chrysalis seed trust

CS ARTS

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CS ARTS

Who we are

Founded in 1998 the Chrysalis Seed charitable trust serves a growing number of contemporary artists.

CS Arts is our main publication, distributed to individuals, institutions and businesses throughout the arts community. It seeks to engage with contemporary artists, current art issues and events.

We have a number of groups who meet regularly to support each other professionally.

Our office and library are located in the heart of The Arts Centre, where all are welcome.

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Front and back cover images: *Death* and *Resurrection*, 2008, Tim Winfield, photograph.

EDITORIAL

A universal theme

Death and resurrection is a theme in most religions and in the folklore of cultures around the world. In Aotearoa, this is reflected in the story of Maui attempting to conquer death by overcoming the goddess of death. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the theme driving this final issue of *CS Arts*.

Born in poverty, Jesus of Nazareth was raised as a refugee in Egypt, becoming first a carpenter, then a travelling teacher. The culmination of his time on earth was a painful execution. Roman soldiers nailed him alive on a couple of pieces of rough wood. Three days later he came back to life and appeared physically to his followers. In following Jesus we follow his suffering as well as his resurrection, or we do not follow him at all. This dynamic is explored in the lives and art of the artists profiled in this edition.

Victory over death

Kiwi icon Colin McCahon was no exception to this in the tensions of his personal life, art and thought. He addressed consumerism and secularism with religious truth that was hard and raw. With the force and energy of an old Testament prophet he mixed artistic innovation with biblical content. His recently exhibited work *Victory over death II* powerfully declares the significance of Jesus' claim to the divine title I AM, revealing his identity as God.

Colin McCahon's truth was so uncomfortable and unfashionable in a superficial and secular art world that it was usually avoided through the placing of secular filters on its interpretation. McCahon died a despairing alcoholic. Yes, he struggled. He also showed faith through his art, in both his personal agony and future hope. His *Crucifixion–the Apple Branch* is a personal statement of faith.

Another New Zealand artist has a very different story of suffering and hope. Early in 2005, Mieke Scoggins was tossed like a piece of cardboard into the air from her bicycle, by a truck on the wrong side of the road. Still suffering from long-term injuries, she has found the path back to wholeness through her art and Jesus. She reveals more of her journey of pain and healing in her interview here.

An indigenous metaphor

Maori art and architecture contains seeds within it for interpreting the death and resurrection of Jesus in the context of the indigenous people of Aotearoa. Darryn George's dynamic installation *Pulse* is full of the word 'waru', meaning eight. It is his symbol for new beginnings. Christ himself rose again on the eighth day, initiating a new spiritual era.

The whole exhibition has deliberate references to the Maori meetinghouse. Andrew Panoho offers some fresh perspectives on its features. 'The end wall is seen as the wall of death. Christ becomes the wall of death, for he is the 'resurrection and life' through whom the gathered will one day pass ... Christ becomes the doorway to God the Father, removing our offences and allowing the gathered community unimpeded access into his presence.'

The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes says: 'God has placed eternity in the hearts of man.' All cultures have 'redemptive bridges'. These are aspects of life and thought in any given culture that show its people are seeking after something beyond their collective experience. The Maori meetinghouse is such a bridge that can communicate the death and resurrection of Jesus in our distinctive New Zealand culture.

Peter Crothall

A meetinghouse at Whanganui, 1989.

The architecture of redemption:

the death and resurrection of Christ in architectural expression

The Christian story of the world's redemption comes to a climax in the death and resurrection of Jesus. For almost as long as the Christian tradition itself has been underway, that story has been celebrated, enacted, and proclaimed through the built form of architecture. The cross, by which Jesus was put to death, has easily been adapted to architectural use, but the resurrection has typically required a more abstract and symbolic representation.

A striking feature of the Christian architectural tradition, however, has been the consistency with which death and resurrection are given together. Neither the cross alone, nor resurrection alone, completes the story of redemption. The way to life—to fullness of life—passes through the cross. We cannot have it otherwise. For the most part, the architecture of Christian faith has maintained this view. Cross and resurrection belong together in the story of God's dealings with the world.

The architecture of baptism

That the way to new life passes through death is represented above all in the Christian sacrament of baptism, and it was in the architecture for baptism that death and resurrection first received architectural expression. The cross, as I have mentioned, was an obvious symbol of death, but not the only one. Cruciform baptismal fonts were occasionally found, but more often in the early centuries of the church's life they were rectangular or square in shape, thus representing a tomb. The circle, the hexagon and the octagon were also commonly used, the circle representing a womb from which new life comes, the hexagon the sixth day of the week, the day on which Christ died, and the octagon the eighth day, or the first of a new week, the day of new beginnings.

These forms were often given together: the font itself might be cruciform, square or hexagonal, thus representing death, and the surrounding structure of the font, or of the baptistery in which the font was housed, would be hexagonal or circular, thus representing the new life of Christ. This combination of imagery survives in the contemporary font by William Schickel in St Anne's Convent Chapel, Melbourne, Kentucky. Here a cruciform stand, representing death, supports a circular font representing new life.[1]

The architecture of contemplation

What is represented on a small scale in the baptismal font and baptistery receives monumental expression in the architecture of gothic cathedrals. Here too, the proclamation of death and resurrection typically occurs together. The most common floor plan of the medieval gothic cathedral is cruciform, formed by nave and choir with two transepts representing the arms of the cross. To be in the church is therefore to be a pilgrim on the way of the cross. That pilgrimage way is represented in the long central aisle and commonly again in the fourteen stations of the cross set out around the perimeter aisles. Contemplating the death of Christ through the stations of the cross in medieval cathedrals and in contemporary churches is a prayerful exercise. Pilgrims may offer their own prayers or follow a set liturgy as, for instance, in the following prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ,

take me along that holy way

you once took to your death.

Take my mind, my memory,

above all my reluctant heart,

and let me see what once you did

for love of me and all the world.

To be a disciple of the Christ here worshipped is to walk with him on the road to Calvary. It is to accept, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer once put it, that 'when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.'[2] Nowhere in the building, and nowhere in the Church, is there any place to walk other than in this cruciform way.

But what of resurrection? There are two great axes in gothic church architecture around which the whole building is conceived. The first is the longitudinal axis, the axis of cruciform pilgrimage, and the other is the vertical. The pilgrim in the way of the cross does not walk with eyes downcast, for Christ is risen and is now ascended. The pilgrim in the gothic cathedral lifts her eyes to behold the soaring vaults above, flooded with light and testifying to the glory of God. This architecture gives powerful expression to the irreducible connection between the death and the resurrection of Christ.

On earth and in heaven

Sometimes in religious architecture the cross has been placed high in the vaults or domes of the building—in the heavens above, as it were. An example is seen in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, built between 425–430 AD.[3] This is a dangerous strategy theologically, because it risks removing the cross from the earthly realm. It risks subverting the Christian conviction that Christ died as one of us and *in our place*, both in our stead, and in the midst of human suffering and sin.

The cross in the heavens serves a dual purpose, however. It reminds us, first, that the risen and ascended Christ still carries the wounds of crucifixion. And second, theologians of the fourth and fifth centuries commonly suggested that a cross in the sky would be the first sign that the second coming of Christ was imminent, and that the day of judgement was at hand.[4] This is the intent of the cross in the mausoleum of Galla Placidia. 'Rather than following the north-south main axis of the chapel, it faces towards the East and Jerusalem ... the expected direction of Christ's return.'[5]

Opposite page:
Church of the Light (1989), Ibaraki, Osaka, Japan.
Architect: Tadao Ando.
Photographed by Liao Yusheng, February 2002.

Top to bottom:

Contemporary baptismal font in St Anne's Convent Chapel, Melbourne, Kentucky.
Architect: William Schickel. Photograph: Neal Tew.

Woodland Crematorium, Stockholm, Sweden.
Architect: Erik Gunnar Asplund.
Photograph: Copyright Dominic Roberts.

The Passion of the Christ on La Sagrada Família in Barcelona. Architect: Antonio Gaudi. Public Domain.

Although rather poorly executed in some respects, we see in St Columba's Church, Sutton Coldfield, England a modern attempt to depict the cross in the heavenly realm, complete with the angelic host blowing the trumpets of victory and resurrection. This cross is also connected to earth, however, thus avoiding the risk of removing the cross from the earthly realm, and indicating that heaven and earth are brought together by means of Christ's death and resurrection.

A more successful expression of this same theme is found in Erik Gunnar Asplund's Woodland Crematorium in Stockholm, Sweden where a great granite cross is seen on the horizon as visitors walk toward the crematorium. Linking earth and sky, it is a symbol of the resurrection hope. As visitors make their way up the path they are led to the foot of the cross, and are invited to find solace and hope there in the face of death.

The architecture of suffering

The depiction of Christ's death in the art and architecture of the first Christian millennium focussed almost entirely upon Christ's victory over death rather than upon his suffering. It was not until the late tenth century that there appeared (in Cologne cathedral) a crucifix on which Christ is shown exhausted by physical pain and suffering, chest strained, stomach bulging and head slumped forward. This cross, carved for Archbishop Gero, is the earliest known instance of the subsequent preoccupation with Christ's agony. In the twentieth century the cross as emblem of Christ's suffering has probably been the predominant image, supported by currents in twentieth century theology that have emphasised Christ's suffering with the poor and the oppressed and with those who are victims of human brutality.

The depiction of the agony of Christ's death may be traced extensively through the visual arts of the twentieth century, but in the spatial arts of architecture and sculpture too, Christ's suffering has come to the fore. The great passion façade of Antonio Gaudi's Temple of La Sagrada Familia, still under construction in Barcelona, tells the story of Christ's suffering and death. Note in particular the materials used. The harsh steel girders of the cross—modern materials—contrast with the soft stone of Christ's body, emphasising the brutality of crucifixion, a brutality not confined to the Roman empire 2000 years ago but equally evident in the modern world. To one side, John, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, turn away or cover their eyes, for this agony is too awful to apprehend.[6]

Little progress has so far been made on the construction of the glory façade of the Temple La Sagrada Familia. In due course these will complement the nativity and passion façades and give expression to the resurrection. But Gaudi, meanwhile, has followed the medieval convention of cruciform plan and soaring vaults and towers. The latter are adorned with the words of the Sanctus, which culminate in the angelical hymn, 'Hosanna in Excelsis'. The cross is present in the floor plan of the building. That once the crowd called out for crucifixion is not denied; but humanity's best and last word, in company with the angels and the whole heavenly host, is a word of praise to the God who raised Jesus from the dead and who in the end, as in the beginning, gives life.

The architecture of humility

Alongside the depiction of Christ's suffering in recent art and architecture, a second theme has been that of Christ's humility. There is a place for the depiction of Christ as high and lifted up, but equally important is the humility and lowliness with which he comes among us, nowhere more evident than in his death among thieves.

William Schickel has adopted this theme in a number of churches he has designed. The cross or crucifix is small and is set at eye level, thus present to the gathered worshippers rather than removed from them. The death Christ dies is our death; it is for us and in our midst. And we are called to die with him.

For that reason, Schickel's crosses and crucifixes are accessible, not removed, but present for us. In Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky, the temptation would have been to place a large cross on the apse wall behind the altar. Instead, Schickel chose to sculpt a small crucifix visible to all, but small, vulnerable, humble. Christ has come among us in the form of a servant and he is available to us here at the altar for those who would come. The soaring ceiling and prominent vertical elements behind the altar are left to speak of resurrection and ascension.

Small, eye-level crucifix in Gethsemani Abbey, Kentucky. Architect: William Schickel. Photograph: Neal Tew.

The architecture of death and resurrection

Returning once more to our theme of death and resurrection being given together in the Christian understanding of redemption, Tadao Ando's Church of the Light in Ibaraki, Osaka, stages a dramatic enactment of the life that comes through death. Built in 1989, Ando's church combines the basic Christian symbol of the cross with the imagery of darkness and light. Access to the church is confined. One does not come accidentally into this space but must seek it out.

Careful deliberation and prayerful reverence are appropriate attitudes for those who seek the company of the crucified and risen one. The church itself is built from preformed concrete slabs. The environment is stark, simple, contemplative. The colour that alone gives relief from the grey walls is the golden colour of the wooden floor and the pews made from recycled scaffold planks, the wood recalling the construction on which another craftsman was executed. Behind the altar a cross is cut in the concrete, extending vertically from floor to ceiling, and horizontally the full width of the space.

Worshippers may come at dawn into this space and wait—wait for the sun's light to strike the exterior wall and to make its way, cross-shaped, into the place of worship. The light of God is not at our beck and call. We must wait upon it, and we are reminded that when it does come, it takes the form of the suffering and death of Christ. The architect himself has commented, 'Light wakens architecture to life'. The gospel of John begins with the confession that the light of the world has come, and it moves toward the climactic manifestation of God's glory, made known in the cross and resurrection of Christ. It is the dawning of this light through the cross of Christ that brings life to the world.

Murray Rae

1 From Gregory Wolfe, Sacred Passion: The Art of William Schickel (Notre Dame; University of Notre Dame Press, 1998) xiii.

2 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (New York: Macmillan, 1959) 99. Had he been saying it today, Bonhoeffer would no doubt have made the point using gender inclusive language.

3 From Gillian Mackie, Early Christian Chapels in the West: Decoration, Function and Patronage (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003)

4 I take the point from Gillian Mackie, Early Christian Chapels in the West, 181.

5 Gillian Mackie, Early Christian Chapels, 181.

6 From Temple Sagrada Familia, 3rd edition (Barcelona: Editorial Escudo de Oro, S.A.) p 70. The sculptures here were undertaken by Josep Subirachs.

Layers of dark and light

An interview with Mieke Scoggins

As creative and sensitive people, how do artists deal with and respond to suffering? Can the traumas of life enhance the creative vision of artists? What benefits might exist for those who go through similar experiences? Mieke Scoggins, a Nelson-based painter, relates the traumatic events of her bicycle/truck collision on a Brisbane road. She discusses her own recovery from the injuries she sustained, and how her artwork became cathartically connected to her healing journey.

Her story offers a kaleidoscope of painful physical lows and also surprising spiritual highs. Pain, by its very nature, necessitates limits upon our physical, mental, spiritual and emotional capacities. Consequently, Mieke learned to objectively 'streamline' her responses, and to direct her available energy levels into healing processes and manageable creative projects. Throughout this ordeal, Mieke's faith in a sovereign God is something that she credits as being pivotal to maintaining her sanity.

A miraculous survival story

'It happened when I was cycling on a semi-rural Brisbane road, in 2005. Because the reputation of local drivers wasn't great, I was trying to be careful, cycling on the left hand side of the road. I even remember singing to myself, when I was hit from behind by a truck doing 70–80 kilometres per hour. I wasn't knocked unconscious. I can still remember the incredible force of the impact, and the sense of losing control of my body, like a rag doll tossed, flying through the air and then bang, bang, rolling on the ground over and over knocking over those white reflector marker poles.

'When I finally came to a stop I remember looking up to see what had hit me, and seeing the brake lights of a truck. It was really strange, but my body was responding like an instinctive animal trying to cope with the trauma of what had happened. It was as if I was two different people. My body was just screaming out in pain, and yet my mind was strangely clear and really rational. I remember my mind telling my body to calm down. And at the same time, I was feeling around in my mouth for teeth and was just spitting them out. Then the witnesses came and people were looking after me.

'That verse came to mind: to "praise Him through your circumstance". And I realised there was nothing I could do, so I was thinking to myself, thank you Jesus—this must be happening for some reason. One lady later told me that she thought the truck had hit a cardboard box, the way that I was just tossed in the air and rolled and rolled on the ground. She came back to discover that the box she saw was actually my body.

'It's funny what you do in those situations. I didn't really know what I was doing, but I remember asking people who were standing around me, "Are you a Christian? Are you a Christian?" There was this one woman who was really affected by the whole ordeal. When I asked her: "Are you a Christian? Can you pray for me?" she prayed for me, as best she knew how. She was really shaken. She couldn't drive home afterwards. Someone had to take her home.

'For the next eight days I was in hospital. I lost a lot of blood through my injuries. I was in a state of constant nausea and they gave me these horrible antibiotics and Ribena, which just made me puke.

'But one night I had this amazing dream. There was this sheer cliff that I was climbing up and I had to get to the top. As I was climbing up I realised my arms were getting stronger. Just before the top there was this ledge that came out. And I knew I just couldn't get over it by myself. Up there was this little boy and that little boy was part of me, he *was* me, he was like my strength. The little boy yelled out: "I can pull you up. I can pull you up." And I said, "No you can't. You can't do it. You are too small. You are only a little boy." So I had to turn and go all the way back down by myself. And as I went down I got stronger and stronger … When I reached the bottom I still needed to get to the top, but now I understood that I had to go the long way around. I had Rob my husband walking with me by my side, and two other friends. We headed off together. It was such a perfect metaphor for what was going on. At that time I was trying to heal myself—I got it right away, it was really cool.'

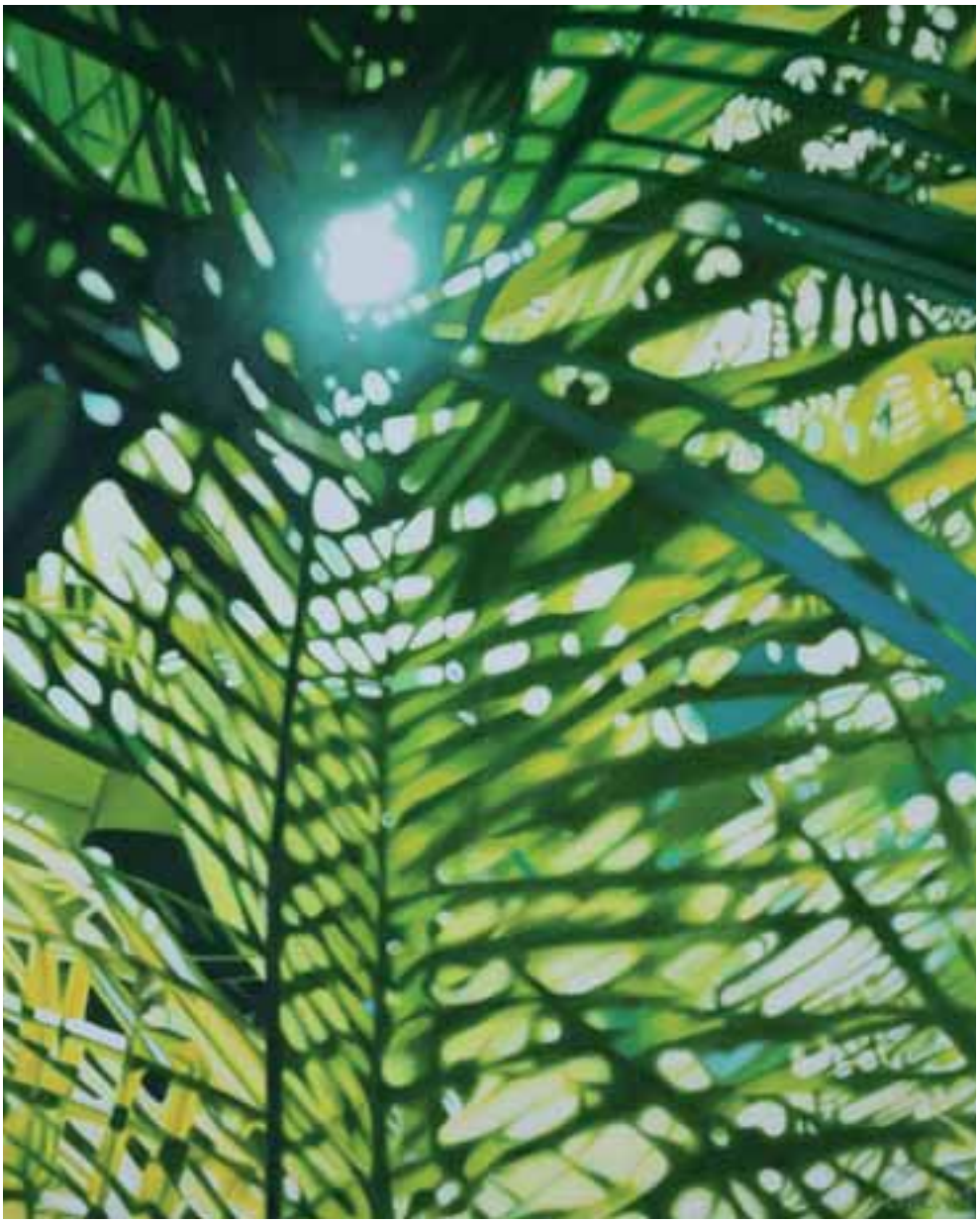
Painting through the pain

Two months before Mieke's accident she began the first sketches of a series of light and dark layered palm-leaf oil paintings. Later, when she was able to sit up on the couch, Mieke was able to slowly finish this series and exhibit them in a Brisbane gallery. 'We had just arrived in Australia and I wanted to capture the essential warmth of the Australian light. It was so bright compared to New Zealand's dark lush green bush. Brisbane had lots of palm trees everywhere, tropical bush and gum trees. The sun would come shining through the palm fronds, casting patterned shadows with a distinct light … I walked into a gallery where an artist had worked in a similar way to what I was planning, so it confirmed my choice to use light in this way. I went away and photographed images, and started painting. I thought deeply about my compositions … I looked closely at naturally made patterns. I tried to balance abstract images with recognisable reality.

