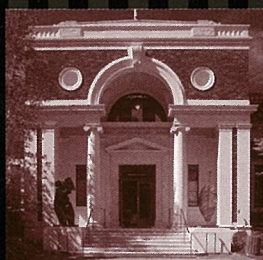


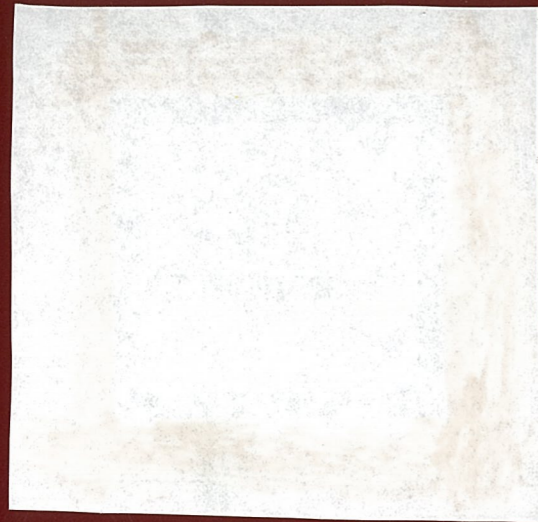
Bill
Hammond

Robert
McDougal

art gallery

A n n e x





Canterbury Painting in the 1990s

Bill Hammond

Acknowledgements

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Concept, development and editing by Judith Houlton and Kirsten Rennie

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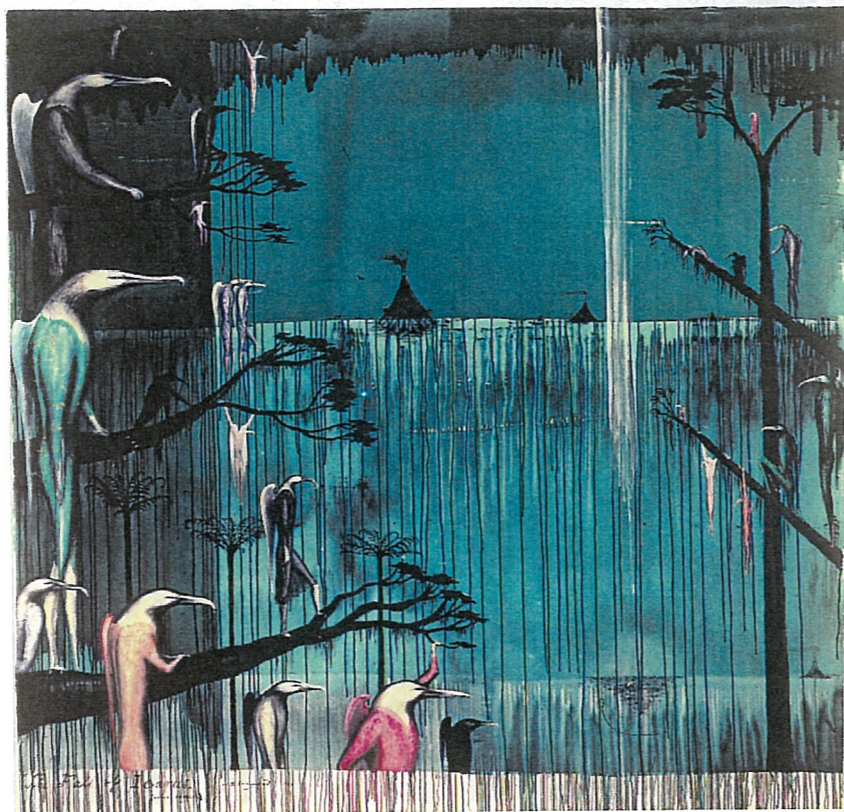
Robert McDougall Art Gallery and Contemporary Art Annex
Rolleston Ave. Christchurch Phone 03 365 0915 Fax 03 365 3942



Knowing about Art: Bill Hammond, Content and Context

Biography

Bill Hammond was born in Christchurch in 1947. He studied at the School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury from 1966 to 1968. From 1971 to 1981 he designed and manufactured wooden toys. Hammond held his first solo exhibition in 1979 in Christchurch and has since exhibited regularly throughout New Zealand. He received QEII Arts Council awards in 1984 and 1987, a travel grant to Japan in 1990 and a major fellowship grant in 1991. In 1994, Hammond was the joint winner of the 1994 Visa Gold Art Award. He is represented in many public and private collections throughout New Zealand and currently lives in Lyttelton.



