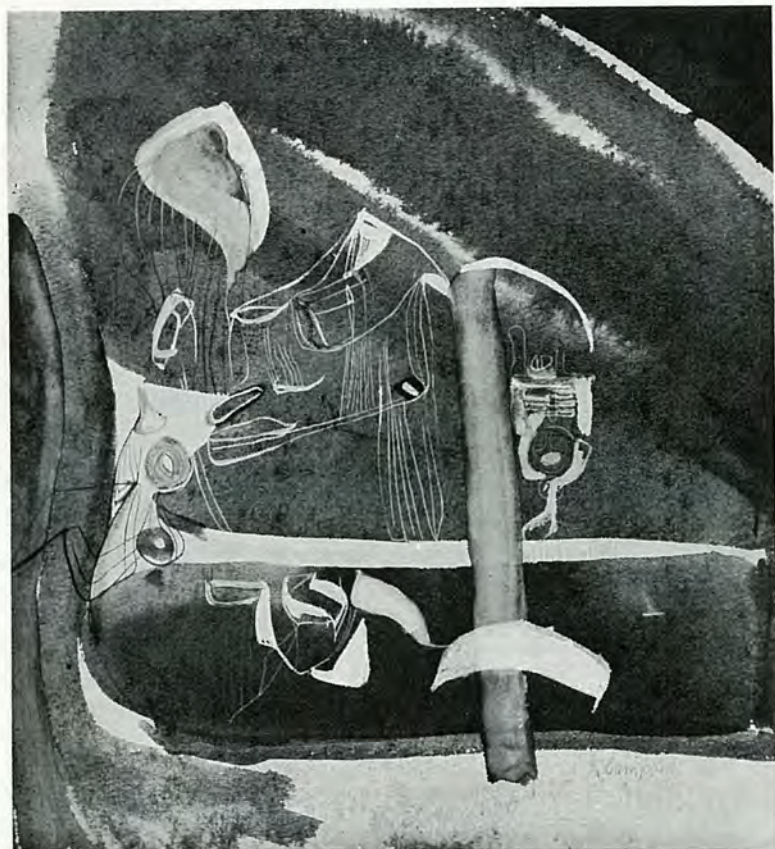
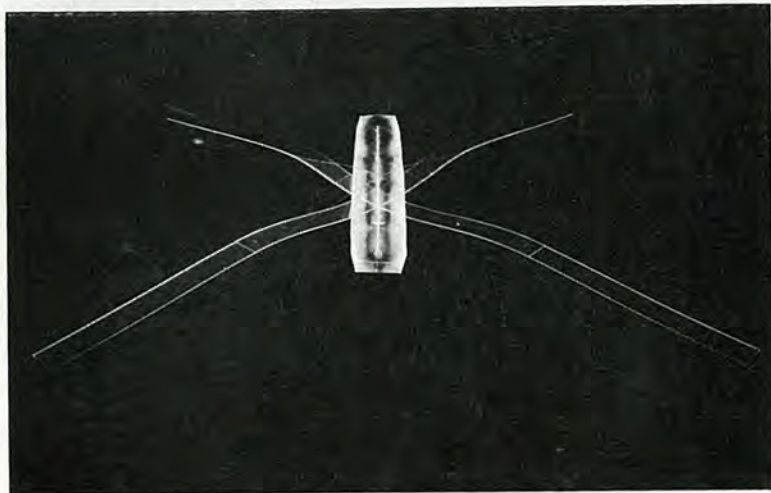
Town Boundary. Acrylic, 1969. 36 x 48in.



The Printer. Acrylic, 1968.
36 x 48in.

Recent Exhibitions in Auckland

GORDON H. BROWN



TERRY POWELL

Ladybirdland, no. 4. 1969

Perspex, plastic and ultra-violet light.

Terry Powell's six sculptures had the all-inclusive title *Ladybirdland*, but this was best regarded as a capricious whim on the part of the sculptor rather than an attempt to convey anything significant to the spectator. The works were made up from sheets of perspex and plastic with air-filled oblong transparent bags and lit by ultra-violet light. The effect of this light gave each work a cool internal fluorescence and to one type of perspex a translucent vermilion edge that glowed in the semi-dark gallery. Although very formal these sculptures were, on the whole, well organized and very pleasant to the eyes. This was particularly so with *Ladybirdland no. 4* with its cross and captured glowing plastic bag. The most austere work, *Ladybirdland no. 6*, exploited the use of repetitive elements in a manner akin to how certain minimal artists have used repetition. With such new works Terry Powell has demonstrated that he can take his art seriously and extend himself beyond superficial prettiness.