'I had only placed the very first layers down when I had the accident. When I was recovering, I was able to sit and paint for, say, ten minutes at a time. People began contacting me, saying they expected some great piece of art to come out of all this suffering, and I wanted to do them justice, and so while I was there thinking about what to paint, I just finished off my earlier series.'

> ***"I can still remember flying through the air and then bang, bang, rolling on the ground over and over knocking over those white reflector marker poles***

Opposite page: Mieke Scoggins.



Layers of dark and light

'… I was working with very, very thin layers. One of the main colours—sap green—is translucent. So in order to make it dark enough I had to place up to twenty layers of paint. It took a lot of patience, a good seven months' worth of just painting, painting and painting as much as I could every day, very slowly.

'I never use black; technically it doesn't contain a colour to enhance, it pulls colour away and dulls it. Without using black I have to go over and over and over in my colours to get that same tonal density. This takes patience and it takes layers.

'The colour contrasts became important, obviously the darker I went, the lighter the light areas became. All these technical things became a metaphor. The high contrast had to do with the depth, the sorrow, the darkness that I was in, and also the incredible joy which was on another extreme as well. As a composition your eye naturally follows an eye path around a painting … but I noticed in these paintings that my eye would always end up landing on a light source. It became a metaphor for me of focus. I had to focus on hope. I had to focus upon the light.'

With her colour layers taking so long, the successive layers also became metaphorical Mieke. 'Not just the layering of paint, but the actual image layering of palms. You had to go through different things: [a ladder of rungs to climb] or bars restricting you, a journey of various stages you had to go through. Sometimes those stages are inexplicable…

' …They [the paintings] were beautiful for me. When I exhibited them in Australia, a woman (who has only recently died of cancer) saw them and they really spoke to her in her illness. So in contrast to my portraiture, the meaning they held was universally accepted; they helped other people persevere in challenges they were going through. It was relating to other people; others who had been through all kinds of trials could relate to them. That was encouraging for me, as in my state of self-focus, I would feel useless and even guilty that I wasn't out there doing God's work. I learnt that God could use me powerfully when I was at my weakest.'

The necessity of suffering

'It started coming to me that God was using these very paintings as my therapy. And this was confirmed in a poem, which was given to me by a good friend, titled

The Weaver:

My life is but a weaving
Between the Lord and me
I cannot choose the colours
He worketh steadily.
Oft-times He weaveth sorrow
And I, in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I, the underside.

Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Does God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skilful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.

'That last part was really important. To get to that joy, to let that really shine through, it is necessary to have the darkness. It's not just that it exists, it's actually important and necessary. You need the darkness, you need the suffering, in order to grow, in order to experience that joy. Once we grasp hold of that concept, we can change our thinking of what suffering really is. We do not have to dwell in self-pity and despair about suffering in the world. We can rather see it as a need. Sometimes that need, if we think about it hard enough, can even become a want as well. If we get a taste for learning, for growth through suffering, we know that we can get there. Because we know that's what it takes. If you really want to grow in your character you are even going to ask God for it.'

Leaving the darkness

'This whole period, I felt as a transition. As soon as I exhibited them [the palm-tree paintings] and was able to talk about them, in front of people, I was able to get them out. It was not just about "me" and "the paintings" any more, it was putting them out there. I felt the transition. I moved from the darkest period and I was suddenly into a period of light … I could let them go. I'm still happy to have them around, I'm still happy to look at them. The colour is calming for me as well, it's bright, it's intense—again part of it, not-too-subtle colours. Originally I was thinking too literally about the accident. But it doesn't make sense to me—why would I want to paint a truck or a bike? These make sense.'

Metaphors of colour

Mieke deliberately uses blue instead of black for her shadows. Black also has an ability to communicate darker feelings, whereas she appears to use colour optimistically. 'I don't tend to like looking at paintings that are in that dark place because I don't have the energy for it—it takes a lot of energy to look at that type of painting, to have one on your wall … I don't have the energy to be able to confront people like that … using those visual methods of communication. I need to use colour … each colour has an emotion, or an attribute. People who work with colour therapy [recognise] colour as important; it can change your mood.

' …I need to learn more about it, but I recognised shifting from [her previous use of] red to these colours that there was something going on here that was really important. If I can't stand looking at a colour, there is definitely something going on, changing within me. [I will keep my colours] bright and uplifting until I have the energy, one day, to be able to handle those colours again.'

On being changed

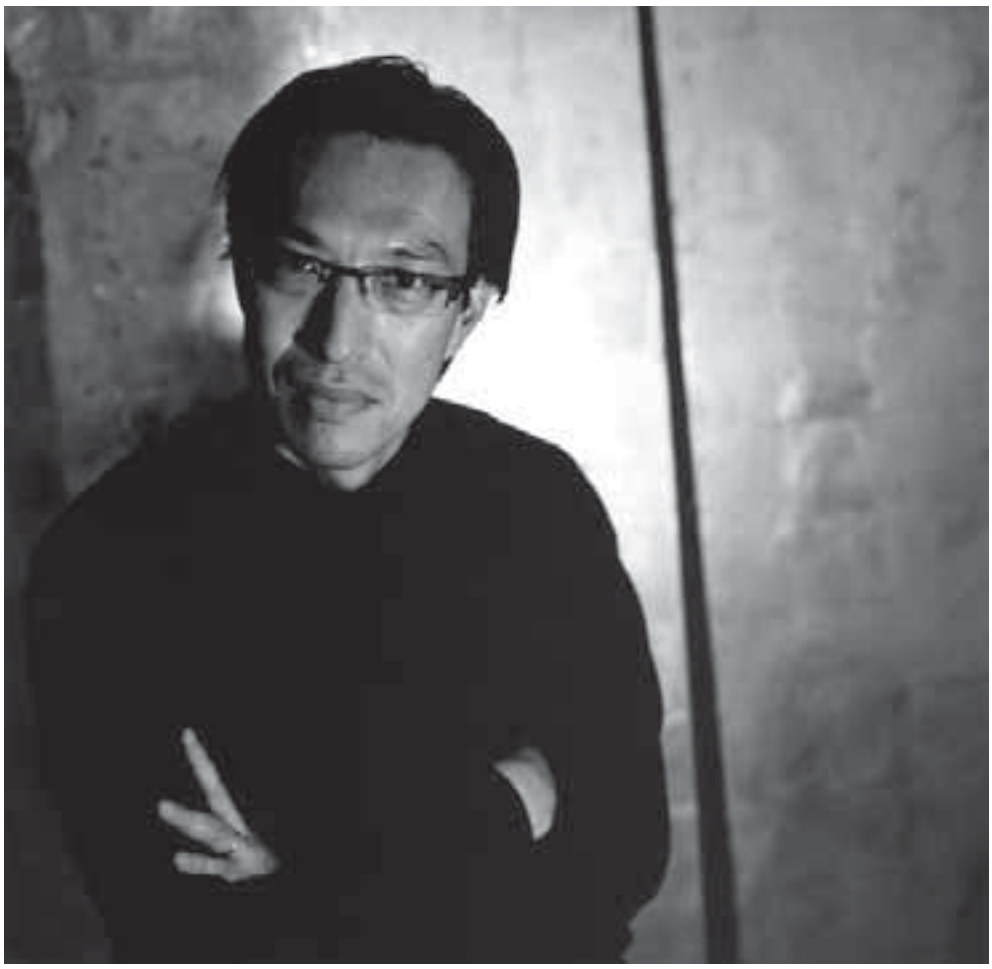
'The accident changed how I viewed myself. Even though my body was all mucked up, I felt more confident about my body. I was released from the anxieties and insecurities about how I viewed my physical self. I could simply rest and be myself. I could just let go. Before the accident, when I was working as a waitress, if customers got annoyed at me about anything I would take it personally. But after the accident I learnt how to put boundaries between myself and others, to keep myself safe. If a customer got annoyed, I learnt I could put a boundary between myself and them, and still walk away with a smile on my face.

' …I used to use a lot of colour, reds that showed my passion. What they stood for—boldness, being passionate—they stirred up emotions, and now after the accident I've been using subtler colours: blues, yellows, greens, and I want to capture things that are calm and peaceful. It was a huge shift. The focus with my art now is one of simplicity again, not so much emotion. [It is] still powerful, but subtle and peaceful and about light and joy in life rather than those dark and challenging times. I realise that the good things that came out of the accident were far greater and outweighed the bad—things that make people smile.'

Anaru/Andrew Panoho

Opposite page:
Season #1, 2005, Mieke Scoggins,
oil on canvas, 760 x 610mm. Private collection.

Right:
Season #2, 2005, Mieke Scoggins,
oil on canvas, 760 x 610mm. Private collection.



Gravity and grace in New York City

An interview with Makoto Fujimura

Art is business, acknowledges New York painter and International Arts Movement founder Makoto Fujimura. He shares his vision for the art world with Micah Hayes of the Veritasse *magazine, and explains why he doesn't believe in 'art for art's sake'.*

After interviewing Makoto Fujimura at the Sara Tecchia Roma Gallery in the Chelsea District of New York City, I returned later in the evening to attend a different artist's opening. I constantly found myself drawn to the back room, where Fujimura's painting *Water Flame* hung, unabashed in its stillness and hope. I just sat and watched while the painting, with its lines gracefully floating toward the ceiling, would slowly, almost painfully, reveal itself to me. Fujimura's works convey that in some way, in spite of the complicated tragedy of life, the Good and the Beautiful do exist.

Born in Boston to Japanese-American parents, Makoto Fujimura was raised bi-culturally and attended both American and Japanese colleges. He currently lives and works in downtown New York City, where he and his family experienced first-hand the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. Many of his works struggle through the meaning of living in a world that has been drastically altered by the ever-present possibility of terror attacks and nuclear holocaust.

Since it will be the centrepiece of your next exhibition, can we talk about your new painting *Golden Fire*?

'It's a painting that took me five years, because I had been thinking about trying to paint a painting in which gold would actually rise. It's always used either for static background like the Japanese screen paintings, or it tends to come down because gold is so weighty and figuratively heavy. So what I wanted to do is use this idea of flames and try to overlap with this idea of sanctification, which gold is a great symbol for.'

Because of the refinement process?

'Refinement, but also permanence. I used the best available materials to depict the most serious themes. I couldn't see myself using plastic to depict something that is so intensely serious, because for me it is directly linked to Hiroshima, Nagasaki and 9/11, and the condition of our reality and fears that we live under. How do you paint looking directly at that, and yet with a hope of some kind? And that is something that I think art can do, because when you create something you are being hopeful.'

You have a painting called *Gravity and Grace*. Is that from Simone Weil's essay?

'She is amazing. I go back to her writing often just as a kind of reference because I think she understood this

Above left to right:

Golden Countenance (detail), 2005, Makoto Fujimura, digital photograph taken during the process of painting, mineral pigments, gold on Kumohada paper. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 United States License.

Makoto Fujimura. Photographer: Julia Nason

Countenance Three, 2008, Makoto Fujimura, digital photograph taken during the process of painting, mineral pigments, gold on Kumohada paper. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 United States Licence.

Countenance is an example of Nihonga, a traditional Medieval Japenese painting technique. Pigments are created by grinding minerals, shells, corals and even semiprecious stones. These organic pigments are washed onto handmade papers. The crystalline paint reflects and refracts light, dynamically changing the colour and texture of the work.

This interplay between light and organic materials is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit, that illuminates and animates God's physical creation. *Countenance* captures the reflection of the Creator's gaze on His creation.

mystery—mystery of God and mystery of the ideal of being. Her words are really weighty and substantial and you have to kind of chew on them—paradoxical, but after a while it really sinks in and I really appreciate that. I think that is what I really long for my art to do, to have that gravity and grace.'

In an industry that claims to strive after beauty and truth, but actually functions on market principles, where does that leave you?

'Art is business. It's the stuff that art schools don't teach you. If you want to make a living at it you have to market yourself and be an entrepreneur. And you are representing your work in a lot of different ways. I think I struggle with the commercial aspect, with just how the art market is driven by greed, and the whole system. The art market is the most unregulated, *laissez-faire* market in the world. A lot of it is just unhealthy.

'It doesn't promote creativity. It doesn't allow artists to have a long-term vision. No patron today is going to come to you and say "I want your work to speak five hundred years later." It's always about the moment—the flashiness of it. How far can you shock? How far can you shake up the establishment? It's just a game. There is little creativity in that premise. You have to have people who support the arts, not as a commercial enterprise or game, or for prestige or power; you have to have people who are saying, "This is good. This is good for the world." You don't find too many people like that today. Part of my work has become … trying to cultivate patronage that is not just short-term, but long-term.'

How do you cultivate long-term patronage?

'Well, I don't know, you pray. If I am doing this, then there has to be somebody out there who would understand the vision. I think before, I was selling my work and trying to make a living, and that's fine. But now I am more a social entrepreneur. I want to tackle the system and say, "We have this situation where artists cannot be artists. They are creating things they do not want to create." So why is it that artists can't truly be artists? I guess I don't have any concept of "art for art's sake". I see it as a service to people.'

As someone who has made his way through the frustrating world of art galleries, what advice would you give to young artists?

'Be true to themselves, you know, don't sell yourself short. There are compromises that we make, so you have to be realistic about it, but ultimately I always tell art students that if you do not love what you are doing, and love the materials you are using, love the smell of paint, don't do it; do something else, because ultimately it is that love that keeps you going.'