Bill Hammond *The Fall of Icarus* 1995 acrylic on canvas
Collection of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery

Knowing about Art: Content

In this contemporary narrative bird-people stand in their trees, silent and vigilant as though aware of an approaching threat. There is no indication of what the threat may be; though some of the birds are already dead. Detail in this world suggests a New Zealand connection, eg the trees and the heads of the bird people. But it is a surreal world; nothing is as it should be. The horizons are ambiguous, volcanoes float and dribbling paint becomes rain (acid?), or a waterfall. Icarus' fall is a minor incident in this primeval time and place.

The Fall of Icarus draws on the Greek legend of Icarus' escape from King Minos' Crete with his father Daedalus. The pair escaped the island by attaching wings to their arms with wax. Icarus became over confident and flew too close to the sun, with predictable results. Here, as in the Netherlandish landscape of Bruegel, daily life continues unaware and unconcerned.

Art Historical Context

- *The Fall of Icarus* by Bill Hammond could be used in Option 12. Modern New Zealand Art. Topic 1: Representational Art and its context, approaches to landscape, the figure and portraiture
- While this contemporary New Zealand narrative artist is unusual in the mainstream of New Zealand art his bird-peopled landscapes draw on New Zealand connections to the land and New Zealand concerns for the environment. There is a strong sense of New Zealand place and national identity, which is part of the tradition of representational art in our country.
- *The Fall of Icarus* is part of his Buller Birds series of the mid-1990s.

Influences

- Literature: - The Greek legend of Icarus' escape from King Minos' Crete with his father Daedalus
- W H Auden *Musee des beaux Arts* (20th century poem)
- Art: - Pieter Bruegel *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* 1558. This Netherlandish landscape of land and sea captures the moment when Icarus crashes into the sea. The country folk in the foreground continue their everyday activities, oblivious to the drama.
- 19th century ornithologist Buller's *History of the Birds of New Zealand*. Buller was noted for his detailed painting of "exotic" New Zealand birds. The birds were painted from stuffed bodies. Buller traded in the stuffed birds.
- Surrealism: where the unreal and the unlikely are normal.
- A Romantic Gothic sensibility which allows him to create a parallel world pervaded by an unnamed threat.
- Japanese printmaking with its emphasis on shallow space, elongated figures, flat colour and decorative patterning.
- The search for a national identity

Style

Warwick Brown, *100 New Zealand Paintings*, "Hammond's vision is so weird it has no parallel in Western art...funky, Surrealist." Yet in many ways it conforms to many of the characteristics of Regionalist style

- Its setting is recognisably New Zealand (trees, ferns and volcanoes).
- The formal structured composition uses framing trees and bird people to direct the eye to the far horizons.
- The flat application of paint allows for little tonal modulation and results in the contradictory sense that the space is very shallow.
- The pervading sense of isolation, loneliness, and alienation is demonstrated through the alert and directed gaze of the bird people, each is so self-absorbed that it is unconnected/uninvolved with the other birds.
- Colour. Vibrant yet moody, the green is enhanced with a touch of blue-grey. The subtle colour relationships reinforce the sense of distance and alienation.
- The low viewpoint, looking up into the scene, and the colour emphasise the shallow space.
- The main figures are outlined in black giving them clearly defined form.
- Symbolically captures the uneasy relationship between the bird people and the unseen threat to the land they inhabit.

Message

Bill Hammond creates this mythological world, which could be primeval New Zealand, to alert us the loss of species and the destruction of the environment.