ROSEMARY CAMPBELL

Untitled. Watercolour, 12½ x 11½ in.

Rosemary Campbell's unscheduled exhibition proved to be a welcome surprise. What became apparent when comparing her often finicky earlier works with her recent, more broadly conceived paintings was the fact that a decisive step in her development as a painter had been taken. While her work originates from the orbit of Rudolf Gopas and Philip Trusttum it possesses sufficient independence not to render such debts obvious. In her best paintings the pictorial space is built up through large areas of modulated colour-washes into which a few images are introduced in such a way that they seem to float within the composition. Sometimes a freely handled network of delicate lines is also added. Although her paintings include the use of bright colours such as red, Rosemary Campbell's usual choice of hues is more often than not subdued. If the awakening awareness and the clarity of purpose that was discernible in her later work is further realized, then there is a real chance that something original could appear that goes beyond the merely fashionable.

STANLEY PALMER

Engulfing Trees, Ponsonby. 1969.
Bamboo engraving, 17 x 23½ in.

Stanley Palmer, equally a painter and printmaker, produces work of uneven quality, some of which occasionally achieves surprisingly good results. This has been particularly true in the case of his bamboo engravings. These prints, developed by the artist, are produced on the dry sheaths of a giant bamboo which are cut into sections and glued onto a board. The surface is worked in much the same manner as a drypoint. This technique has allowed Palmer a good deal of freedom and in his line-work he has made full use of the medium's natural softness. In this way he has been able to produce some very admirable print qualities, but these are frequently minimized through his inability to always realize his images in as convincing a manner as could be wished. Although other prints in the exhibition contained more interesting subjects, only a few achieved the degree of visual and artistic unity that was found in *Engulfing trees, Ponsonby*.

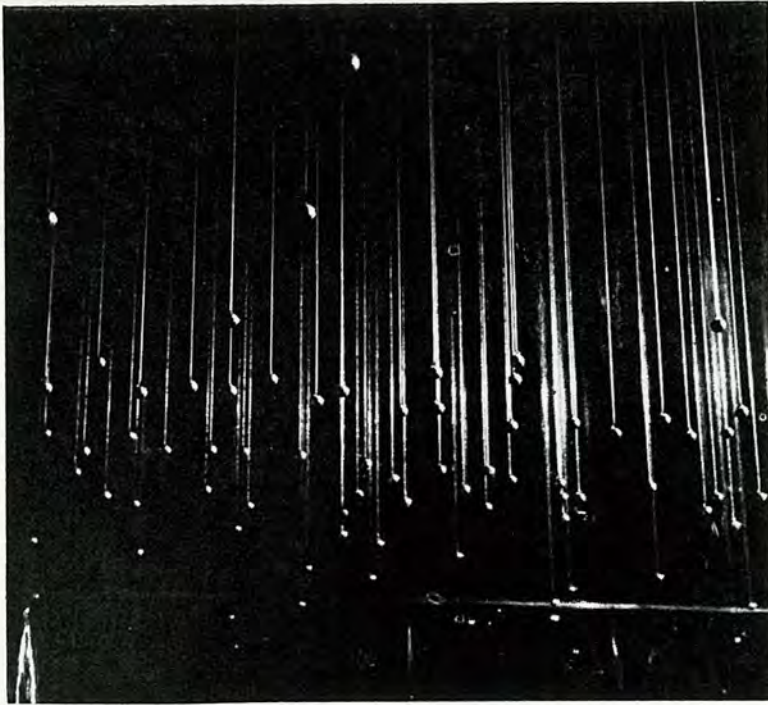


SUZANNE GOLDBERG

Kirsten. 1967.
Oil on canvas, 19 x 16 in.

Although Suzanne Goldberg's exhibition included a selection of her landscape paintings with their vaguely hinted forms and richly painted surfaces, the most significant landscape proved to be an ink drawing, *Black and White Landscape*, which demonstrated a clarity of imagery, form and depth rarely found in her paintings. However, it was the figurative paintings and drawings that aroused the real interest. These varied considerably in quality and too frequently did not read convincingly as figures or portraits. In many ways a drawing that was related to a painting called *Audience* clearly indicated where her talent appears to lie, for the drawing showed an understanding of form that evaporated in the final painting. There was also a feeling for character about the heads that was observed in the drawing but not in the painting. It was partly the kinship to drawing that helped to make the child portrait *Kirsten* the best-conceived work in the exhibition. The feeling for the shape and structure of the human form, so often only partly realized in her other pictures, helped to make *Kirsten* a convincing work.