Micah Hayes

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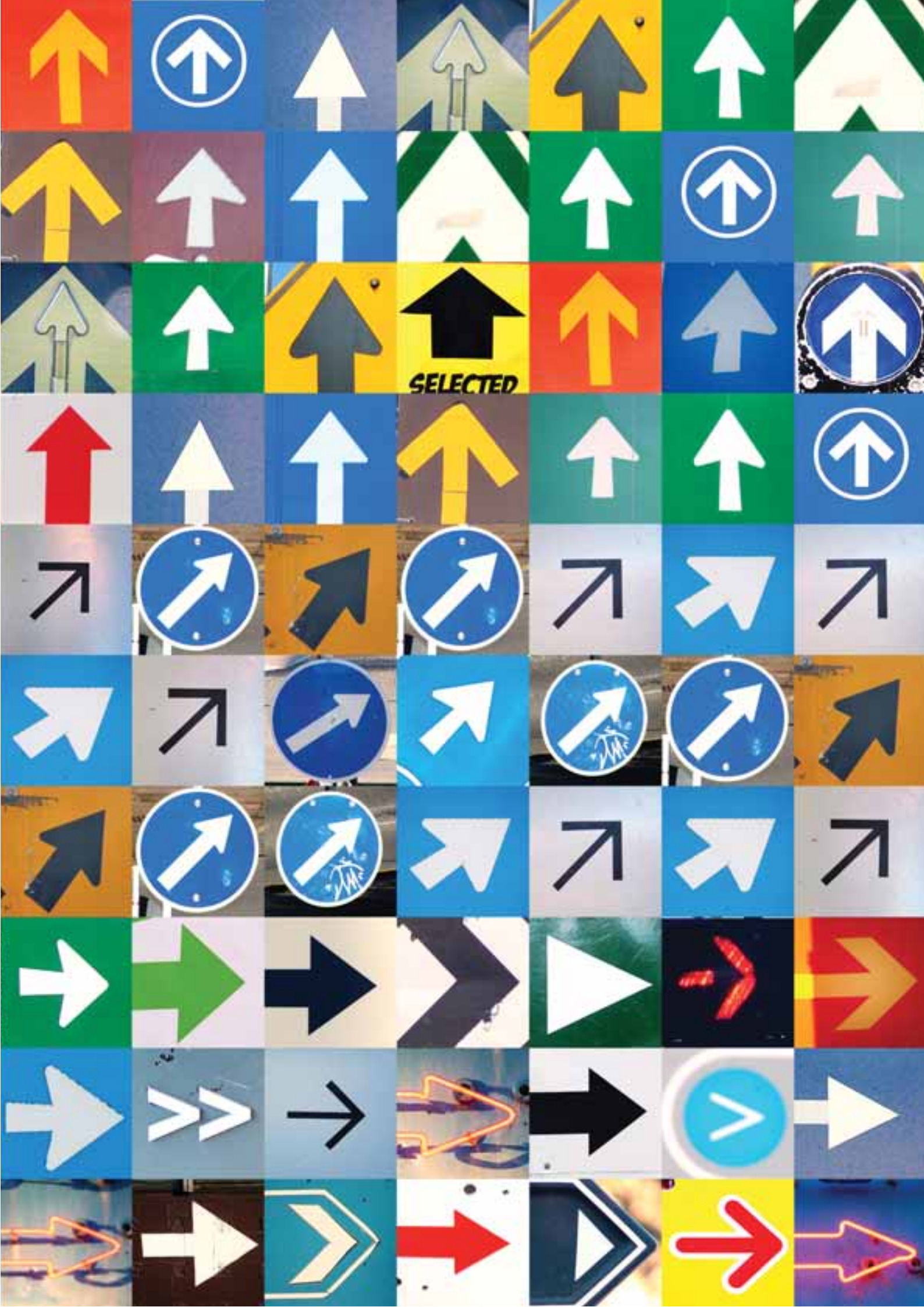
VISUAL ESSAY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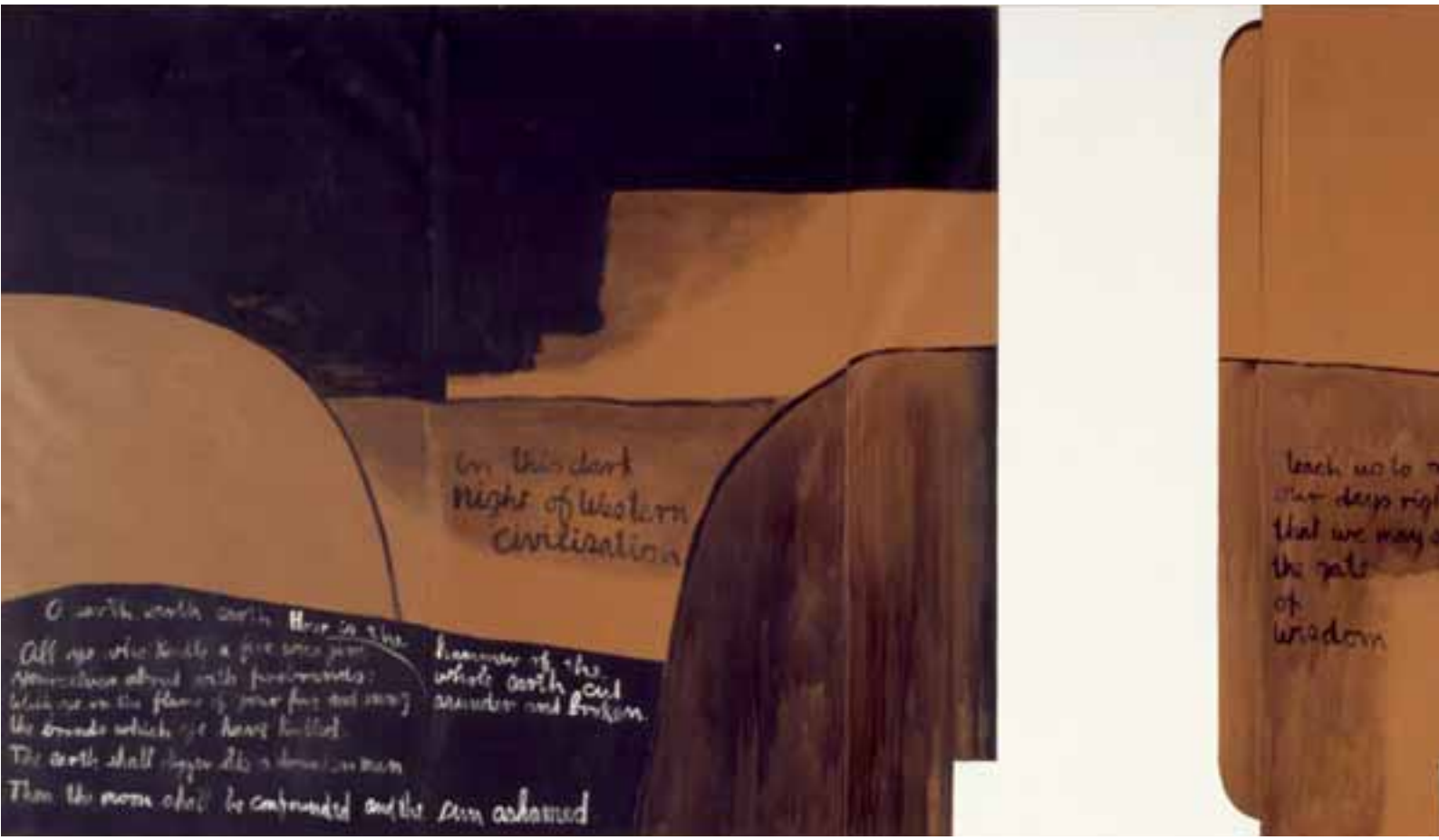
How the light gets in

The Christian art of Colin McCahon



Gate III, 1970, Colin McCahon,
acrylic on canvas, 3050 x 10670 mm,
Victoria University of Wellington Art Collection. Courtesy of the Colin McCahon Research & Publication Trust.

The Evangelist

I first encountered a Colin McCahon painting in the mid 1970s when I was Ecumenical Chaplain at Victoria University of Wellington. A gigantic mural appeared on the wall of the entrance foyer of a new lecture block—now known as the Maclaurin Building. It featured an enormous 3 metre-high 'I AM' in white and black letters, astride a stylised but recognisably New Zealand landscape, with texts reminiscent of the biblical prophets.

It was a painting to walk past, from left to right. The left panel, showing the lowering darkness of a bush fire or an approaching storm, seemed heavy with foreboding about secular culture, 'this dark night of Western civilisation'. It reminded me of the words of Fairburn, who a generation earlier had also lamented the burning of the bush and the secularity of New Zealand culture:

Smoke out of Europe, death blown

on the wind, and a cloak of darkness for the spirit.[1]

Toward the right of the painting the landscape brightened. The transition from darkness to light was marked by a series of biblical texts, framed by the giant letters 'I AM', God's numinous personal name, indicating his eternal being, revealed to Moses before the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 3:14). The texts, from the Psalms, included a prayer for self-awareness: 'teach us to order our days rightly, that we may enter the gate of wisdom' (Psalm 90:12),[2] and an invocation of God's blessing: 'God be gracious to us and bless us, God make his face shine upon us that his ways may be known on earth and his saving power among all the nations' (Psalm 67:1-2).

I remember standing before this vast mural, awed by its impact. It was a profoundly counter-cultural statement—not unlike the 'turn or burn' preaching of the Jesus People movement with which it is contemporary—warning that our secular, materialistic society will destroy itself, unless we humble ourselves, seek wisdom, and pursue 'the Lord, our true goal'. Like an evangelist pressing home the bleakness of the human condition and the majesty and holiness of God to bring about a change of heart, McCahon spread a giant canvas to urge his viewers to leave the broad and popular way that leads to destruction and 'enter through the narrow gate' that leads to life (Matthew 7:13-14).

The path of conversion is represented by the very structure of the painting. It moves from the dark, oppressive scene on the left to a landscape of rolling hills and open sky, a world of space and light on the right. Between is the entrance, the gate of

> ***I was amazed that Victoria University should have put on public display a work of art so dissonant with its values***

wisdom—bounded by the 'A' and the 'M' of the great 'I AM'. On the far right McCahon's text links being 'born into a pure land' with the presence of 'a constant flow of light'. Thus he reminds us that we cannot have fellowship with God unless we walk in the light (1 John 1:5-7), and—by repeating his point twice—that we cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we are born again (John 3:3, 5).

'When I was young I wanted to be an evangelist,' McCahon told a friend in the late 1950s, while travelling on a bus to work at the Auckland City Art Gallery.[3] Behind such a surprising description of the artist's calling stands an influential figure. In his youth McCahon worked in the orchards of Motueka, and sometimes visited his artist friend Toss Woollaston. Woollaston's uncle, Frank Tosswill, was a member of the Oxford Group, a supporter of Moral Rearmament, with its emphasis on evangelical social renewal and four rigorous ideals of absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute love. 'Uncle Frank' used to carry a large rolled-up scroll, with diagrams and texts to illustrate his sermons. When he came to stay he would take down Toss Woollaston's paintings from the best part of the wall and hang up his scroll instead.

The scroll was more than two metres long, with the sun rising over Tasman Bay, texts in red forming radiating beams, and the words 'Almighty God' painted along the top. Toss Woollaston didn't like it, but the twenty-one-year-old McCahon was fascinated by the poster-style and combination of image and text.

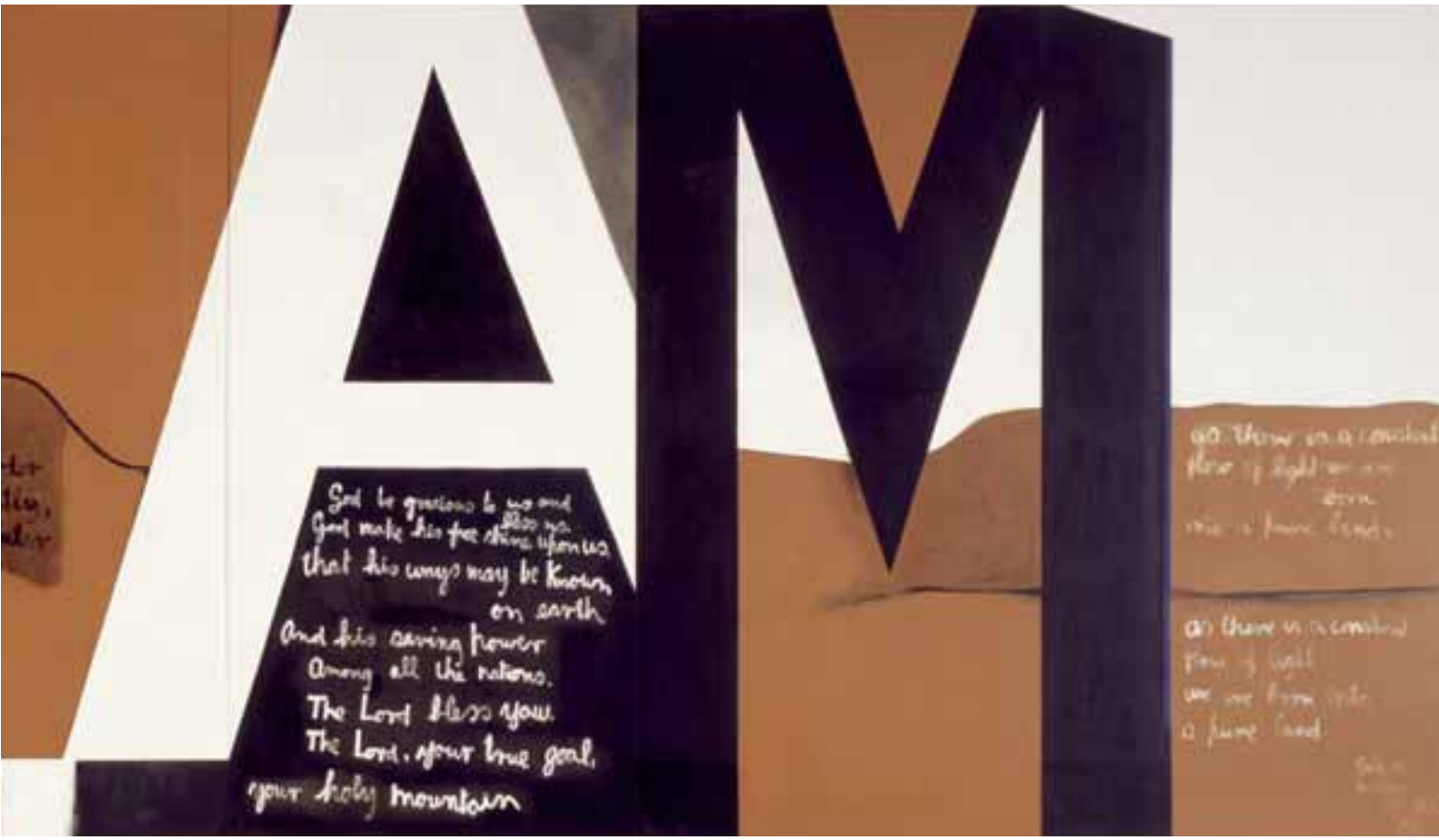
One of his last works, in 1980, was *A Painting for Uncle Frank*. The once-fiery and earth-shaking Mount Taranaki forms a shape reminiscent of the Almighty's callipers in Blake's *Ancient of Days*—and of the radiating sunbeams of Uncle Frank's scroll. Its text is the great vision of the heavenly Jerusalem in Hebrews 12:22–27. Quoting Hebrews 1:7, McCahon changes the word 'ministers' into the singular: 'He who makes his angels winds, and his minister a fiery flame.'

'Uncle Frank' kindled a passion to communicate the Christian message through art that burned in McCahon to the end of his career.

The Prophet

Years later I learned that the 1970 mural is called *Gate III*, and that McCahon painted it to warn of the possibility of physical destruction that threatens our civilisation. Its searing lines denounce nuclear warmongers in even stronger terms than did Bob Dylan's 'A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall' (1963) after the Cuban missile crisis. McCahon writes like a graffiti artist scrawling on the wall of a military installation: 'All ye who kindle a fire who gird / yourselves about with firebrands: / Walk ye in the flames of your fire and among / the brands which ye have kindled.' (Isaiah 50:11).

But when I first saw *Gate III* in the mid 1970s, I read it above all as an indictment of Western secularism, the ruling spirit of our age. I found it ironic that it should have been hung in New Zealand's most secular university. McCahon's statement of a biblical worldview was so unequivocal that I was amazed that



Gate III by Colin McCahon 'Coming out from under its plastic wraps at Victoria University this morning...' Published in the Evening Post 1978. Courtesy Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Ref: EP/1978/1078. EP-Arts-Paintings (4/1).

> ***It is a measure of his greatness that he bore witness to religious themes when it was very unfashionable to do so***

Victoria University should have put on public display a work of art so dissonant with its values.

In the event, the university didn't change its stance, but it did move the painting. As if to maintain its secularity, the university relocated *Gate III* to its new Adam Art Gallery, Te Pataka Toi, when it was established in 1999. McCahon had designed the 3-metre-high and 10.5-metre-long *Gate III* in 1970 as a public work for a public space. In the lecture block foyer where it first stood it made a far more visible prophetic statement than it does now, domesticated in an art gallery where its message can be safely deconstructed, critiqued and compared with the 'manufactured meaning' of other works of modern art. Years earlier McCahon had lamented: 'Once the painter was making signs and symbols for people to live by: now he makes things to hang on walls at exhibitions.'[4]

Even more at variance with McCahon's intentions was the sale by Victoria University of one of his last paintings, *Storm Warning* (1980-81). This is an apocalyptic warning of what things will be like in the latter days, based on 2 Timothy 3:1-3. 'YOU MUST FACE THE FACT', it declares, 'the final age of this world / is to be a time of troubles':

men will love nothing but
money and self, they will be
arrogant, boastful and abusive;
with no respect for parents,
no gratitude, no piety, no natural affections
they will be implacable in their hatreds.

McCahon had given *Storm Warning* to Victoria University as a gift in 1981. But it was sold in 1999 for around $1.2 million to unidentified New Zealand collectors to cover the shortfall in the funding of the Adam Art Gallery. 'It is a public work and I don't want it to disappear into a private collection', wrote McCahon before he made the gift; but the letter came to light after the painting had been sold.

It is disquieting that this painting, given for public display, advice and warning, should have been sold to a private collection for an enormous price, well beyond what local art galleries could afford, risking its permanent loss to New Zealand. McCahon's message in *Storm Warning* couldn't have been clearer, says artist Janet Paul, a friend of McCahon's. 'He was opposing ... materialist thinking. To him the spiritual concept of life ... was really important. I think it's deplorable to sell it for money when it is totally opposed to money being the only currency.'

One of the biblical tests of a true prophet is whether their prophecies come to pass (Deuteronomy 18:21-22). As the artist's son, William McCahon, caustically observed, '*Storm Warning* has fulfilled its prophecy.'[5]

The Artist

In 2002, Marja Bloem, Senior Curator of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam brought together for the first time a comprehensive exhibition of McCahon's paintings from throughout his entire career. Entitled *Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith*, it was brought to New Zealand with the organisational support of the Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tamaki, and made available free to the public of New Zealand by the generosity of two anonymous benefactors. It showed in the Auckland Art Gallery from 29 March until 15 June 2003.

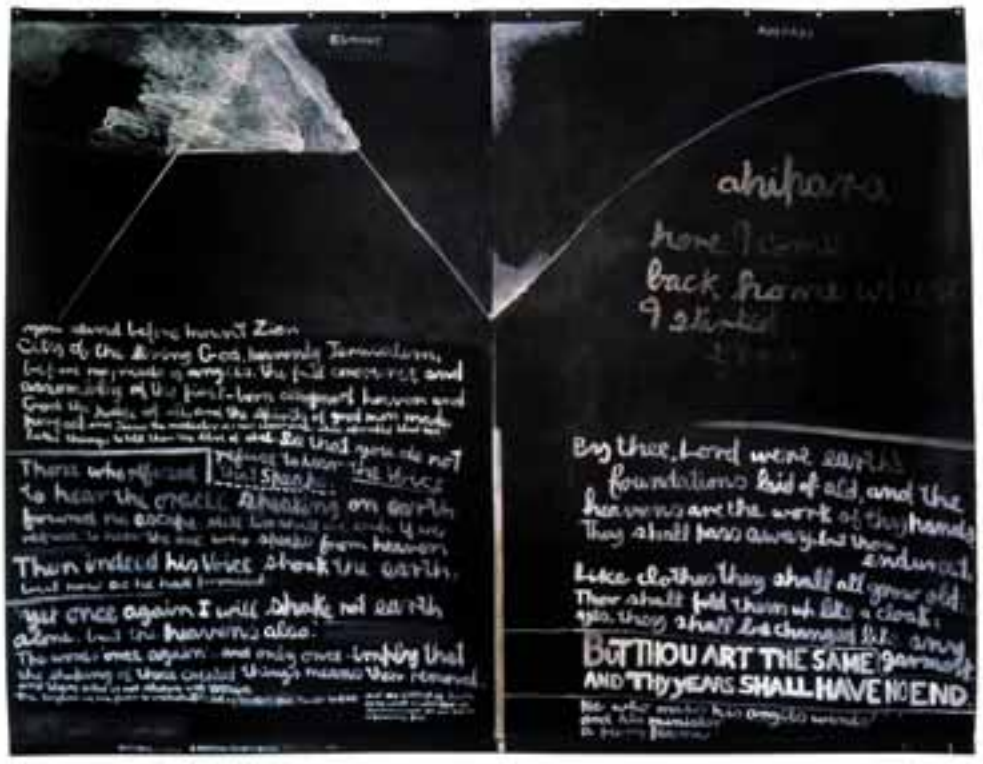
The exhibition brought together 78 works tracing the development of McCahon's art chronologically from 1946 to the early 1980s. Never before had these works been in one place—not even in the artist's studio. In a courageous departure from the secular premise of many earlier exhibitions of his works, *A Question of Faith* recognised the central importance of Christian themes for McCahon's life and art. It was organised around the artist's spiritual quest, showing how he explored questions of faith and doubt, meaning and despair. 'My painting is almost entirely autobiographical', McCahon once wrote, 'it tells you where I am at any given time, where I am living and the direction I am pointing in.'[6]

McCahon's greatest contribution was to contextualise a Judaeo-Christian vision in New Zealand art. As Marja Bloem says, 'landscape and religion ... are constant factors in his life and work.'[7] For the first time international recognition was given to a leading New Zealand artist for his grappling with the great religious and existential questions of our time. Rudi Fuchs, former Director of the Stedelijk Museum says, 'McCahon was the artist who gave New Zealand a powerful visual identity. ... That he went further, to explore and communicate through the medium of painting the universal questions and concerns of humanity, is why we, in other parts of the world, must recognise him as a great modern Master.'[8] It is a measure of his greatness that he bore witness to religious themes when it was very unfashionable to do so.