Robert McDougall Art Gallery

Making Art: Bill Hammond, A Painter's Practice

Biography

Bill Hammond was born in Christchurch in 1947. He studied at the School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury from 1966 to 1968. From 1971 to 1981 he designed and manufactured wooden toys. Hammond held his first solo exhibition in 1979 in Christchurch and has since exhibited regularly throughout New Zealand. He received QEII Arts Council awards in 1984 and 1987, a travel grant to Japan in 1990 and a major fellowship grant in 1991. In 1994, Hammond was the joint winner of the 1994 Visa Gold Art Award. He is represented in many public and private collections throughout New Zealand and currently lives in Lyttelton.



Bill Hammond *The Fall of Icarus* 1995 acrylic on canvas
Collection of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery

Subject

In this contemporary narrative bird-people stand in their trees, silent and vigilant as though aware of an approaching threat. There is no indication of what the threat may be; although some of the birds are already dead. The detail in this world suggests a New Zealand connection, eg the trees and the heads of the bird people. But it is a surreal world; nothing is as it should be. The horizons are ambiguous, volcanoes float and dribbling paint becomes rain (acid?) or a waterfall. Icarus' fall is a minor incident in this primeval time and place.

The Fall of Icarus draws on the Greek legend of Icarus' escape from King Minos' Crete with his father Daedalus. The pair escaped the island by attaching wings to their arms with wax. Icarus became overconfident and flew too close to the sun, with predictable results. Here, as in the Netherlandish landscape of Bruegel, daily life continues unaware and unconcerned.

Sources of Motivation

- The Greek legend of Icarus' escape from King Minos' Crete with his father Daedalus
- Pieter Bruegel *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* 1558. This Netherlandish landscape of land, sea and peasant life captures the moment when Icarus crashes into the sea. The country folk in the foreground continue their ordinary everyday activities oblivious to the drama.
- W H Auden *Musee des beaux Arts* (20th century poem).
- 19th century ornithologist Buller's *History of the Birds of New Zealand*. Buller was noted for his detailed painting of "exotic" New Zealand birds. The birds were painted from stuffed bodies. Buller traded in the stuffed birds.
- Surrealism, particularly its use of paradox and contradiction.
- A Gothic sensibility of place which allows him to explore a sense of physical and emotional unease.

A Contemporary Practice

Sketch books show the evolution of his elegant elongated bird people but Bill Hammond does not make preparatory drawings for a specific painting. This work was painted on an acrylic gesso-primed canvas tacked to the wall. It has been stretched and mounted in the Gallery. He applied several layers of thick and thin acrylic paint interspersed with varnish layers. Because the canvas was painted on the wall we can work out that the final washes were from the top as the fluid Phlato Green dribbles over the other layers of the green and Payne's Grey. He also uses black, white and metallic gold and silver for highlights and detail. The surface is very smooth and glossy.

Formal Elements:

Colour

- Successive layers of Phlato Green and Payne's Grey build up the rich opaque green, which dominates the whole surface of the painting.
- The reds of the birds' clothing demonstrates the use of complementary colours and creates a focal point that draws us into the painting.
- The sombre colours reinforce the mood of the painting. They impart a sense of a still, silent world that is waiting for the unknown.
- The sense of approaching threat is increased by the thin black washes of paint that appear to be slowly seeping down from the top of the painting.
- The swathe of translucent white down the right of the painting is unexplained till we follow it to its conclusion and note the tiny figure of Icarus. It is balanced by ghostly bird images on the left.

Space

- Space/depth is not clearly stated. Great distance is suggested by the ambiguous horizons, but the green flattens the space. The colour is more intense in the upper third of the painting, tipping this section towards the viewer, yet, we assume, this is the sky.
- The colour is more modulated in the two lower horizontal panels, suggesting recession. In the lowest, narrowest band, aerial perspective is implied. The light/dark boundary on this horizon draws our attention to the rocks and then to the death of Icarus.
- The birds and trees occupy a space outside the canvas. They are in the viewer's space.

Form

- The 3-D form of the birds is established by bold tonal shading around the head and shoulders of the bird people and variations in the colour of their clothing.

Light

- The painting is illuminated by the light of the viewer's space, increasing our involvement in the action.
- Within the painting there is the suggestion that night is falling, or a curtain closing on a whole world and way of life.