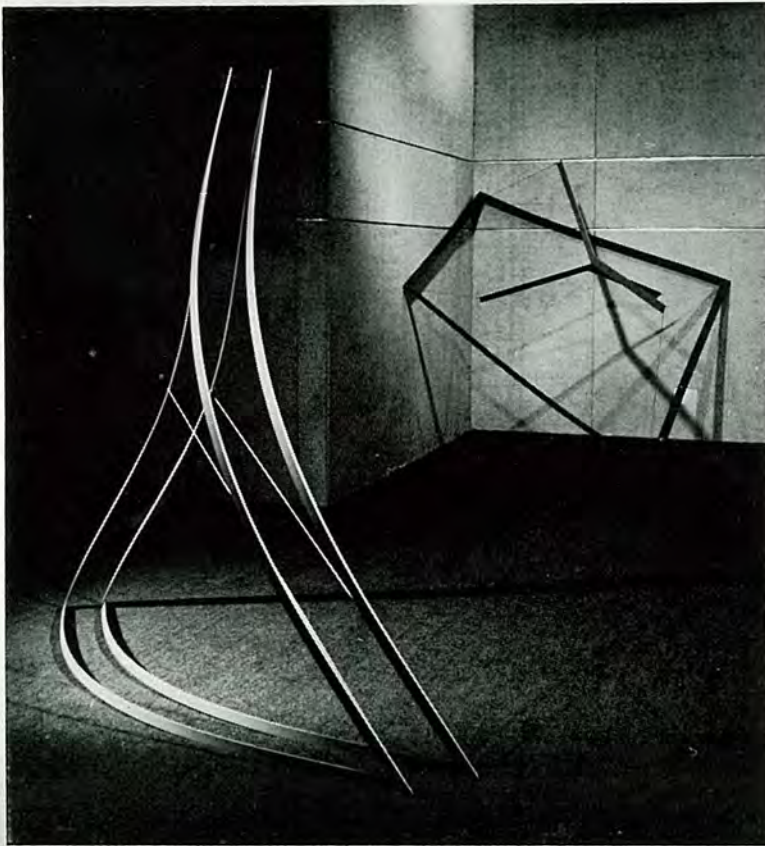


JIM ALLEN

Space Plane (detail). 1969.

Mixed media.

Small Worlds, five environmental structures, is how Jim Allen described his exhibition at the Barry Lett Galleries. Jim Allen's pieces had a unity that allowed them to work together as a cohesive exhibition. This unity was helped by Allen's use of 'black light' which seemed to radiate from the structures in order to include the spectator. In differing measures each environment incorporated a number of elements that had tactile, spatial, kinetic and illusionary properties that to some degree affected the spectators as they walked around, in between, or looked through each structure. Just how effective these works were in arousing audience participation of the desired sort is difficult to guess, but there is in Jim Allen's work the impression that he at least understands what is currently implied by environmental art of this kind.



JOHN PANTING

Construction 1969: no. 1 (with Construction 1969: no. 4 in the background). Metal sprayed steel and stainless steel cables: no. 1, 72 x 12 x 72in. high, no. 4, 58 x 58 x approx. 60in. high.

John Panting's six sculptures were constructed from steel bars welded to form square or triangular frames and painted a metallic grey. Attached to these frames were thin steel cables to which tension was applied so that the frames were twisted from their normal flat state to form the basic units from which each sculpture was constructed. Each work consisted of two or three such units. The means of construction and the materials used were allowed to remain obvious and the effectiveness of each work relied, to a large extent, on this fact. Also important to the appreciation of these works was the part played by the 'enclosed' space of which the metal frame formed the outline. This was clearly illustrated in work *No. 1* with its simple repetitive rhythm. The winged cross in *Construction no. 4* was a departure from the basic unit. As a work, *No. 4* suffered from being too small in scale. Greater possibilities were suggested if it had been much larger so that the spectator

could look from underneath up to the cross floating above him. Despite the obvious skill apparent in these works there remained a feeling that the sculptor had not fully extended himself, for the works suggested a series of brilliant solutions to an academic assignment.

PHILIP TRUSTTUM

Green fireplace. 1969.

Oil on chip-board, 72 x 48in.