In *The Promised Land* (1948) McCahon shows his love for the natural beauty of New Zealand, and yet a longing for a perfection that lies beyond it. Dressed in his black workman's singlet he places himself in the painting, beside the Takaka Hill, with his red workman's hut to the right. Superimposed on this—a painting within a painting—is a vision of a future paradise represented by the scene beyond the hill: the landscape of Golden Bay, with the hills of Takaka now in the foreground, the view towards Farewell Spit in the background, and the artist (or perhaps an angel) looking down envisioning it. McCahon is affirming more than the goodness of God's creation. Far ahead, beyond the barren hills and toil of present experience, across the golden strand, he glimpses a promised land of fruitfulness and beauty, the almost forgotten Christian dream of an earthly millennium.

In *Beach Walk* (1973), a fourteen-panel painting of Muriwai Beach more than twelve metres long, the Christian theme of life as a pilgrimage combines with the Maori tradition of the journey of the spirits of the dead to the place of their departure at Cape Reinga, the northernmost point of Aotearoa/New Zealand. It was moving to see this painting exhibited in a room large enough to stand back and see it whole and at a distance—to recognise the West Auckland coastline in its elemental expanse, its starkness of sand and sky, its changing moods of cloud and current. 'I do not recommend any of this landscape as a tourist resort,' said McCahon. 'It is wild and beautiful; empty and utterly beautiful.'[9]

McCahon reduced the New Zealand landscape to its characteristic elements and shapes, rather like the drawings in C A Cotton's famous textbook *Geomorphology of New Zealand* (1922), given to him



A painting for Uncle Frank, 1980, Colin McCahon, acrylic on unstretched canvas, 2330 x 3000 mm. Collection Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, purchased 2000. Image reproduced courtesy of the Colin McCahon Research and Publication Trust/Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

as a wedding present in 1942 by fellow-artist Patrick Hayman.[10] Whether the folds and escarpments near Oamaru (in *North Otago Landscape*, 1951), the cliffs of the gannet colony at Muriwai (in the *Necessary Protection* series of 1972), or the round curve of his favourite hill at Ahipara in Northland (in the left panel of *Gate III*, in *Venus and Re-entry*, 1970-71, and in *A Painting for Uncle Frank*), McCahon's landscapes, at first glance so generic and stylised, can be recognised as concrete and exact.

Even the use of text in McCahon's art reflects his observation of the New Zealand landscape, as his son William recalls: 'The sign painting of roadside stalls is often talked about by commentators as an indication of the genesis of his style of graphics. But this too was a deflection of intent by Colin in response to persistent questioners. In fact, the source of this idea was the religious graffiti once common throughout New Zealand. Taking the form of Bible texts or slogans such as 'Jesus Saves', these messages were emblazoned in large letters on walls, overhead bridges, and the natural blackboards of rock faces. These amateur sign painters mostly used white house paint and house-painting brushes to make their words quickly and effectively.'[11]

Behind McCahon's lifelong fascination with painted text lay an early formative experience. When he was a child in the mid 1920s, two new shops were built next door to the family home in Highgate, Dunedin. One had its window painted by a signwriter with the words 'HAIRDRESSER AND TOBACCONIST'. 'I watched the work being done', says McCahon, 'and fell 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.'[12]

Though he strove to incarnate the Christian message in a recognisably New Zealand context, the religious dimension of McCahon's paintings was frequently minimised or ignored by academic critics and the general public. To counteract this, McCahon became more direct in his presentation. Increasingly he used words in his paintings because he was discouraged that people were misinterpreting them. 'Most of my work has been aimed at relating man to man and man to his world, to an acceptance of the very beautiful and terrible mysteries that we are part of. I aim at very direct statement and ask for a simple and direct response, any other way the message gets lost.'[13]

The Believer

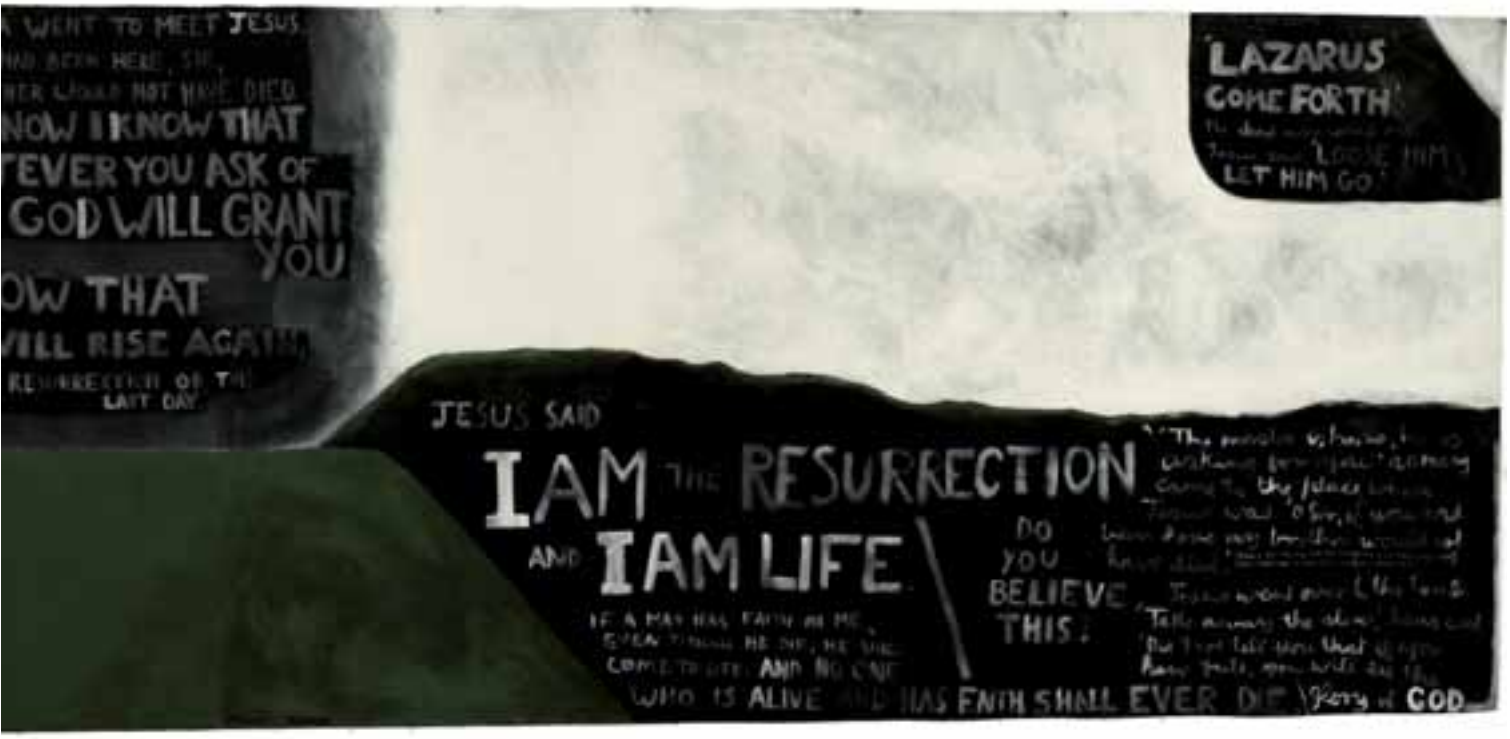
A common misunderstanding of Christian faith portrays the believer as immune from struggle with doubt. McCahon shows that nothing could be further from the truth. As a Christian artist he struggled with doubt on two fronts: on one, because his faith isolated him in a secular society; on the other, because of the intrinsic ambiguity of faith itself.

The reproach of being a Christian artist was recognised by Alexa Johnston, a close friend of McCahon's and author of one of the earliest assessments of the religious significance of his work: 'Colin McCahon's works have in recent years achieved acceptance and acclaim in the New Zealand and Australian art markets. They are high-status commodities. Yet their religious content is seldom discussed, either critically, or I imagine, around the dinner tables of their owners. ... There is a nagging suspicion that McCahon has somehow let us down by his being a great painter, yet insisting on "bringing religion into it".'[14]

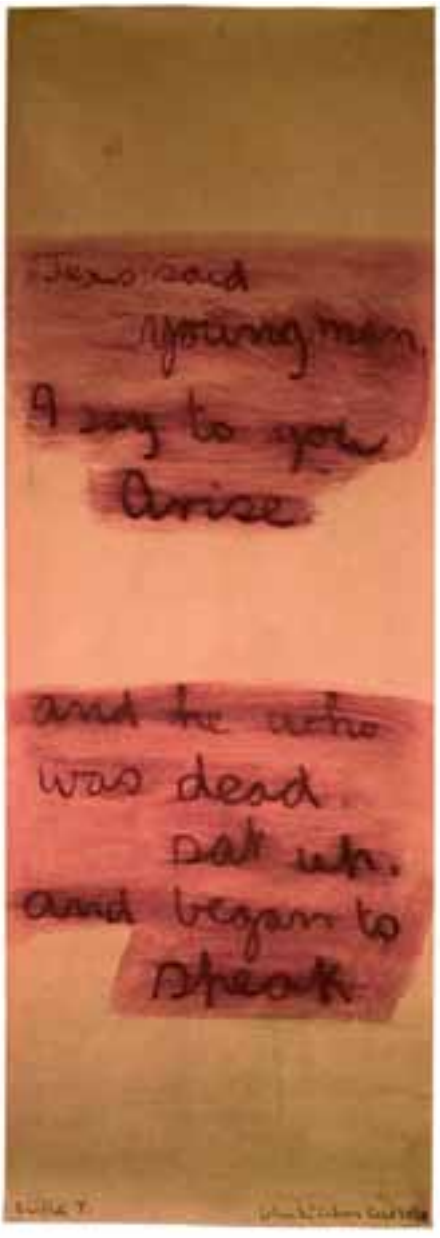
What was notable, therefore, about the 2002-2003 exhibition *Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith* was that it explicitly acknowledged the central importance of the religious dimension in McCahon's life and art. It is a mark of McCahon's greatness that he explored

Above:
Practical religion: the resurrection of Lazarus showing Mount Martha, 1969-70, Colin McCahon, acrylic on unstretched canvas, 2075 x 8070 mm. Collection Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, purchased 1985 with New Zealand Lottery Board funds and assistance from the Molly Morpeth Canaday Fund. Image reproduced courtesy of the Colin McCahon Research and Publication Trust/ Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Opposite:
Jesus said young man, I say to you arise... (*Scrolls* series), 1969, Colin McCahon, water-based crayon and wash on wallpaper stock, 1597 x 533 mm. Reproduced courtesy of Manawatu Art Gallery Collection, Palmerston North/Colin McCahon Research and Publication Trust.



My painting is almost entirely autobiographical, it tells you where I am at any given time, where I am living and the direction I am pointing in



the nature of Christian belief and the challenges it poses in an overwhelmingly secular age. In this he is without parallel among artists in the second half of the twentieth century, and invites comparison with the French Catholic artist, Georges Rouault (1871-1958), in that century's destructive first half.

McCahon's personal awareness of isolation can be seen in such works as *This day a man is* (1970), which includes the words 'Keep thyself as a pilgrim and a guest upon the earth...', a quotation from Thomas A'Kempis' early-fifteenth century devotional classic, *The Imitation of Christ* (I.23). It demonstrates his feeling of being an alien and a stranger in secular society while also locating him in the great heritage of Christian spirituality.

McCahon's interest in Maori spirituality was rekindled when his daughter Victoria married into a Maori family. *The Lark's Song* (1969) is based on a Maori poem by Matire Kereama. It flows with the liquidity of a lark's trill, like Vaughan Williams' 'The Lark Ascending'. Soaring skyward, the lark seems to symbolise McCahon's awareness of being a citizen of another world. The painting concludes with an appeal, in English, to the patron saint of birds and animals: 'Can you hear me St. Francis'.

McCahon felt that secular New Zealanders were not listening to him. He compares himself to St. Francis, who preached instead to the birds! This echoes a characteristic theme in Eastern Orthodox icons of the nativity, which show animals worshipping the incarnate Christ. 'The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.' (Isaiah 1:3).

McCahon's keen awareness of the ambiguity of faith, on the other hand, is first explored in the *Elias* series of 1959. This series is based on the conflicting comments of the observers of Jesus' crucifixion as described in the Christian Gospels. McCahon's interplay of the words 'Eli-Elias' ('My God-Elijah'), 'ever-never', reflects the differing viewpoints of the

bystanders at Jesus' crucifixion, and indeed Jesus' own intense faith-struggle, as to whether God could or would save him.

The ambiguity of faith with which McCahon grappled arises from the fact that God hides himself sufficiently to render faith both possible and virtuous—yet that very hiddenness opens up the possibility of doubt. As philosopher J P Moreland points out, 'God maintains a delicate balance between keeping his existence sufficiently evident so that people will know he's there and yet hiding his presence enough so that people who want to choose to ignore him can do it. This way, their choice of destiny is really free.'[15]

In February 1970 McCahon painted *A Question of Faith*, which recounts the dialogue of Jesus with Martha following the death of her brother Lazarus (John 11). For this and subsequent text paintings McCahon uses the New English Bible translation to address his contemporaries in everyday speech. 'I got onto reading the New English Bible and re-reading my favourite passages. I rediscovered good old Lazarus ... one of the most beautiful and puzzling stories in the New Testament. ... It hit me, BANG! at where I was: questions and answers, faith so simple and beautiful and doubts still pushing to somewhere else. It really got me down with joy and pain.'[16]

The question whether Jesus can raise the dead is both hinted at and doubted in Martha's reproachful words, 'If you had been here, Sir, my brother would not have died'. These words are repeated from the middle panel of the large eight-by-two-metre *Practical Religion: the Resurrection of Lazarus showing Mount Martha*, which McCahon finished slightly earlier (1969-70). In defiance of secularism, this painting boldly identifies 'practical religion' with our greatest existential need, the raising of the dead!

Practical Religion is contemporaneous with a little-known McCahon painting *Young Man, I Say to you Arise* (20 September 1969), in the Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North. It records the dramatic incident when Jesus interrupted a funeral procession and restored to life the son of a grieving widow from the village of Nain in Galilee (Luke 7:14-15). The text, red on a caramel background, reads:

Jesus said
'young man,
I say to you
Arise'
and he who
was dead
sat up
and began to
speak

Its shape contrasts strikingly with that of *The Dead Christ*, the gruesome painting by Hans Holbein the Younger (1521)—which so affected the Russian writer Dostoevsky when he viewed it in Basel in 1867, becoming the foil for his great representation of faith and doubt in his later novels. Where the horizontal form of Holbein's painting suggests the shape of a casket and the inexorable power of death, the vertical form of McCahon's painting emphasises Christ's power over death. The Greek word for resurrection, *anastasis*, means 'to stand upright'. In McCahon's painting you can see the young man sit up—the gap between the stanzas representing the hinge between the torso and the legs.

Unremarked by both art critics and theologians, *Practical Religion* and *Young Man, I Say to you Arise* were painted during the years when the nature and reality of the resurrection was being publicly debated throughout New Zealand. They are McCahon's contribution to the debate, contemporaneous with the affirmation of Jesus' resurrection by the Presbyterian Church and by two leading New Zealand theologians.[17]

Colin McCahon, Courtesy of McCahon family archive.

V. The Man

The Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes is the only book of philosophy in the Bible, the one book in the Bible that speaks to our modern experience of meaninglessness, the only book in the Bible in which God is silent. The biblical 'preacher'—who is both a philosopher and a prophet—speaks to the existential crisis of our hedonistic consumer culture like no other figure in ancient literature.

In his final text paintings from Ecclesiastes (1980-82) McCahon is clearly contemplating his mortality, pondering 'the emptiness of all endeavour'. He questions the justice of an existence where 'Good man and sinner fare alike' and 'one and the same fate befalls every one'. He sees 'the tears of the oppressed' and that 'there was no one to Comfort them'. He counts the dead 'happier than the living' because 'all toil and all achievement' is 'emptiness and chasing the wind'. He worries that 'The men of old are not remembered'. His resignation finds expression in the preacher's fatalism**,** that 'the sun rises and the sun goes down; back it returns to its place ... all streams run into the sea.'

By his sixtieth birthday in 1979, McCahon was a sick man: depressed, drinking heavily, increasingly paranoid about public rejection. All his life he resisted having a television in his house, but in 1983 he turned from his painting to a world portrayed on the flickering screen. In 1984 he fell victim to Korsakov's syndrome and dementia. 'Darkness had set in', says his biographer, 'blotting out his world.'[18]

Though the book *Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith* regards it as 'a matter of conjecture' whether in this final period 'McCahon lost totally any belief in a spiritual Being',[19] the exhibition *A Question of Faith* was organised on the premise that 'over the course of time ... McCahon's attitude evolved from a positive outlook, through a period of doubt, to a feeling of utter despair', and culminated ultimately in 'the collapse of his faith'.

This is too simplistic. The works on Ecclesiastes, though some are dated April and May 1982, were essentially complete by mid-1980, and drew on texts selected in 1979.[20] Other works chronologically from this last period—the three orange and black text panels *Paul to Hebrews* (February 1980), *A Painting for Uncle Frank* (1980), and even the red and black *Storm Warning* (1980-81)—are far less bleak. In them McCahon shows a firm grip on faith's paradoxes, juxtaposing awe of God and awareness of self, divine revelation and human responsibility, God's eternity and our temporality.

McCahon's increasing infirmity is evident in the *Paul to Hebrews* series, with its spelling mistake ('fourty' instead of 'forty'), and the later insertion of an omitted word ('If even ^{an} animal touches the mountain'). 'Ring the bells that still can ring,' sings Leonard Cohen. 'Forget your perfect offering / There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in.'[21] Despite the artist's weakness, in contrast to our brief lifespan and human frailty, the third panel shines with a vision of God's enduring purpose (Hebrews 1:10-12, quoting Psalm 102:25-27):

BY thee, Lord, were earth's foundations laid of old,
and the heavens are the work of thy hands.
They shall pass away; but thou endurest:
like clothes they shall all grow old;
thou shalt fold them up like a cloak;
yes, they shall be changed like any garment
But thou art the same,
and thy years shall have no end

If this be a 'collapse of faith', it shows how far secular society, with its shallow optimism, has moved from the realism of the biblical view of life, to which McCahon bore witness while his powers lasted.

Rob Yule

Reproduced with permission from 'Music in the Air', Winter 2006, Songpoetry, 15 Oriana Place, Palmerston North. ISSN 1173-8669.

1 A R D Fairburn, 'Elements', in Allen Curnow, ed., *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*. Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1960, p 149

2 McCahon treats the biblical text freely, altering 'that we may gain a heart of wisdom' to suit his theme of a gateway to a new realm of existence.