Purpose

Bill Hammond creates this mythological world, which could be primeval New Zealand, to alert us the loss of species and the destruction of the environment. The imminence of this threat is highlighted by the way the bird people ignore the viewer, yet the viewer is drawn in to be part of their world.



**Robert McDougall
Art Gallery**

Some suggested uses for the resource

Making Art: A Painter's Practice

Bill Hammond

1. Using the commentary related to the Formal Elements of Bill Hammond's painting practice construct your own layered painting scape of colour. Pay particular attention to the colours you select and the way you are making marks on the surface of your work.
2. (a) Research a New Zealand legend that relates to the importance of the land and draw your own thumb nail sketches of images and motifs central to that legend in your visual diary. Also research a series of bird images from Buller's **History of the Birds of New Zealand** and record these in your visual diary.

(b) Photocopy and cut out your collection of recorded images and arrange these on a series of previously prepared painted grounds until you find a compositional arrangement that you are satisfied with.
3. Combine the painted ground from the first exercise and your chosen compositional arrangement of images from the second task and produce a work based on the painting practice of Bill Hammond.

Some suggested uses for the resource

Knowing about Art: Content and Context

Bill Hammond

1. Answer the following questions:

(a) Cite three of the major influences for **The Fall of Icarus.1995**

(b) What is the message underlying Hammond's choice of subject matter?

(c) Define the term Surrealism.

2. Using the information related to the style of **The Fall of Icarus 1995**, describe the composition.

3. Research the Greek legend of Icarus and write a brief precise of the essential elements of the plot. Also state why you think a European myth has been chosen by Hammond as the source material for this particular painting.

Bill Hammond

Solo Exhibitions

- 1982 Brooke-Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
- 1983 Brooke-Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
- 1984 Red Metro ,Dunedin
- 1985 Red Metro, Auckland
- 1986 Brooke-Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
Loft Gallery, Motueka
- 1987 Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington
Loft Gallery, Motueka
Brooke-Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
Aberhart North Gallery, Auckland
- 1988 Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington
- 1989 Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington
Brooke-Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
Loft Gallery, Motueka
- 1990 Lazelle Gallery, Auckland
Loft Gallery, Motueka
Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington
Fluxus Gallery, Dunedin
- 1991 Brooke-Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland
Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton
- 1992 *Japan* Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland
- 1993 Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington
Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland
Brooke-Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
- 1994 *Walter Buller Blind* Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland
Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington
Brooke-Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
- 1995 Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland
Bill Hammond Unplugged Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

- 1996 Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland
Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington
Brooke-Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
- 1997 *Headscape* Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland
Plain and Fancy Brooke-Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington
- 1998 *Blood Sin, Sin Bin* Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland
Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington
Brooke-Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington
- 1999 *Melting Moments* Brooke-Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
23 Big Paintings Dunedin Public Art Gallery, touring

Selected Bibliography

- Jim and Mary Barr, "Endangered Species" in *Distance Looks Our Way: Ten Artists from New Zealand* editor, Mary Barr, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, 1992
- Allan Smith, *A Very Peculiar Practice: Aspects of Recent New Zealand Painting*, exhibition catalogue, Wellington City Art Gallery 1995
- Gregory O'Brien, *Lands and Deeds: Profiles of Contemporary New Zealand Painters*, Godwit, Auckland, 1996
- Michael Dunn, *Contemporary Painting in New Zealand*, 1996
- Elizabeth Caughey and John Gow, *Contemporary New Zealand Art 1*, David Bateman, Auckland 1997
- 23 Big Paintings*, exhibition catalogue, Dunedin Public Art Gallery 1999

Articles

- Louise Wilton, *Bill Hammond: Images of Funk*. *Art New Zealand* 40 pp 42-44
- Justin Paton, *New Games, New Rules*, *Listener*. 12 August 1995 pp 42-43
- Allan Smith, *Bill Hammond Paints New Zealand*, *Art AsiaPacific* 23 1999, pp 47-53
- David Eggleton, *Hammondland*, *Listener*, 6 November 1999, pp 38-39

ART REVIEWS

Images of birds explored further

New paintings by William Hammond at the Brooke Gifford Gallery until April 27. Reviewed by Robyn Ussler.