The majority of paintings in Philip Trusttum's exhibition, while developed from his previous work, pointed to a newer and more coherent outlook that came as a pleasant surprise. The expressionistic brush-stroke is now more controlled and the haphazardness of his composition is becoming better organized. The subjective tendencies, sometimes expressionistic, at other times surrealist, that were so noticeable in his past work, are now made to fit into a more ordered notion of what a painting should do. In some works his imagery has taken on an almost playful quality that suggests comparison with an Art Nouveau painter Gustav Klimt. In the best paintings there was a surprising development in the painter's realization of how pictorial space can be organized. This was clearly seen in *Pale Blue Square*, *The Angel* and *The Temple Wall*, but most clearly in *Green Fireplace*, the most impressive work in the exhibition. Unlike the majority of Trusttum's paintings, this work contained a minimum of imagery as well as retaining the delicate handling of paint and shapes found in the best of his earlier work.



Exhibition dates: Jim Allen, 3-13 June; Terry Powell, 30 June-11 July; Suzanne Goldberg, 14-25 July; John Panting, 28 July-8 August (Barry Lett Galleries).

Philip Trusttum, 21 April-2 May; Rosemary Campbell, 23 June-4 July; Stanley Palmer, 14-25 July (New Vision Gallery).

'New Zealand Art'

The Editor
ASCENT
Sir,

I would like to comment on the review of the three booklets of the above title, which appeared in *Ascent* No. 3.

I was surprised to see such a long review, since generally, such minor and general publications are lucky to get ten lines or so. In my own experience, similar booklets I have written for an English publisher over the last dozen years have not even been reviewed. Why then should your reviewer shovel up such a mountain of a review to cast the blackest of shadows on three little molehills? Why review them at all, if, as he implies, they are such miserable productions? The reason that he gives in his last paragraph, '... they were much trumpeted in advance, ...' borders on the ludicrous, for and since when has a publisher's advance publicity determined the length of a review?

In the same paragraph your reviewer warns against the 'inadequacies' of these booklets, but nowhere does he point to any mis-statement of fact. These 'inadequacies', therefore, are largely differences of opinion or emphasis. For instance, your reviewer calls for the inclusion of Hodges and Webber, but they were both dead thirty-four years before our survey opens in 1827. The authoritative, paedagogical tone that your reviewer assumes might spur your readers to wonder what he has written, of substance, to justify this. The truth is that neither your reviewer nor anyone else can lay claim to being an authority on New Zealand Art. Not nearly enough work has been done by anyone, including your reviewer, to allow him to be so dogmatic on the subject of artists and movements. In any case, none of the authors was under the illusion that he was making a major contribution. How could this be in introductory picture books intended for the general public? Given the scope of each booklet, how does anyone avoid making generalisations in such a short text? On this fault, your reviewer is myopic, since with the very scanty evidence afforded him, he can suggest '... not one of them [the authors] has ever looked at painting or at the external world closely and lovingly, or has tried to thing clearly.' That seems to me a generalisation of a magisterial kind! But what does your reviewer really believe? Further on, the only crumb of praise to be thrown my way, is the comment, '... three well-chosen plates illustrate Van der Velden's landscapes.' Now surely this would infer that not only had I looked 'lovingly' at that artist's work but also 'lovingly' on the New Zealand landscape!

Elsewhere, your reviewer castigates my brief reference to Frances Hodgkins. I can assure him, that if I was to write a short survey of Cretan Art, I would exclude El Greco's work in Venice and Toledo; on English late Nineteenth Century Art, I would include Whistler, despite his American citizenship, and exclude Alfred Sisley, who did all his painting in France. What precisely are the New Zealand characteristics in Hodgkins' mature style, or does your reviewer base his statement on the evidence of her passport?

Your reviewer is really rather tiresome over our omissions, and commissions it seems. We are all wrong all the time. 'The choice of painters mentioned and

illustrated is somewhat arbitrary.' If your reviewer does it, I suppose it is all right to start off a paragraph with a monumental cliché. Can your reviewer name, *in his own field*, any anthology of poetry which is not arbitrary? If our choice is arbitrary, then what is his? Only rarely does your reviewer suggest alternatives, in the case of McCahon, for instance. If the general title of this series had been 'Masterpieces of Painting in New Zealand', I could understand, perhaps, your reviewer's alternatives, but he does not seem to have grasped the point that my illustrations were chosen as examples of McCahon's variety of interpretation at that time. For the same reason, both the Hipkins and the Perkins exemplify a trend in New Zealand art at the time.

Your reviewer reminds me of Don Quixote tilting at the windmills. To someone less charitable, he might appear as critically dishonest. For instance, he does not say that such an illustrated survey was previously unavailable. He does not say that a great number of the paintings were illustrated for the first time, and some in colour. He does not say that the reproduction is no better and no worse than any other *cheaply* priced survey elsewhere. He does not say that up-to-date potted biographies of each artist are included, with the locations of major holdings of works. He does not say that the reading lists would amplify the information given, that the page of comparative dates might assist the general reader in 'placing' New Zealand art against its background.