3 Murray Bail, 'I Am', in Marja Bloem and Martin Browne, *Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith*. Amsterdam, Stedilijk Museum and Nelson, Craig Potton Publishing, 2002, p 46

4 *Colin McCahon: A Survey Exhibition*. Auckland, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1972, p 26

5 Colin McCahon, Janet Paul and William McCahon quoted in Philip Matthews, 'The Prophet Motive', *New Zealand Listener* (29 May 1999), pp 36–37

6 *Colin McCahon, A Survey Exhibition*, p 26

7 'Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith' in Bloem and Browne, p 16

8 'Colin McCahon: A Note' in Bloem and Browne, p 12

9 *Colin McCahon: Artist*, Gordon Brown (revised edition). Auckland, Reed, 1993, p 109

10 Ibid., pp 22–23

11 William McCahon, 'A Letter Home' in Bloem and Browne, p 36

12 'Beginnings', *Landfall 80, Vol. 20, No. 4* (December 1966), p 361

13 *Manawatu Art Gallery Centenary Collection: Contemporary New Zealand Painting*. Palmerston North, Manawatu Art Gallery, 1971, p 11

14 Alexa M Johnston, quoted in the exhibition *Colin McCahon: Works from the collection*. Manawatu Art Gallery, 1966

15 Interviewed in Lee Strobel, *The case for faith: A journalist investigates the toughest objections to Christianity*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2000, p 189

16 Quoted by Marja Bloem, 'Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith' in Bloem and Browne, p 24

17 Helmut H Rex, *Did Jesus rise from the dead?* Auckland, Blackwood & Janet Paul, 1967; and Robert J Blaikie, *'Secular Christianity' and God who acts*. London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1970

18 Brown, p 209

19 Bloem and Browne, p 230

20 Brown, p 190

21 Leonard Cohen, 'Anthem' in his bleak album *The Future*. Stranger Music, 1992

Two exhibitions—one people

Above:
Crucifixion–the apple branch, 1950,
Colin McCahon, oil on canvas, 89 x 117cm, Purchased with funds from the Sir Otto and Lady Margaret Frankel Bequest 2004, Courtesy of the Colin McCahon Research and Publication Trust.

Above right:
Darryn George dwarfed by his mural, *Pulse*, April 2008, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu. Photographer: Andrew Clarkson.

Two shows ran recently at the Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu: Darryn George's *Pulse* and Colin McCahon's *Collection*. These two artists share a common thread in their Christian worldview. Each artist's work symbolically speaks into our changing circumstances as New Zealanders. As a prophet in his day, McCahon certainly challenged the prevailing mindsets of his audience. As a Christian, his faith played an integral part in forming those challenges. Do McCahon's questions regarding faith still ring true with 30 years' hindsight? In comparison, Darryn George is a modern-day aesthetic seer. He similarly places before us the word 'waru' and the concept of Christ as the spiritual ancestor, and exposes the inner worldview of Maori spirituality.

Recreating an experience

Pulse is a painted installation, designed by the artist and executed by a team of commercial signwriters. Darryn has taken great pains to cohesively translate Maori meetinghouse designs and personal references into the Western gallery setting. This commission is a designer's dream and the artist has clearly come up with a stunning showpiece. As far as I am aware, the work is unique as the first floor-to-ceiling painted wharenui design within the New Zealand public gallery setting. Other shows have alluded to the meetinghouse, but none have so comprehensively recreated the same sensory 'feeling' found in a meetinghouse interior.

On a cold winter's night, I stand outside Darryn George's show. Like a glowing fire, an enveloping red colour invites me in. To pass over a door threshold in a meetinghouse is to enter the poho (bosom) of the ancestor. I enter the warmth, and a heartbeat 'thump' is felt through the contrastingly bold red, black and white designs. Visual sounds reverberate in repeated patterns upon the walls. Here the ancestor's soul is living, breathing and intimately exposed.

In sensory overload, I sit on the floor in the corner of a large room. Surveying the space around me, from floor to ceiling and wall-to-wall, I am encompassed, surrounded— overwhelmed by the sheer scale of Darryn George's monumental mural designs. Slanted motifs in boxes fall like dominoes in an active clockwise direction, encircling the two side walls. These cascading shapes draw the viewer's eye around a central pole and spin me round the room. I close my eyes and am reminded of the mid 19th century diaries describing Hau Hau worshippers marching about their central niu pole. Like dynamic ancestral figures these abstract shapes chant with one another in alternating black, red and white and occasional purple and raw sienna colours.

Symbols and meanings

The central column is a structural pou-toko-manawa pillar—it holds up the roof. Here the ancestor bears the full weight of the heavens above. We his descendants shelter within his strength. Upon his black skin he wears the word 'waru'. Waru means 'eight', 'peeling' or 'scarcity' in Maori. I ponder this word for some time. Turning to the doorway—which in a meetinghouse symbolises the creation—there is a blackness, a serene stillness suspended in static, vertical lines. This wall suggests to me the pre-creation spiritual chaos of te Kore, the state of nothingness in which the supreme being *Io* existed before space and time were ever made.

I face the end wall, traditionally seen as a wall of death and resurrection in the meetinghouse. It is alive with shapes formed by positive and negative letters. These letters cryptically mask, whisper, chant and shout 'waru' at various volume levels. This word is scaled up and down, rotated and reflected, repeated over and over like a chorus line emphasising a thought and implying the theme of a song. With Darryn's deliberate references to the Maori meetinghouse, I ponder again his choice of words, and I look forward to unravelling some of his intentions later on in the evening.

With only a few minutes to spare I join Peter Crothall, the director of Chrysalis Seed, and we quickly cross over the plaza floor between the galleries to view the Colin McCahon exhibition.

Calling out a challenge

Clearly visible from Darryn's show is the iconically powerful image of *Victory over Death 2*. It intrigues me how the curatorial staff have arranged the pieces of this show. The exhibition's showpiece is positioned right at the front doorway to the gallery. The resulting effect is one of confrontation, of calling out to the public. Like a speaker starting his tauparapara on the marae atea, this large painting seems positioned to provoke dialogue with Darryn George's show *Pulse*,

Colin McCahon: *Collection* 8 March–8 June 2008
Darryn George: *Pulse* 8 March–24 August 2008
Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu

On a cold winter's night, I stand outside Darryn George's show. Like a glowing fire, an enveloping red colour invites me in

directly across the plaza floor. Their close proximity is certainly visually arresting.

Most obviously in *Victory Over Death 2*, Colin McCahon invokes the Tetragrammaton (the name of God). This name 'I AM' challenges us as his audience to respond to Christ's daring claim to the Jews that he is God in human flesh. The two-metre-high letters stand out powerfully against a subtly modulated black background. Words in raw cursive brush strokes fill negative spaces between the carefully composed and tonally bright monumental letterforms.

On closer examination, as our eyes adjust to the tonal contrasts, a mute black word forms on the left hand side of the painting. It asks the enigmatic question 'AM I?' Clearly, McCahon is adding a second statement to his first. Going back to the texts that McCahon is drawing from (John chapters 8-17), we see the attitudes of the crowds changing from adulation and celebration to resentment and anger. Again and again they abandon their miracle-working Messiah as he reveals his identity. Christ confronts their hidden motivations, and he offers his imminent death at their hands and his final resurrection as proof of his divinity.

Questions and interpretations

In the question 'AM I?' we see the artist placing both himself and us, his audience, firmly amongst the crowd of doubters who will soon kill the Christ. This is an important alignment and now we understand the relevance of this confession in the Christian faith. He not only owns their doubts, but he also owns their actions. We are invited to own our place amongst the crowd. In this sense his 'AM I?' becomes an invitation for us to join the artist in his journey of faith.

McCahon is a master of catharsis, and he uses these same themes to expose his anger at being misunderstood by the general public. If 'I AM' is his own statement of intent, then 'AM I' is his rhetorical answer/question, expressing sadness to his antagonists. Just as McCahon was misunderstood by the critics of his day, he can still be misrepresented. This is seen whenever secular historians project their own faith-less rationalisation of what Colin McCahon's Christianity actually means.

Our own internal belief systems create filters that determine our perceptions and our interpretations of the world around us. This is never seen more strongly than in *I applied my mind…* A liberal nihilist like Lloyd Geering delights in projecting his own hopelessness onto this painting. This painting becomes his testament that McCahon must have died a faithless sceptic. Such opponents to faith forget the fact that this painting is quoted directly from the bible, and that all such scriptural passages are equally and unashamedly embraced as normal and valid expressions in a believer's journey.

Focusing on faith

Moving quickly on through the show, I become aware of the artist's physical facility with paint—the rawness of his gestural marks on canvas and board, his empathy for each medium. I especially love his watercolour crayon works on wallpaper, which I have never physically seen before. And I also note the singularity of his statements, the power of his metaphors, his playful spontaneity, and the fact that he seems to perform to an inner audience.

Coming to the end of this selection of paintings is *Crucifixion–the apple branch*. As an artist with a

View of *Pulse*, 2008, by Darryn George,
at Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu.

growing family, I find this last painting particularly relevant and touching. McCahon shares with us his inability to provide for his family. A bubble transports his wife and son across times zones and landscapes to share the same pictorial space. We see Colin earning a living in a Canterbury landscape. His wife Anne stands beside a Nelson orchard apple tree. She anxiously looks on at their uncertain future. On the right is Colin's son William, who stares out to the audience. McCahon, as the husband and patriarch of his family, draws his wife's attention (and us as his viewers) across time and distance. We focus serenely on the God-man hanging upon a cross. His son remains unaffected by the doubts and uncertainties around him, resting securely in his parent's faith.

This sensitive painting exposes the financial insecurities of the artist's home-life. It is a real scenario played out again and again in the relationships of individual artists and their families throughout this country. In my experience, those who make their own journey of faith find this burden much easier to bear. This is something that McCahon clearly understands, for here we see his family's needs rooted and rested in a Christ-centred order.

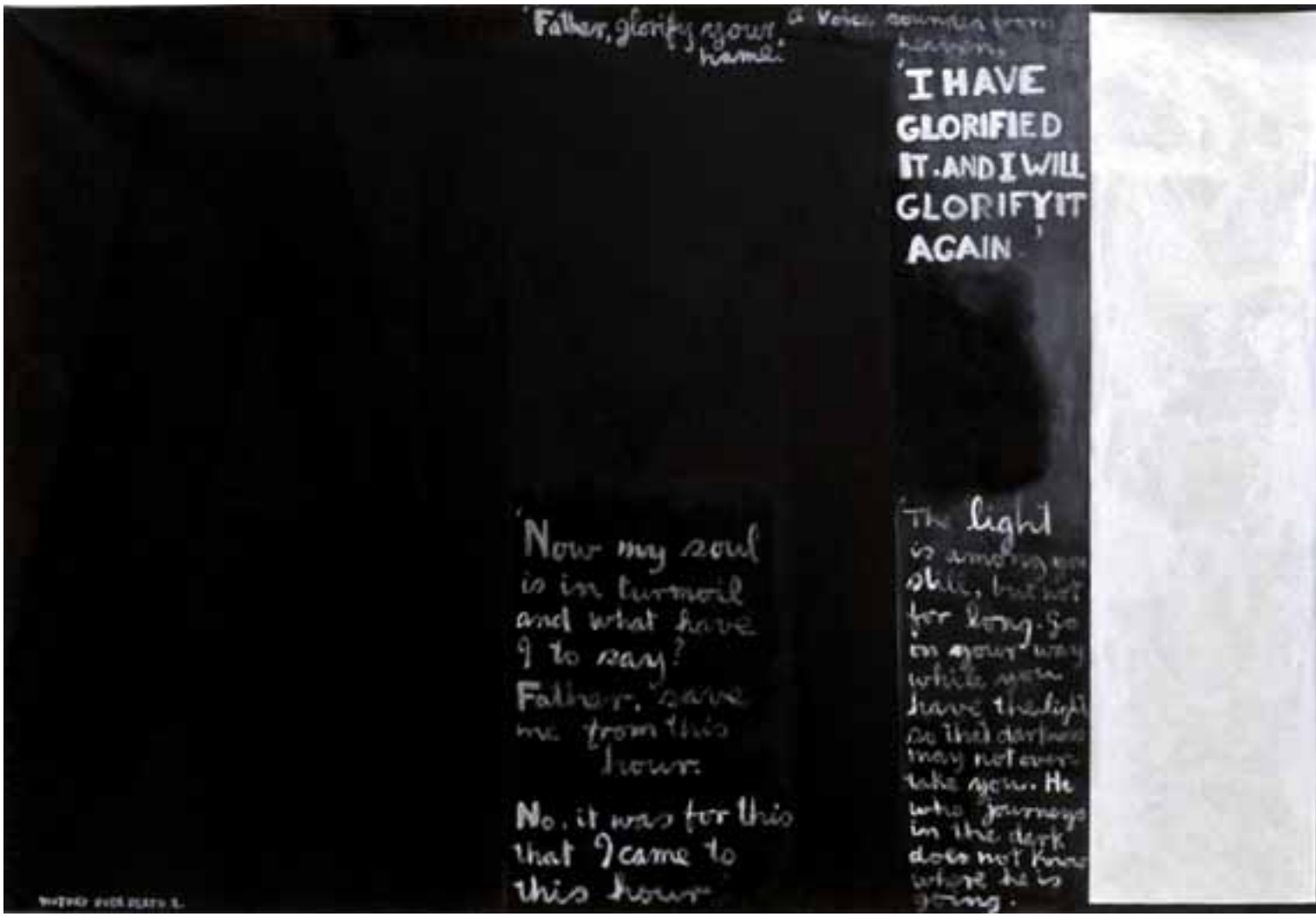
Metaphors explained

At closing time the security guards gather Peter and myself to the front door. We leave the building and head on back to the Crothall house, waxing lyrical on the work we've seen. Later that evening I drop in to Darryn George's home for dinner, to talk to the artist about his work and to ask questions about his installation. Adding to my first observations about *Pulse*, I learn from Darryn that the central pillar, the pou-toko-manawa, is his reference to Christ. So Christ becomes the ancestor who shelters, protects and provides for his descendent children. I also learn that the leaning motifs on the side walls are actually books leaning upon shelves. This is Darryn's reference to knowledge. He points me to his MDF bookshelf in his living room—books have become Darryn's teachers. Other than long treks back to ancestral homes, urban Maori like Darryn increasingly access their culture through literature.

In answer to my question about the word 'waru', Darryn tells me the number eight is his symbol of new beginnings. He rattles off three examples: the world was created in seven days, but the eighth day was its actual beginning. The ark brought eight people into a new world era. Christ himself rose again on the eighth day, initiating a new spiritual era. I now understand his metaphor, and ponder it further.

Joining the dialogue

The next day, I visit the shows again—taking some time to reflect on each one. There appears to be a dialogue between George and McCahon that we are invited to join.



Victory over death 2, 1970, Colin McCahon, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 207.5 x 597.7cm, gift of the New Zealand Government 1978, courtesy of the Colin McCahon Research and Publication Trust.

Having contemplated Darryn George's word *waru*, I can't help but think of this year—2008—and the present economic challenges facing global markets. The arts as a luxury commodity are certainly one of the earlier industries to suffer in recessions. This year may very well be a year of new beginnings, but perhaps those beginnings will involve a different season of *waru*, as 'peelings' or 'scraps' for us as artists. In his *Crucifixion–the apple branch* (1950), Colin McCahon very intimately shows us where we can find provision and respite.

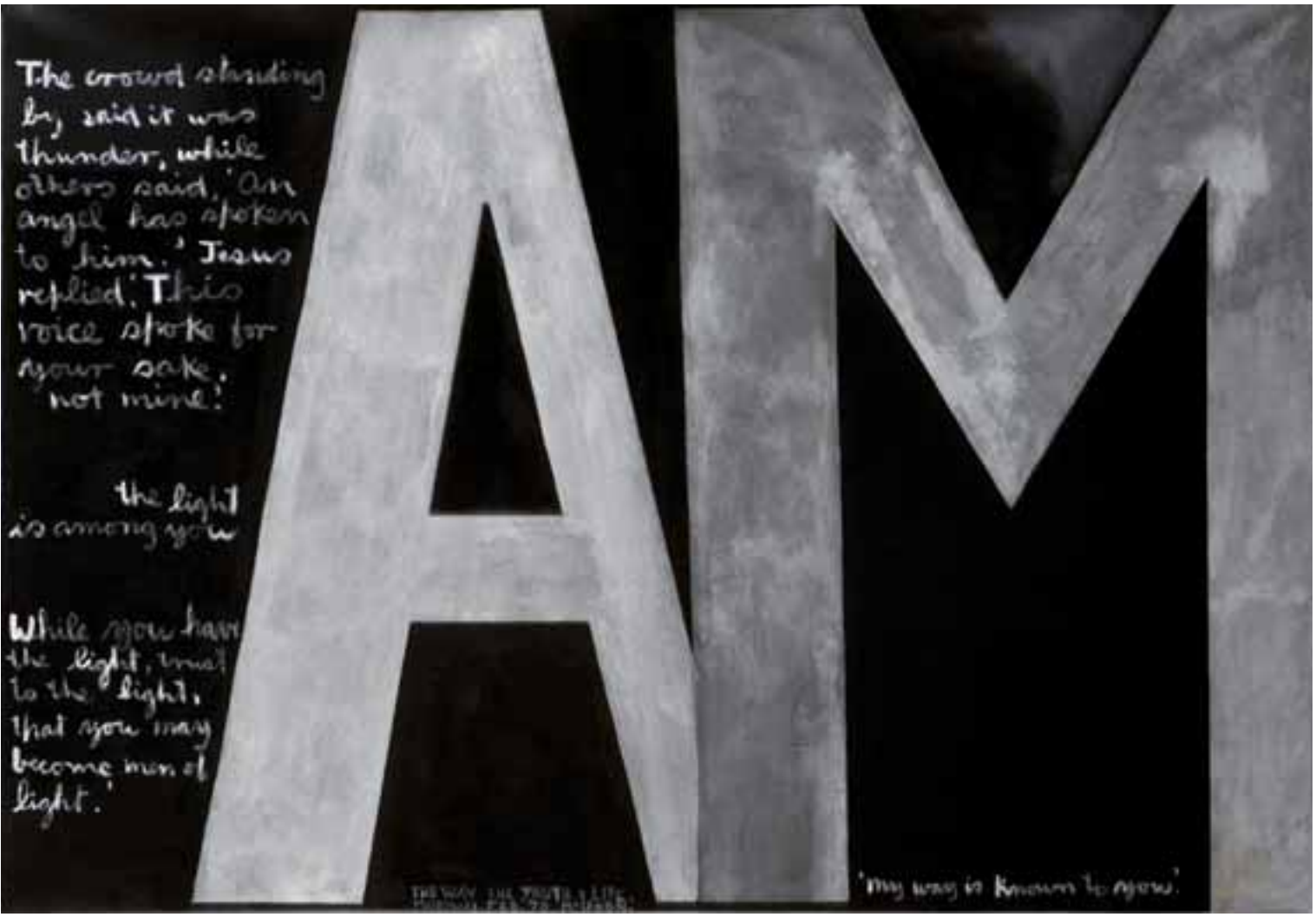
McCahon stands upon his *tauparapara* to project his prophetic voice across the courtyard of time into our day. The issue he raised in the 1970s was our profound need to engage with Christ's claim to divine rights over our lives. Today as a society we seem far less consciously intimidated by McCahon's statements. Perhaps this is because we have simply adjusted the meaning of his words, and therefore we can choose to ignore his intentions. Certainly postmodern thought, with its accession to the concept of relative truth, gives ample room to them. But then again, its conscious rejection of any cohesive system of moral absolutes disengages the responsibility of meaningful dialogue. This is one of the greatest challenges facing contemporary thought, and in this sense McCahon's theologically offensive *Victory over Death 2* remains just as provocatively relevant today as when it was first exhibited 38 years ago.