In his lyrical exhibition William Hammond continues to explore images of birds and the land, an extension of the theme reflecting his interest in Walter Butler's 19th-century ornithological paintings.

Over the years Hammond's work has matured from an urban-based cult art — progenitor, surely, of the "Bad Art" predominant in the work of young Christchurch painters at present — to this mysterious, romantic sensibility.

"The Colour Plates" is a large-scale canvas, unstretched at present, broken into different images, illustrated in an old-fashioned book or photo-rapids on an album page.

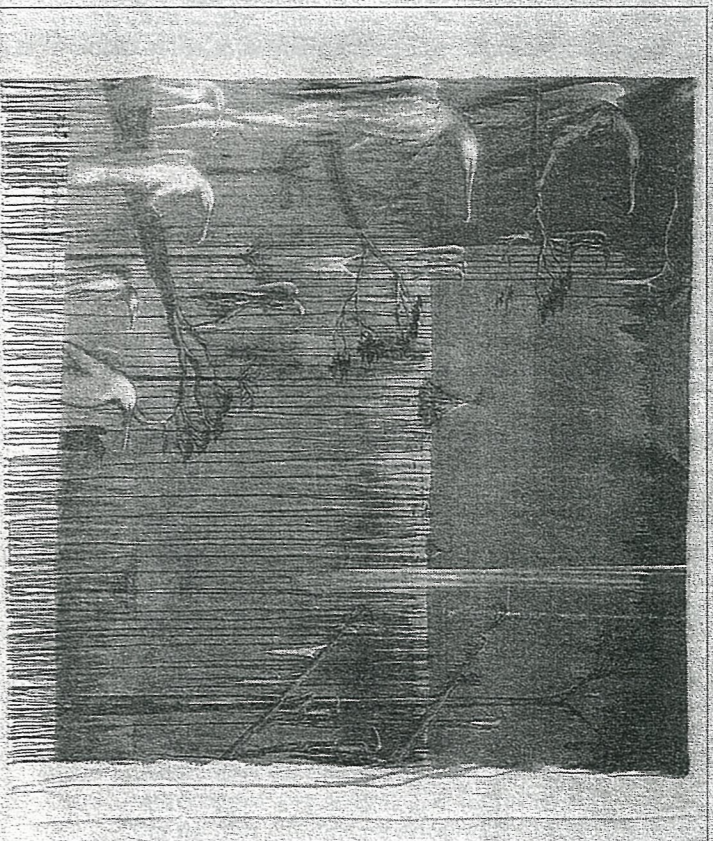
Nostalgia predominates, enhanced by largely monochromatic colouration, in iconic images of the land, the colonial landscape, birds, hybrid animal/humans and in the revealing title of a map of New Zealand, the "The Birdland".