Finally in reference to your reviewer's final words. Having previously held me up as a dismal exemplar of incoherence, insensitivity and semi-literacy and then to conclude, 'It is hard to credit that Mr Tomory would lend his name to such productions; to state that he edited them looks like libel' — looks to me like hypocritical impertinence.

However, I suppose we all have our 'inadequacies'. It is only fair that your readers should know some of your reviewer's.

P. A. TOMORY.
38 Cranley Gardens,
London, S.W. 7
as from *NEW YORK*
24th July, 1969

The Editor
ASCENT
Sir:

Allow me to remind Mr Tomory of some relevant points.

1. The publishers advertised *New Zealand Art* widely beforehand. One of their advertising sheets reads:

How many books can you find on the visual arts in New Zealand? There are remarkably few.

This new series performs a major service for all interested in New Zealand art. Peter Tomory, now on the staff of Columbia University, New York, was formerly Director of the Auckland City Art Gallery and senior lecturer in Art History at the University of Auckland. His intention in *New Zealand Art* is to provide an illustrated commentary on the principal artists and characteristics of each period with a list of public collections.

The series *might*, if well written, well edited, and well reproduced, have performed a useful service, though scarcely a major one. The advertisement implies that

these are books, and also offers a 'Bound Library Volume, containing all three books'. This seems to me distinctly misleading.

2. The booklets were greeted on publication by a full-page illustrated review in the *New Zealand Listener* of 6 December 1968, by Peter McLeavey. The writer's sole comment on the choice and quality of the reproductions and on the introductory articles is: 'Well illustrated in colour and black and white, they provide an excellent introduction for students.' The rest consists of general remarks on New Zealand painting, with only the slightest reference to these booklets. The result is not a review, but a puff.

3. *Landfall* carried a review of the booklets in June 1969, by Wytan Curnow, who manages to write about them without having looked at them or read them with any care. The result is another uncritical puff, due this time, I suppose, to expatriate nostalgia. The country's two principal journals thus failed to provide readers with any serious consideration of the booklets.

4. The booklets have been listed by the Education Department as recommended reading for school children taking art as a subject for University Entrance. This means that, under cover of Mr Tomory's name, the

booklets are likely to be taken as authoritative by unsuspecting teachers and pupils. I suggest that if the Education Department recommends such publications, it ought to do so with suitable caution.

One of the three authors is reported to have remarked, after reading my review, that the booklets were only written for children anyway.

CHARLES BRASCH

The Editor
ASCENT
Sir:

I am preparing a catalogue raisonné of the paintings and drawings by Richard Parkes BONINGTON (1802-28) for publication by the Paul Mellon Foundation, and shall be most grateful to hear from any of your readers who have in their possession works by Bonington (or other directly related material) and who have not hitherto communicated with me. The catalogue will be well illustrated.

MARION L. SPENCER (Dr.)
Paul Mellon Foundation
38 Bury Street
LONDON S.W.1, England.



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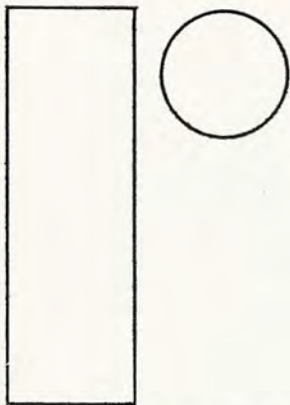
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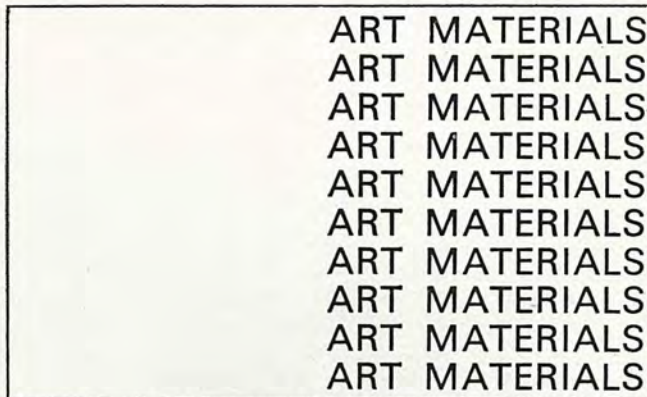
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Other commentators who contribute works include Professor Anthony S. G. Green, Melvin Day, Jane Opie and Shay Docking.

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