Darryn George is a bicultural educator, who draws our attention to an alternative, less visible worldview within the heart of this nation. Maori perceptions are something that a substantial percentage of this country has only limited access to. Ever since the first missionary voice dismissed Maori spirituality as purely occultic, Maori have closely guarded their inner world from the critical eyes of the undiscerning. This exhibition by George is one of those rare opportunities for the general public to enter this inner world.

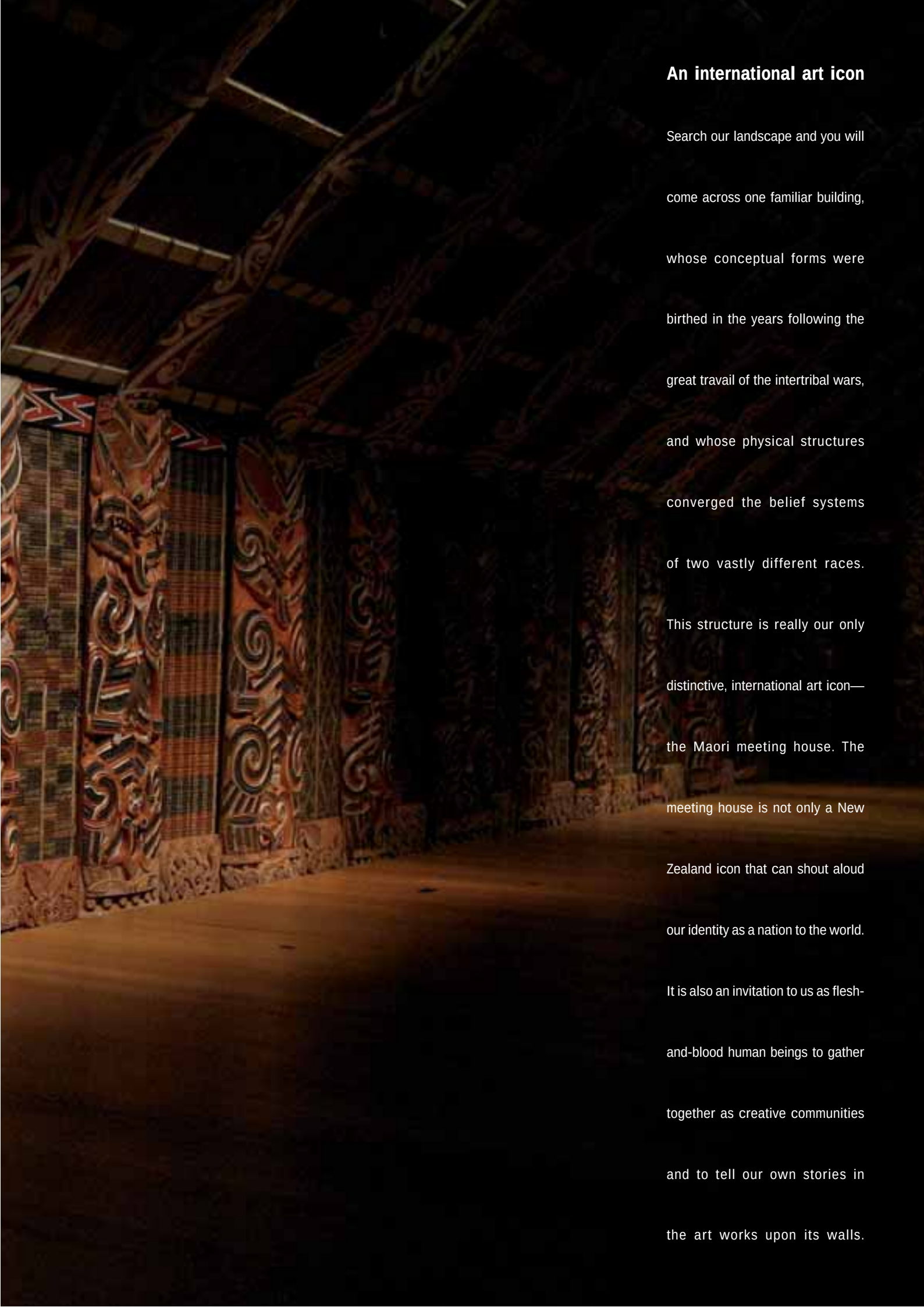
George is also one of a new generation of bicultural artists who offers us a solution to the challenges facing disparate tribes and races in the urban environs of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Though his use of Christ as the spiritual ancestor may only have been intended as a personal statement expressing identity, it has tremendous breadth of application for uniting communities beyond their own tribal and ethnic origins. It is this one aspect of Darryn's show that I hope will be taken up by other artists again and again around this country. May the legacy of this show endure long after this installation is painted over and returned to blank gallery walls.

The Colin McCahon *Collection* exhibition was toured by the National Gallery of Australia.

Anaru/Andrew Panoho




Reinventing a New Zealand icon



An international art icon

Search our landscape and you will come across one familiar building, whose conceptual forms were birthed in the years following the great travail of the intertribal wars, and whose physical structures converged the belief systems of two vastly different races. This structure is really our only distinctive, international art icon—the Maori meeting house. The meeting house is not only a New Zealand icon that can shout aloud our identity as a nation to the world. It is also an invitation to us as flesh-and-blood human beings to gather together as creative communities and to tell our own stories in the art works upon its walls.

Historic origins

Like a monument to suffering, the meeting house emerged in the 1830s. For fifteen years previously Maori had endured the worst excesses of their own worldview. Out of a population of seventy thousand, at least twenty thousand had been killed by warring *iwi*. And now, unable to find hope beyond their own reciprocating laws of *utu* (payment), Maori became open to other beliefs.

Into this vulnerable setting came the missionary. Like a harvester amongst fields of ripe wheat, the missionary reaped the hopes of a spiritually broken people. Released war slaves returned as Christian evangelists, going before the missionary, sowing the seeds of the gospel message. In a wave of spiritual fervour, over fifty percent of this nation turned to the God of the bible.

In many ways, the belief system of Christianity has played an indirect yet inseparable role inspiring the development of the Maori meeting house. The early missionary crusades provided the impetus to build larger accommodation to minister to Maori congregations. Te Kooti's Ringatu improvisations helped define a 'biblical' Maori identity. Wiremu Raatana's use of teaching symbols helped to convey the gospel message. The concept of the meeting house, then, is a post-European invention by Maori. It was created as a statement of identity to meet the needs of communities in their rapidly changing world. With its creative arts and associated cultural patterns, it evolved from a combination of sources: the chief's house, the communal guesthouse and the European church.

Institutional Christianity's response

On the other hand, the institutional church has had an on/off love affair with the Maori arts. Early missionaries feared its symbolic language, something that they never learnt to read. As cultural illiterates, they didn't understand how to separate the iconographic forms of *whakairo* (carving), *tukutuku* (latticework) and *kowhaiwhai* (rafter painting) from the content that those forms represented. Such shallow discernment shipwrecked their possibility of navigating the traditional use of iconographic forms in communicating Christ's work at the cross.

The missionary-encouraged arts became increasingly decorative and devoid of thematic content. For example, in the church that the Reverend William Williams oversaw in Manutuke in 1849, carvers under Raharuhi Rukupo were halted from their work because Williams objected to the content of ancestral figures in the carvings. Instead of providing alternative themes associated with a Christian house of worship, he opted for a decorative format of non-figurative *manaia*, thus missing out on the opportunity of spiritual and cultural integration.

Divergence of traditional art and Christian faith

It was at this point that Maori continued using traditional art themes in their meeting house designs and did not investigate the new belief system of Christianity in them. For Maori Christians, a dichotomy of thought began and remains to this day, where their beliefs as Christians are separated from their traditional use of the arts of the meeting house.

It is no wonder that, after two hundred years of Christianity in Maoridom, there is presently a reversion back to an anti-Christian spirituality rather than their own Christian/Maori integration. As a postgraduate student reading this history, I remember asking myself, 'How could the church in New Zealand have better managed its stewardship of Maori creativity?' and 'What themes could now be used to better articulate the Christian faith?'

Interpreting the meeting house

Meeting houses can be 'interpreted' at several different levels. The first level is genealogical—linking the present community to the ancestor of the tribe. The second is mythical or cosmological—linking the community to the greater cosmos around it. A third, 'modern' level introduces the Western concept of linear time. This modern invention breaks away from 'the eternal now' Polynesian understanding of time, and anchors people into specific events, spaces and times as measurable history.

Previous spread:
Interior view (looking towards the rear) of Hotunui, a carved meeting house built in 1878 for the Ngati Maru people, Thames, New Zealand, by carvers from the Ngati Awa tribe of Whakatane, as a wedding present when Mereana Mokomoko, a Ngati Awa woman, married Wirope Hoterene Taipari, a Ngati Maru leader. The house has been in the Auckland War Memorial Museum since about 1920.

The walls are decorated by poupou (wall posts) depicting ancestors. The carvings are flanked by decorative tukutuku panels. The rafters are decorated in swirling white, red, and black kowhaiwhai designs.

This page:
View of Maori women and children seated outside the Owhata meeting house, Rotorua. Photographer: James Cowan. Courtesy of the Cowan Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Ref: PAColl-3033-1-21.

Opposite page from top to bottom:
A group standing outside the meeting house at Maketu Pa, Bay of Plenty. Maori carvings and rafter patterns can be seen on the front of the house. Photographer: H W Scheltus. Courtesy Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Ref: 1/2-139855-F.

The Rev Thomas Kendall and the Maori chiefs Hongi and Waikato, 1820, James Barry, oil on canvas, 720 x 920mm. Courtesy Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Ref: G-618.

Tane nui a rangi *kuaha* (doorway). Auckland University Wharenui designed by Master carver Paki Harrison. Photographer: Anaru/Andrew Panoho.

Anthropomorphism and the body of Christ

To quote master carver Paki Harrison's thoughts regarding the anthropomorphic symbolism of the Maori meeting house:

'The meeting house (*whare whakairo*) is conceptualised metaphorically as a human body representing the founding ancestor of a tribe at the apex of the gable; attached to the *tahuhu* or ridgepole is the *koruru* (head). The *maihi* (barge boards) are the arms, outstretched to welcome guests. The *tahuhu* is the backbone and the *heke* (rafters) are the ribs. People in the house are protected in the bosom of their ancestors: thus we have names like *Te Poho o Rawhiri* (The Bosom of David) and *Te Poho o Hinepare* (The Bosom of Hinepare.) The porch is termed the *roro* (brain.) The *kuwaha* (mouth) or door is the symbolic entry where the physical and the spiritual realms come together. The window becomes the eye (*matapihi*) and the interior the womb (*koopu*).

'The *poupou* (carved posts), which depict notable descendants from the founding ancestor ... reinforce the spiritual unity with human forbears right back to the beginning ... this visualisation of the house as the body of an ancestor (male or female) brings together its individual members into a united organism sharing a life and heritage.'[1]

In my dissertation *Te Poho O Ihu Karaiti—A Thematic Alternative*, the 'thematic alternative' that I suggested was to transpose the body of Jesus Christ onto the anthropomorphic forms of the meeting house. Christ now became the ancestor of the gathered community. This single concept held so many implications. It not only embraced Maori *iwi* from diverse genealogical and dislocated geographical backgrounds, but it also embraced other races, cultures and creeds. In our modern complex and dysfunctional urban communities, Christ's disarming love, as the uniting head of mankind, has the power to remove barriers and unite communities all over this country.

Cosmology

Adding to Paki's thoughts, there are other direct and indirect insights that can be gleaned from the meeting house. At a cosmological level, the entry wall is seen as the wall of creation and birth. Christ becomes the first wall of creation, through whom the gathered are given life. The end wall is seen as the wall of death. Christ becomes the wall of death, for he is the 'resurrection and life' through whom the gathered will one day pass.

Transitory states occur when moving between different positions in the meeting house. The doorway for example, is a *tapu* threshold where the *pare* (carved lintel) removes harmful *tapu* from those entering the meeting house. Christ becomes the doorway to God the Father, removing our offences and allowing the gathered community unimpeded access into His presence.

Linear and cyclic time

The side walls discuss the journeys of the ancestors who have already walked the path of life. On the linear time level as well as the genealogical one, Christ becomes incarnate man intermingling his work with the gathered saints as their lives become meaningful stories of his resurrected power.

Continuing on: The *tahuhu* (ridgepole) *kowhaiwhai* pattern repetitions link the present generation to that of the ancestor, and the *heke* (rafter) *kowhaiwhai* repetitions indicate the number of generations linking the *pou* ancestors to the founding *tahuhu* ancestor. Christ becomes the first and the last, the beginning and the end. He transcends and telescopes linear time into the cyclic, eternal now. The past and the future are brought into the present reality—Christ embodied in the gathered community.

Uniting worldviews

Because of the intermingling concepts of time, the meeting house can be viewed as a symbolic meeting place of differing worldviews united into one. The concepts of cyclic and linear time, though they come from opposing cultural polarities, are each found in both the Hebrew and Greek scriptures. Maori read their bibles perceiving its cyclic qualities, whilst Europeans read theirs emphasising its linear qualities.

Like a two-way street, symbols from these two different cultures can convey parallel meanings. For example: Europeans, in their journey with Christianity, have used the concept of an upside-down ship to describe the interior of their Cathedral buildings (European church bodies are called the *nave*, meaning 'ship' in Latin). The same metaphor is also used for the meeting house, which has been referred to as the *waka*, or the canoe. Both speak of communal rowers/paddlers whose united energies propel their vessel forwards. Both speak of a challenging journey across turbulent waves in the seas of life.

A teaching tool

Like the medieval cathedrals of Europe, the meeting house has been an illustrative teaching tool. A modern-day spectator can be guided step by step through its art forms and educated regarding the tales of heroes from the past. As our society fragments further and further into a confusing fantasy world of disconnected cyberspace, we need tangible guides to tell their stories. We need flesh and blood people, who can physically walk with us demonstrating the realities of Christ's kingdom around us.

As far as I am aware, the concept of the meeting house as the metaphorical embodiment of Christ had never been proposed before. Yet the logic of it seemed sublime. It was almost as if the meeting house had been sitting like a blank canvas beneath a tarpaulin, awaiting its day. When its time had come, the tarpaulin would be removed and a generation of modern artists would start painting its surfaces with their own incredible tales of life and faith.

The theme of Christ as the ancestor is just one example of how the modern New Zealand community can respond to the incredible cultural resources that are available in this country. With creative integrity and intelligence, let us investigate, celebrate and express our identities as a 'gathered' community drawn from different races to this land. And as we do, may we use these resources wisely.

Anaru/Andrew Panoho

1 Harrison, Paki, *Tane-Nui-A-Rangi*, (1988) Auckland: Auckland University Press

Where treasure is

An interview with Anne Fountain

Anne Fountain. Photographer: Andrew Clarkson.

Anne Fountain, an accomplished artist approaching her seventieth birthday, has learnt to deal with significant health problems. These challenges have sharpened her focus: causing her to assess her priorities in life, deepening her faith, and enabling an acceptance of self. Calling on God in times of need deepened Anne's personal relationship with Him, allowing spiritual and emotional healing.

Anne experienced a series of transient ischemic attacks (TIAs, or 'mini strokes') over a one-month period in 2003. Hospitalisation left her confused and feeling unwell. Symptoms of nausea continued and were followed four months later with a diagnosis of Parkinson's disease. 'I initially thought, "I have got to make the most of my painting time". The shaking seems to have predominantly affected the left side; I am right-handed and therefore my painting has not been limited as yet. My writing style has been affected dramatically—the sense of frustration is huge.

'Shortly after diagnosis, I found I also had cataracts. I was lucky enough to be able to have these treated and then receive laser therapy, achieving twenty-twenty vision— only to be diagnosed with Glaucoma (degenerative sight loss).' This was too much for Anne to be able to understand at a conscious level. She had to lean firmly on her faith, taking great comfort in scripture: the Psalms being particular favourites.

Most attempts to do things resulted in Anne feeling overwhelmed as she worried about further TIAs and nausea. 'Stress caused uncalled-for anxiety: others' emotions, energy, anything could tax me. I absorbed it more. That was worse than the Parkinson's. When I get one of these waves I do an internal scream—"Help, Lord!"—and I can imagine him coming close and I feel closer to God.'

Considering your health issues, how do you emotionally protect or take care of yourself?

'I have a spiritual director, a person that I can unload to. I have high moments like reading and really believing Psalm 139: God knows what I'm doing, who

I am. Verse 7 Psalm 140, "O Sovereign Lord, strong deliverer, who shields my head in the day of battle": guard your mind. I think this verse can also relate to our own minds, negative thoughts, ruminating over things that get under your skin. I have found great comfort in knowing that God loves us the way we are. A spiritual formation group I attend has been wonderful. I have realised how introverted I am, having tried for most of my life to be an extravert. Accepting myself as I am, a contemplative person, has been very healing.'

How does being a contemplative person affect your work or assist you with it?

'I guess with the whole contemplative thing, the truth can be veiled. I do often put messages in my work that are metaphorically veiled. I like to think that there is something worth finding in the work; the truth is there, but not easy to see.' Deeper meanings have been consistently inherent within her work from *Find Gold ... find nothing* (1997) to *Tea Bee* (2002) and works from her *Rust and Moth* series (2007).

What is it about sight and blindness that interests you as a subject matter?

'A lot of people think they know things—I am meaning on a spiritual or emotional level—and often they don't. Others have wisdom and knowing. It reminds me of the Scribes and the Pharisees: Religion over relationship. The Pharisees were concerned with the law. They didn't think about the practical fact that their mother needed money, and they could have helped, for instance.'

I find the Lewis chessmen that have long been your subject matter have quite bold personalities attributed to them. They appear to be used to carry messages beyond their identity as chess pieces. How important is the relationship between the figures? Does this have a reference to your own life?

'I don't think I have any kind of identity thing with them, but sometimes I can be the queen. As in *Queen, Moth and Rust* (2006–2007)—the queen has her hand to her mouth in shock and horror of money disappearing. I can relate personally with the current economic climate, with large finance companies or corporations falling over bankrupt. People pursue wealth—what a waste of time, it is not safe.'

Right:
Queen, Moth and Rust, 2006–2007, Anne Fountain, Mixed media on board, 440 x 440mm.

Far right:
In Heavenly Armour, 2006–2007, Anne Fountain, Mixed media on board, 440 x 440mm.

Your latest series, *Rust and Moth*, refers to processes of slow destruction. What ideas inspired this series—what are you wanting to communicate to your audience?

'The business behind trying to store up treasures, or the preoccupation with being hedonistic. If you are focused on this aim, you are probably, eventually, going to be disappointed. "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be" [Matthew 7:7, the Bible]. Is your treasure on earth or in the Kingdom? What are your goals in life? I don't want to be condemning of others. God has given us pleasures to enjoy, he gifts us with amazing things; but they are not my aim in life.'

It is unusual to see such playfulness and a quirky sense of humour running alongside, and perhaps juxtaposing, deeper meanings. Is this purposeful?