Hammond continues to use found

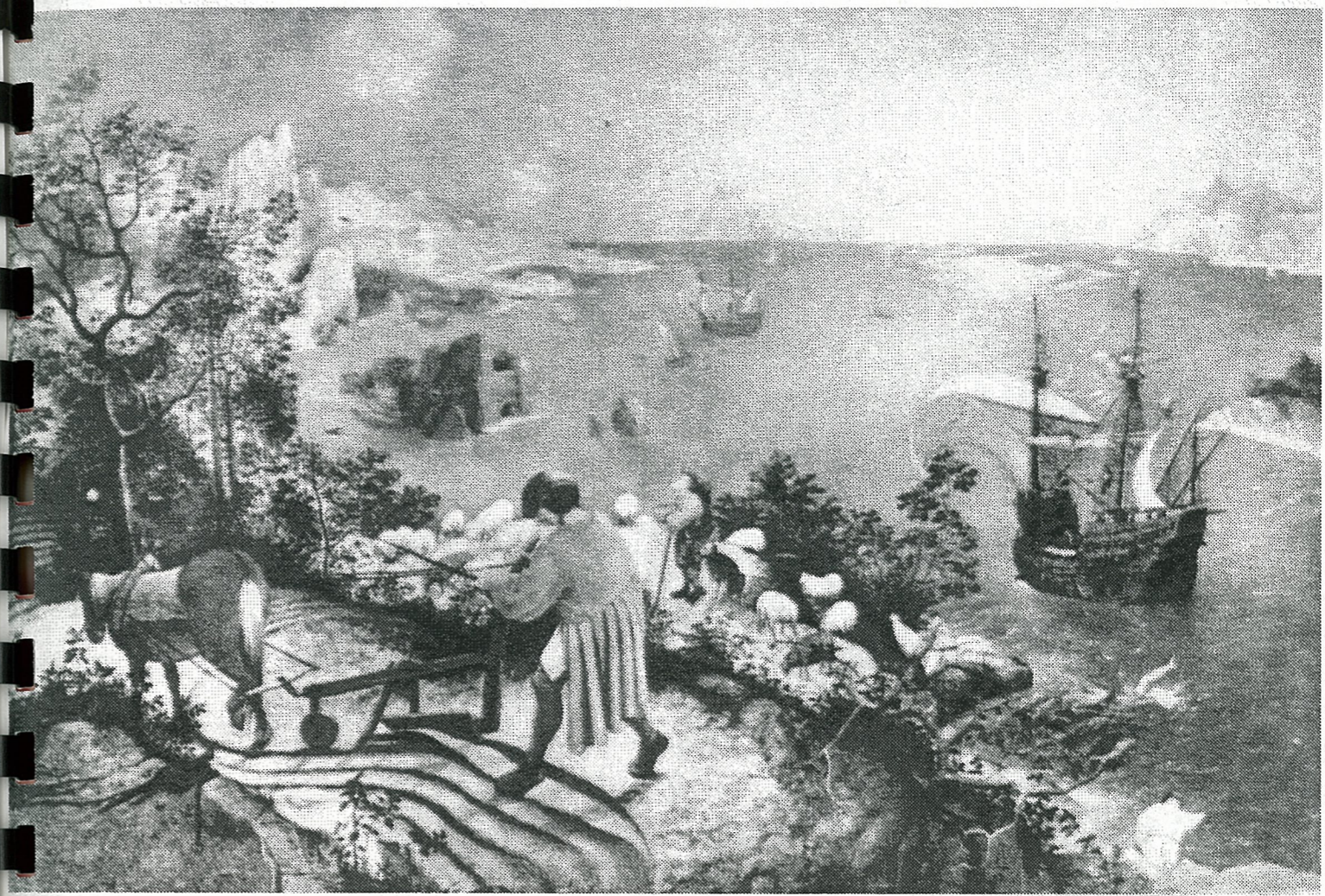
objects, a cupboard door and a kidney-slated table top (the remnant, surely, of a long ago woodwork class), as supports for his painting. The pattern making which forms an important element of his paintwork is evident in the rhythms of waves and in the patterned suits of the birdmen. This light control is contrasted by dribbles and drips of paint which represent a different aspect of his pictorial surface.

"A Lullaby of Birdland" brings together many of the images of the exhibition in five large panels. Birdpeople perch on trees, hang from branches, trees are made from their forms and throughout, musical instruments and singers reinforce the lyrical mood.

The exhibition climaxes in "Fall of Icarus", a free adaptation of a Breughel painting with an obvious debt to Japanese printmaking. The large scale and deep sea-green colouration of the canvas command attention, as do the haunting figures of the angel-like observers.



A "Lullaby of Birdland", by William Hammond.



Pieter Bruegel Landscape with the Fall of Icarus 1558

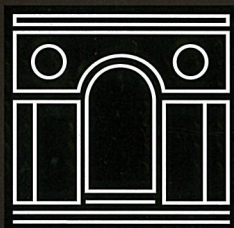
Musee des Beaux Arts

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking
dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting for the miraculous
birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
on a pond at the edge of the wood:

They never forget
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's
horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

*In Brueghel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely for the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it is not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.*

W H Auden



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