'Yes—life can be difficult and unfunny, so to bring some humour in takes the sting out of the tail. As with *Hot Water Bottles* [two naked figures standing front-on with hot-water bottles covering their genitals]: this is just playfulness aimed at giving people a laugh. It was inspired by a quote by George Mikes from *How to be an Alien*, "Continentals have sex lives like the English have hot water bottles."'

What series of work are you most happy with, and why?

'Probably the *Moth and Rust* series, because the message was strong, but not in-your-face. Making the tin go rusty—leaving it under a shrub over winter—was fun. I enjoyed the assemblage and found it successful. I am pleased with the different textures—the matt black against the wax or shiny paint. There is nothing sweet about them; quite in contrast to my *Seasons* series, they just work. In fact, I feel they were so successful I don't know where I am going now. I realise now, as I have got older, I am more sensitive to others' emotions, others' opinions. Feeling I have used up all my ideas adds to this uncertainty. The Lord has changed me and continues to do so. Healing the body is less important to me than healing the inner soul and spirit. Coming into closer relationship with Jesus and my heavenly Father, I crave quietness and solitude, God's presence.'

Janet Joyce

The promised land

Living in Aotearoa/New Zealand, even in the cities, the land is never far away. The Southern Alps dominate the horizon in Christchurch, the bush, gulf, and island define Auckland, and the harbour and hills surround Dunedin and Wellington. Traditionally much of our art has been a response to the physical environment. The physical design and concept of our national museum *Te Papa* reflects both Maori and Pakeha traditions (Murray Rae discusses this in *CS Arts issue 23—January 2006*, pp 10-11). The early Pakeha artists described and responded to the land directly. Maori traditions explored the underlying powers. Maori spirituality and therefore art is closer to a biblical worldview than a modern secular perspective.

The book of beginnings describes the Creator God making the entire cosmos. As each part of the world was spoken into being, the writer says, 'it was good'. The New Testament affirms that Jesus is the Lord of all the earth. He holds all things together. A worldview that includes these articles of faith gives the Christian artist a mandate to engage with the whole world. This means that any topic or style can be explored. There is no limit to the materials or concepts that can be used. Every level of reality is interrelated. Therefore the Christian artist should reflect that in how he/she develops her professional practice.

Claire Beynon, Sue Cooke and Jessica Crothall all engage with the physical environment in their art. This pursuit is about seeing the land as a springboard for fresh ideas and innovative aesthetics, rather than producing a descriptive record. The landscape becomes a framework for exploring the artistic medium. Implicitly the non-physical world is alluded to. The simplified tones and shapes of Fiordland are a doorway to the spiritual in Claire Beynon's canvases.

In Genesis 1, man and woman are presented as the caretakers of the world. Both development and conservation are implied in these verses. Both Sue Cooke and Claire Beynon developed recent works out of personal visits to areas of special environmental interest and fragility: the Antarctic and Fiordland. The silent bush and the melting ice in their art allude to this caretaking in the context of global warming. Claire mentioned how surprised she was to find the silence and lack of native birds in the heavily bushed areas of Fiordland. She was on a special visit to the Sounds on board the *Breaksea Girl*, alluded to in some of her paintings.

Jessica Crothall's use of simplified compositions, vibrant colour and varied texture reflect and allude to the presence of the creator and the reality of the unseen supernatural world. Her dynamic markmaking can be seen as a textural metaphor for the act of creation: both human and divine.

These works responding to the land are neither 'religious' nor 'biblical' in content. All these artists celebrate the wonder of the physical environment in which we live. They remind us of the need to take better care of these landscapes. Christian art is not confined to a narrow religious iconography. The faith of these artists connects with their artmaking at a deeper level. It reflects a worldview that affirms Jesus is Lord of all the earth and all that is within.

Peter Crothall

The promised land,
1948, Colin McCahon, oil on canvas, 920 x 1370mm,
Collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki,
Presented by the McCahon Family, 1988.
Courtesy Colin McCahon Research and Publication Trust.

Fathom
Claire Beynon

5–23 March 2008
The Arthouse, Christchurch

A week in Western Fiordland as part of a group artist residency aboard *Breaksea Girl*, a conservation yacht, gave rise to Claire Beynon's recent exhibition *Fathom*. The works continue themes previously explored by Beynon, with remote and predominantly untouched landscape as the content to hold the concepts of conservation and man's presence and purpose upon land and sea.

Ideas reveal themselves to the viewer through visually strong and complex works. Signifiers abound in the artistic expression of land, sea and sky, with a spiritual presence pervading. They continue the themes of her 2006 response to an Antarctic residency,[1] posing questions of human presence, relevance and responsibility within relationship to these elements of existence.

Fierce was the wild billow, dark was the night—prow to the storm is one example. This large monochromatic work captures (ironically) a moment of a dramatic, uncontrollable storm. Freezing time, the artist allows for the act or experience of looking into, steering through the storm. This seems to be metaphorical while remaining literal. The sweeping lines and dynamic energy clearly express the intensity, the monumental power of the climatic conditions. In contrast, the precise design of *Breaksea Girl*'s skeletal frame, etched into the covering glass and positioned low in the picture, grounds the sense of landscape. A three-quarter dominance of sky scene, erupted in storm, gives a stratosphere-like stillness to the top quarter of the work; another layer.

In *Fathom* the works have a balanced ease, combining a variety of modes and mediums. In the oil-on-canvas *Your dark waters—Camelot River* (2007/8), a creamy painted line cuts horizontally through the work, merging with the gallery wall, initially causing me to think I was looking at a diptych. It's a powerfully beautiful piece. Earthy mustard and golden hues and moss-green palette-knife-smeared pigment rest eloquently over brushed intense dark blue, giving a feeling of age and depth— perhaps beyond measure— to the represented water. Stunning in its simplicity, a snapshot of the ever-changing natural elements, this piece again works as metaphor; the reverence for the magnificence and mystery of nature references faith in, and appreciation of, the Creator.

A large work of combined sample drawings of Fiordland's wilderness sits alone, showing an observational journaling of the enterprise. It's further evidence of the prolific work ethic and the experimental nature of Beynon's art practice. The exhibition is skillfully curated, with the sectioned gallery space giving visual room to appreciate differing modes and styles used by Beynon. Poignantly, etched into the covering glass over seven pastel-on-paper works, a poem is revealed. It works with the images to articulate the experience shared by Beynon and her colleagues on *Breaksea Girl*.

Janet Joyce

1 *not EMPTY not SILENT not WHITE,* The Arthouse, 25 July–13 August 2006. See our review in *CS Arts* issue 26, pp 14–15

Your dark waters - Camelot River, 2007/8, Claire Beynon, oil on canvas, 1020 X 1520mm.

Landworks: a personal response

I live and breathe in God's own land. Stepping into Jessica Crothall's exhibition I felt a mutual appreciation of its beauty. Large painterly landscapes surround and call to me, taking me to those places, connecting me with my maker.

But the painted mark throws me. I am in a place of contemplation, awe, and peace, but then the rugged mark stirs up the land. It radiates energy, life, action, even creates turmoil. I feel how the mark was applied—pure, unhindered, honest, bearing all against the white canvas as one bares their soul at the cross.

I have suffered. I know the balance of pain and peace. Each painting is of a different time and place, a different time and pain. I have felt alive on the cliffs, looking out over the Pancake Rocks. I have been in the cave at Truman Bay, hiding in the depths. God has still always managed to find me there.

Then I feel the progression. The next two rooms are a forest of windswept and tangled trees that go deeper, using the power of colour to heal and challenge me. Each work is a specific and necessary part of the journey. A second layer of paint adds meaning: was there conflict with the spirit, a time of loss? Monochromatic blue lets me sink into my thoughts; I can stay with this one a while. Blood red recalls Christ's sacrifice, but also the worst pain in my life. I cannot *be* with this colour now, maybe later. I move on.

Then I feel a shift into realisation with the black-and-white works. Away from colour I am not stressed but empty, just *being*. Here I see the significance of light and darkness. The trials and joys at the end of it all. But that mark pulls over the canvas again, merging into shades of grey. I am still growing, still learning, still healing.

Mieke Scoggins

Landworks Jessica Crothall

2–26 April 2008, Refinery Artspace, Nelson

It is good to see good abstract painting.

Landworks, a recent exhibition by Jessica Crothall at the Refinery Gallery in Nelson demonstrates the power of abstract painting, reviving lively debate about the importance of the painted surface and other aesthetic myths. Large canvases punctuate the open interior spaces of the whitewashed gallery walls; they impress a sense of solidity and structure by which to navigate each space. Pink here, blue there: each canvas draws you into its visceral grip and holds you for a moment … before its trickery begins to unravel.

By trickery, I mean the way in which each painting captures a viewer somewhere between the surface of the picture plane and the subject of the painting. In other words, each title of Crothall's works provides a framework of approach: landscape (*Truman Bay, Pancake Rocks*) or tree imagery (*Coastal Trees 1, Wind Swept Tree Black* or *Red*). However, just as quickly as you gain some understanding, you are broken away from any subject-reference by the mark-making and abstraction process. You become caught in the rhythms and intricacies of the surface. This play between subject and abstraction raises a question: if these works were untitled, would there be more success in appreciating the surface qualities as the main concern? Or, if they were *not* abstracted, would the subject be more persuasive?

Whatever the case, it is sure that they do sit somewhat uncomfortably on the threshold, holding a space in-between representation and abstraction. But this is precisely what makes the work so interesting: they are of the surface, and of the subject, but never exclusively one or the other. Being pulled one way then the other between surface and subject produces a tension that benefits her works, avoiding one-off readings—despite their titles.

Crothall's painting process is one of pushing paint around. Through her discovery of the usefulness of old, hardened brushes plus the addition of quick-drying medium to her paint, she is able to produce a variety of marks and effects. In fact, intrinsic to this approach is that as much as paint is pushed around, paint is removed, revealing the primed canvas as negative shapes and spaces. The overall effect is an energetic play of textures and colours that hold the viewer in each vibrant composition. The eye cannot pause on any particular aspect, but seeks to take in the work as a whole. The resulting 'blur' when looking at the whole of a painting, while at the same time trying to *not* look at any detail in particular, is when the essential rhythms and movements are revealed. In this state the power of these abstract works is most fully realised, the viewer is pushed and pulled around the canvas, as much as Crothall's paint has been, in a dance of movement in and out of the dominant flows of mark-making.

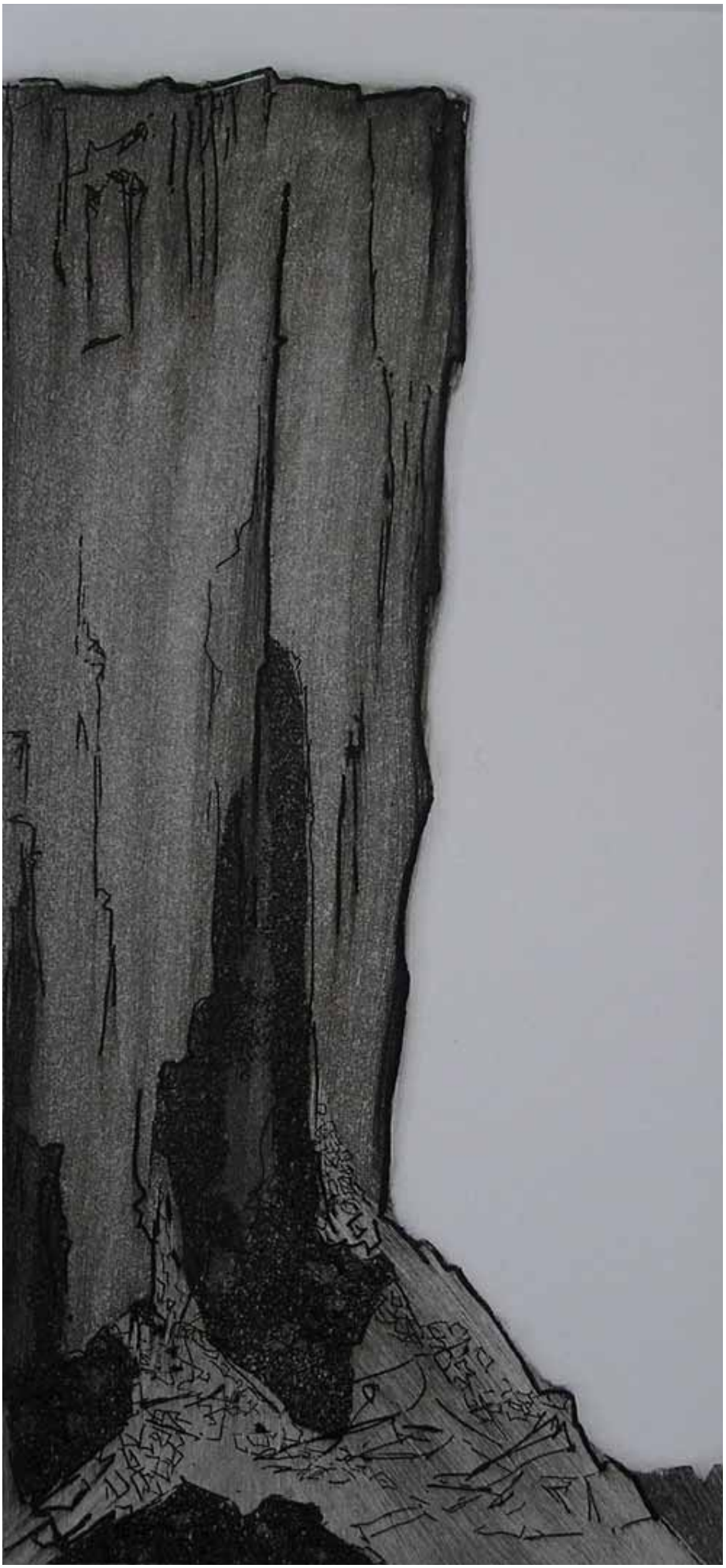
Jessica Crothall's practice is successful and maturing. It also sits at a threshold balancing a relationship with landscape with a commitment to abstraction. It will be interesting to watch and follow the development of this artist and where in fact her work may settle.

David James

Top to bottom:

Wind Swept Tree (Red),
2005, Jessica Crothall, acrylic on canvas, 755 x 1220mm.

Wind Swept Tree (Black),
2006, Jessica Crothall, acrylic on canvas, 910 x 1220mm.



Blizzard in a Dark Landscape
Sue Cooke

28 April–11 May 2008
Salamander Gallery, Christchurch

The voyage to and along the Antarctic Peninsula (the opposite side to New Zealand's Scott Base) is reportedly a climatically rough travel through the South Shetland Islands, Bransfield Strait, passing many islands on through the Geriache Strait, then back again.

Sue Cooke's series of etchings at the Salamander Gallery is an observational journaling of this travelling in expressive form. Crisp white matting and frames contrast the inky hues of grey-black and smouldering, subtle blue landscapes. The series is in a similar vein to previous work seen from Cooke, and makes for an interesting and intimate show.

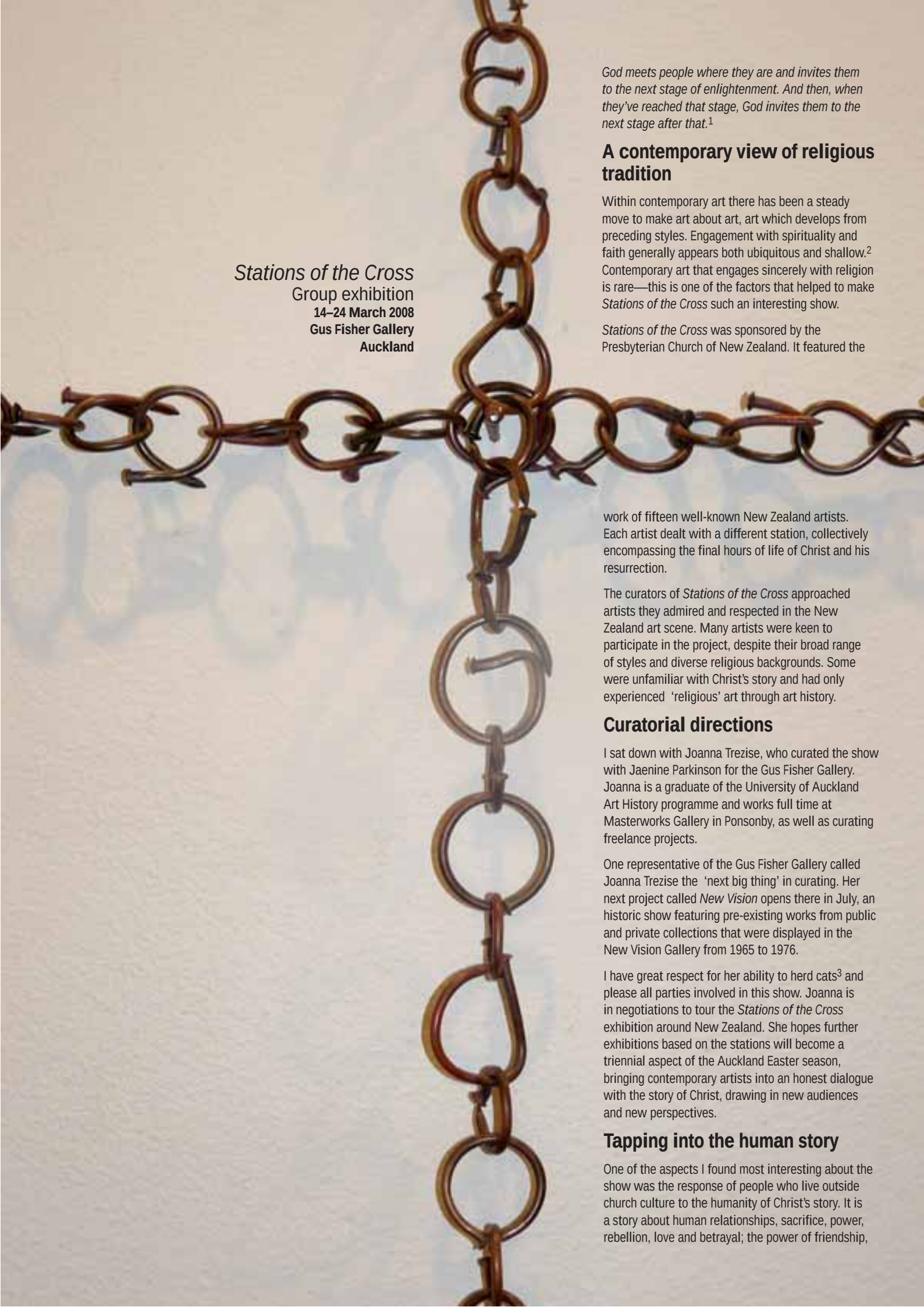
Pillar (2007) features a very proportionally-balanced composition of a black ominous cliff face against a white sky. This work takes you close to the landmass, and crops the scene. In *Deception Island Blizzard III* (2008), faded grey markings give the impression of a print from yesteryear, forgotten, left in the sun. Quite abstract in its depiction of sea and ice, this work adds variety and interest to the exhibited series.

Volcanic Landscape (2007) would be one of my favourites: a small and intimate etching measuring approximately 5 cm by 30 cm. A shadowy land mass is separated from an atmospheric sky, enlivened by the scratchy gesture of line. It is this gesture, not common in the other works, that causes me to feel a connection with the artist, and in so doing inspires greater interest in the piece. This encourages extended looking, which in turn allows time to consider Cooke's purpose in visually describing the scene thus.

The majority of Cooke's works capture more distant views and often in a panoramic fashion. They create a feeling, not so much of being in the landscape, or of having a connection with it, but of viewing an old faded picture of it. I contemplate the artist's intention again, and note—land without the visible presence of man. Perhaps it is a tribute to the timelessness of Antarctica and the medium of etching? Overall, the images seem detached and sullen with an eerie uncertainty. I do not know for sure Cooke's ideas and goals, but I do feel the emptiness and cold of Antarctica as I attempt to find out. I appreciate the aesthetic texture of the works, and I like the mystery of them.

Janet Joyce

Pillar, 2007, Sue Cooke, etching, 275 x 130mm.



Stations of the Cross
Group exhibition
14–24 March 2008
Gus Fisher Gallery
Auckland

God meets people where they are and invites them to the next stage of enlightenment. And then, when they've reached that stage, God invites them to the next stage after that.[1]

A contemporary view of religious tradition

Within contemporary art there has been a steady move to make art about art, art which develops from preceding styles. Engagement with spirituality and faith generally appears both ubiquitous and shallow.[2] Contemporary art that engages sincerely with religion is rare—this is one of the factors that helped to make *Stations of the Cross* such an interesting show.

Stations of the Cross was sponsored by the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. It featured the work of fifteen well-known New Zealand artists. Each artist dealt with a different station, collectively encompassing the final hours of life of Christ and his resurrection.

The curators of *Stations of the Cross* approached artists they admired and respected in the New Zealand art scene. Many artists were keen to participate in the project, despite their broad range of styles and diverse religious backgrounds. Some were unfamiliar with Christ's story and had only experienced 'religious' art through art history.

Curatorial directions

I sat down with Joanna Trezise, who curated the show with Jaenine Parkinson for the Gus Fisher Gallery. Joanna is a graduate of the University of Auckland Art History programme and works full time at Masterworks Gallery in Ponsonby, as well as curating freelance projects.

One representative of the Gus Fisher Gallery called Joanna Trezise the 'next big thing' in curating. Her next project called *New Vision* opens there in July, an historic show featuring pre-existing works from public and private collections that were displayed in the New Vision Gallery from 1965 to 1976.

I have great respect for her ability to herd cats[3] and please all parties involved in this show. Joanna is in negotiations to tour the *Stations of the Cross* exhibition around New Zealand. She hopes further exhibitions based on the stations will become a triennial aspect of the Auckland Easter season, bringing contemporary artists into an honest dialogue with the story of Christ, drawing in new audiences and new perspectives.

Tapping into the human story

One of the aspects I found most interesting about the show was the response of people who live outside church culture to the humanity of Christ's story. It is a story about human relationships, sacrifice, power, rebellion, love and betrayal; the power of friendship,

forgiveness, family and suffering. Each station has a human aspect that anyone can respond to and identify with. Joanna felt that traditional representations of the stations of the cross can sometimes be uninspiring, caricature-like artworks that lose this human element of the story. This mainly non-figurative show presents a fresh response to the Easter story—the disparate parts reinstate a sense of mystery in this very powerful narrative.

Unique responses

Each artist was assigned a station at random and had three months to make work in response to it. Artists who were known for a particular style were not constrained to this style, but were encouraged to exercise the freedom to experiment. Joanna believes this reflects the healthy state of New Zealand contemporary art, in which well-known artists still have the confidence to work outside their 'own' style. An example of this was *Station II: Jesus receives the Cross* in which Philip Trusttum responded to the physical materials of the crucifixion, specifically the nails. As soon as he took on the project, he set aside his traditional colourful painting style and began a series of black and white drawings in waterproof marker. When Joanna and Jaenine visited him in his studio in Christchurch the walls of his studio were covered in drawings. Only a small selection actually featured in the show. The works were based on the shape of the nail but feature 'meticulously worked detailing … influenced by everything from Maori carving, god sticks and Mayan totems, knitting patterns and Trusttum's own motifs.'[4]

Jae Hoon Lee's *Station IV: Jesus Meets his Mother* featured a work called *Archetype 2007-08* in which patches of photographed facial skin were cut out, digitally altered and merged into an abstract pattern with a cross at the centre. Lit from behind, it has the quality of a stained glass window or a computer screen. This station speaks of an intimate moment, the meeting between mother and child for the last time. Lee's skin samples are the artificial meeting between strangers, skin on skin, which strongly contrasts the personal meeting of Mary and Jesus. For me it captures our hunger for intimacy, for something more than the skin-deep.

Today's church

Joanna and Jaenine were given a broad proposal by St Heliers Presbyterian Church who organised the show. Joanna respected that they were trusted to select the artists, and made it clear that the artists had the freedom to respond however they wanted to. Extending this inclusive invite for different perspectives promoted the church's core values. John Pule's work in particular sparked an open debate between church members, because it featured graphic images of acts of violence and war. Pule's *Station V: Simon of Cyrene Carries the Cross* reinterprets this station to discuss contemporary struggles: ' …particularly current wars, and the often flawed attempts made to alleviate the suffering of others.'[5] The way Pule has captured gruesome elements of contemporary culture reflects the confronting nature of Christ's violent crucifixion. He highlights that suffering continues today, often in the name of religion.

Any church project that stimulates such a diverse group—artists, curators, contemporary musicians, gallery workers, and the 180 viewers who came to the opening of *Stations of the Cross*—to learn more about Christ and experience the relevance of the story today, and also allows Christians to debate their faith within New Zealand culture, has to be considered a great success. Art now asks questions of the viewer: it tends not to preach ideas but beseech thought.[6] God does meet people where they are; I look forward to seeing where the next stage will lead.

Participating artists: Octavia Cook, Darryn George, Tony Lane, Jae Hoon Lee, Niki Hastings-McFall, Peter Madden, Ani O'Neill, James Ormsby, Peter Peryer, John Pule, John Reynolds, Natalie Robertson, Hamish Tocher, Philip Trusttum and John Walsh.

Esther Hansen

1 Rob Bell, 2007, *Sex God*, p 136.

2 For example *Mystic truths*, at the Auckland City Art Gallery, 2007.

3 Joanna shared with me this description of curating as 'herding cats' that she had heard from another curator.

4 *Stations of the Cross* catalogue.

5 Ibid.

6 Philbrick, Harry, 2000, *Faith*, p 17, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art.

Opposite page:
Chain and Nail Barb Chain,
2008, Octavia Cook, copper, 520 x 900mm,
courtesy of the artist and Anna Miles Gallery, Auckland.

Below:
Nails for the Cross,
2007-08, Philip Trusttum,
Stephens vivid permanent waterproof markers
on Das acid-free paper, variable dimensions,
courtesy the artist and Warwick Henderson Gallery, Auckland;
CoCA, Christchurch, and Brett McDowell, Dunedin.

Above left:
Heaven's Above, 2008, Anah Dunsheath, acrylic on board – triptych, 1200 x 610mm.

Above right:
Queen of Earthly Delights, 2007, Tracey Tawhiao, acrylic, oilstick and newspaper on canvas, 1700 x 2500mm, collection of the artist.

The Altar Triptych Revisited

Group exhibition

7–28 April 2008

Ferner Galleries, Parnell, Auckland

The altar triptych is a work of art that sits directly on or behind the altar in Christian churches, providing an important focus for worship. This Ferner Gallery show revisits the compositional format of an altarpiece. It successfully showcases a number of existing artworks by established New Zealand artists such as Kura Te Waru Rewiri, Geoff Tune and Michael Moore. New works by Anah Dunsheath, Tracey Tawhiao and Grant Hanna have each interpreted the theme of a triptych with their own flair. However, little of the work engages with the original spiritual intention of the altarpiece tradition: a work worthy of devotion and worship.

It is fascinating to see what each artist sets up for the target market—'art buyers with walls big enough to accommodate works of this size'[1]—to worship in their own homes or businesses. Anah Dunsheath's *Heaven's Above* embraces and coolly mocks its target buyers. The painting is set in between four white archways. Stepping out of these is a young urban couple. The man in the foreground looks up to the sky, the woman strolls towards us. They dominate and dwarf the strip of lush green landscape. Beside them a couch falls from a great height through the black sky and a sports car gleams with the promise of happiness that only self-reliant, financially secure consumers can know. My eyes kept being drawn back to the couch. For me it became a symbol that rest was always just out of reach—literally 'no rest for the wicked'.

Tracey Tawhiao's collage work *Queen of Earthly Delights* shows a messaging system of traditional Maori decorative design with embedded newspaper headlines. Both give us a window into her rich internal world, a snapshot in time. It is a significant piece, as it documents the defeat of the All Blacks in the rugby world cup and reflects part of the blow we collectively felt to our cultural self-confidence. It's a joyful work with rough edges.

Grant Hanna is a gifted painter, technically flawless and skilled at creating visual illusions. *Subliminal 5—Mine (A Picture Window of Opportunity)* shows a photorealistic landscape of a New Zealand harbour through a set of three aluminium window frames. On the centre panel a pair of orange scissors cuts along a dotted line. Along the cut mark a flap of the painting folds back to reveal a twenty-dollar bill underneath. Hanna's intention could be to question whether the audience values the painting or the potential investment the artwork represents. He says, 'An altar triptych's purpose is to enhance the experience of worship. I have introduced what seems to me the new Deity that everyone reveres: money and ownership, thereby bringing an element of modern-day truth to the original purpose.'[2]

Geoff Tune's work, *Opito—Easter*, was the most inspiring of sublime worship. It is a work about navigation. 'These personally derived maps and diagrams, which are integrated with images of the land, give a sense of how we come to terms with our environment. They are like star charts of life, a modern version of the complex stick and twine constructions of the early Polynesian voyages or the primitive maps of the early explorers.'[3] The cross format, richly worked surfaces and celestial forms gave me a sense of *selah* (Hebrew for 'stop and listen')—and if you did, you might hear the quiet voice of God speaking back.

The Ferner Gallery has significantly added to New Zealand art by challenging its artists to explore scale, the unification of multiple surfaces through the triptych format, and what contemporary artists feel compelled to paint as objects of worship and adoration. I encourage more galleries to take up such challenges.

Esther Hansen

1 Based on a conversation with a Ferner Gallery representative.

2 Grant Hanna, on www.fernergalleries.co.nz/default,3817.sm

3 John Daly-Peoples, The Listener, 2004

Fallen
Sam Harrison
18 March–6 April 2008
COCA, Christchurch

Fallen, Sam Harrison's March exhibition, surprised many of COCA's visitors familiar with his work. In the first instance, it was a mature and consistent body of work for a young artist, with an impressive and subtle dialogue established between printmaking and sculpture. This was most immediately evident in its underlying imagery of portraiture, and in Harrison's confident manipulation of materials and dramatic contrasts of light against dark.

However, the public response to the large-scale woodcut *Crucifixion* (at 3 metres by 2.8 metres – is this the largest woodcut ever made in New Zealand?) was both affirmative and negative. The ambitious nature and monumental scale of the work impressed, and this was consolidated by Harrison's confidence in crafting the work. One visitor, standing close to the image, and taking in the beautifully printed surface, commented that he did not care where this was placed in either Harrison's oeuvre or New Zealand art in general; it was simply an art object of considerable aesthetic quality that he was pleased to take in. Others were less complimentary and raised questions about the context of an art work that seemed to appropriate the High Renaissance imagery of Northern Europe, with little regard for, or awareness of, post-modern irony in New Zealand in 2008.

Crucifixion, 2008, Sam Harrison, Woodcut, 3000 x 2800mm.

Certainly, *Crucifixion* did appear to be a bit like the woodcut that Albrecht Durer had kept hidden from public view, which had suddenly re-emerged on the other side of the world more than 480 years later. Why did this work seem out of step with other images in the exhibition? After all, High Renaissance imagery (from both Italy and Northern Europe) was predominant throughout the gallery space, and was one of the reasons the exhibition was so aesthetically successful. Moreover, Harrison had referenced contemporary images of war and human suffering from television news and magazines, seeking to establish a context for the traditional iconography of the *Crucifixion* in a current setting. Yet, comments about the work's failure to locate a place for itself in arts practice seemed, on one level, to be credible.

Or were they?

Following the conclusion of the exhibition, *Crucifixion* went on to have another life as a finalist in the COCA Anthony Harper Award. It was sited in the gallery space between an untitled watercolour by Kushana Bush and Beverly Rhodes' *Flower Girl VII*. Both works retained a particular darkness and decadence that somehow complemented Harrison's medieval and religious imagery. On second viewing, *Crucifixion* did not appear quite so out of step with current ideology. The scale, drama and imagery of this work now seemed familiar, suggesting that it was the very 'newness' of the work, and the immediate desire to somehow make sense of it by locating it in an art historical canon, that was the problem.

Possibly the challenge that audiences initially faced with the work was the reading that they brought to it. Just as the *New York Times* critiqued the newness of abstract expressionism in the 1950s by highlighting the personal agenda that gallery visitors bring to an art work, those who viewed Harrison's *Crucifixion* should not have been asking 'what does it represent?'. If they felt perplexed by an artwork that seemed to have arrived in the wrong time zone, a more appropriate question may have been what values and principles were they bringing to the work, or to make the point more succinctly: 'What did *they* represent?'

Warren Feeney

Do Not Fear
Brett a'Court

17–31 May 2008
James Wallace Gallery
Auckland

Brett a'Court's faith is at the centre of his latest exhibition. The collection of works serves as a homage to the artists with whom a'Court is creatively and critically engaged, while also displaying an ongoing conversation about what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be an artist.

Do Not Fear is thematically unified, with each work using elements of traditional religious iconography within a dark, specifically New Zealand palette that plays overtly with the artistic shadow that McCahon casts. That shadow is an intrinsic part of the way light is used in the larger works, which see an Angus-esque landscape overlaid with words in a McCahon font, perhaps dotted with Bill Hammond's birds—or are they Don Binney's? The figures that emerge from this mélange of references are imbued with Renaissance Christ or Mary symbolism, each face semi-obscured and taken from an art school text—we have a Durer, a Masaccio and several Raphaels.

At times this mixture borders on pastiche, with the plethora of motifs and connotations obscuring the beauty of the delicately executed line drawings that form the basis of this exploration of a'Court's spiritual and artistic anatomy. Most successful are the smaller works, which retain a sense of the Byzantine kitchen icon about them. These are the twenty-first century Christian equivalent of the Buddhist or Hindu family shrine: a human-sized reminder of faith in a secular world.

Alongside these beautiful miniatures, a number of the larger works explore the theme of spiritual anatomy in a provocative manner: his Christs and Marys are fully human, with genitals evident on many of the figures. This in itself works—a'Court seeks to explore the notion of Christ's personhood, to lay this bare in a profound and basic way, using the sexual organs to uncover the generative and procreative aspects of both faith and art.

However, the opposing depiction of male and female genitalia creates a gap between a'Court's themes and his execution. Male genitals are exquisitely drawn, with the delicacy of line found in scientific texts, whereas female genitals are often reduced to a black hole, or are drawn carefully but then scratched out. This imbalance suggests that the artist, while postmodern in his layering of influence, his mélange of technique, is in fact a modernist—dichotomising male/female, reason/passion and creator/created.

These oppositions enable Christ's male body to be the site of identification: the viewer connects on a physical and spiritual level with the anguish of a'Court's Christ. Perhaps this is a'Court's point—Christ is, after all, the saviour of both men and women—but with his explicit referencing to centuries of artistic and Christian tradition through the appropriation of imagery, a'Court has also linked himself, unconsciously, to the misogyny of both those traditions.

Do Not Fear displays God made flesh, and allows the viewer to identify with the depictions of Christ through the self-conscious referencing of historic and contemporary art. The use of negative imagery surrounding the female sexual organs undermines a'Court's attempt to create a contemporary art discourse that can be Christian without resorting to sentimentality or self-censorship. a'Court needs to engage again with the depiction of Mary, Mother of God, considering his desire to allow the works to be open to interpretation.

Kate Hannah

Top:
Do not fear, 2008, Brett a'Court,
oil and mixed media on canvas, 1065 mm x 1520mm.

Bottom:
Madonna, 2008, Brett a'Court, oil on wood and mixed media, 685 x 345 mm. Private collection.

THE CS ARTS GUIDE TO LAUNCHING AN ARTS PRACTICE

A good network

Stimulates creativity

Critiques your art and challenges your thinking

Breaks the sense of isolation caused by working alone

Gives practical help, such as transportation, technical skills and proofreading

Keeps you accountable to your goals

Strengthens your faith

Gives emotional support—a different perspective opens up the alternatives

Some things to remember

Prioritise time with friends, but value your own time and keep to a time budget

Stay in touch: send emails regularly, a text to say 'hi', and book times to meet

Be discerning: consider seriously the effect others can have on your thinking, your energy, your decisions and your subsequent actions

'I keep a good database, enabling me to keep in touch and network. I seem to be making new inroads into groups and individuals all the time. When people reach out to me, I reach back to them.

'The way I develop support is to also trade my support, so it is reciprocal. How can I repay the help I get—teaching, mentoring, curating, companion painting or money?'

ALLIE EAGLE ARTIST

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD NETWORKS

'Networking' is a bit of a buzzword, but for an artist, often working in isolation, the need for great networks is primary.

With support from other people, an artist is more able to make work that is both meaningful to them and relevant to others. It enables Christians to explore what it means to be both an artist and a follower of Jesus.

'There are big networking groups on the net. I enjoy networking within the craft aspects of what I do: [the] community of people, [the] variety of knowledge and skills. This has led to international contacts, leading to opportunities for travel and international exhibitions and speaking engagements. For me this has broken that national isolation.'

MARK LANDER ARTIST

SOME TYPES OF NETWORKS YOU COULD JOIN

The Chrysalis Seed social network
www.csartspace.org.nz
Create a profile, share events and notices, and start or participate in groups and discussions with other arts participants around New Zealand

The Chrysalis Seed critique group
Contact Janet Chambers: *jchambers@clear.net.nz*
Bounce ideas off other artists in a monthly critique group across fine arts disciplines

Anchored Artists
http://anchoredartists.ning.com Share ideas and discuss topics with an online social network of Christian artists, primarily in the Auckland area

SPAM
http://spaminitiative.ning.com
or contact Emma Jaine: *emma@mallville.co.nz*
St Paul's Arts and Media. Exchange ideas, projects and support with a church-based group of over 100 artists across all media. Meets monthly

Artway
Contact Anne-Marie Verbeek: *amverbeek@xtra.co.nz* Give and receive encouragement in a small, informal group of Wellington Christian artists who meet monthly

Stations of the Cross project

www.stations.org.nz or contact Dave White: *d.white@incendo.org.nz* Be part of a changing group of people from a wide variety of disciplines that pulls together for common projects—primarily the annual Stations of the Cross project

'It is not about us all becoming superstars. It is about us contributing what we have, where we are at. Enjoy the collaborative process of working within a supportive arts community; seeking that support, using it and giving it.'

KATIE THORNTON ARTIST

RESOURCES TO HELP CREATE NEW NETWORKS

Facebook and MySpace
www.facebook.com and *www.myspace.com*
The two most popular online social networks on the internet. Join up, create a profile and then start a group for whatever you can think of

Ning
www.ning.com
Allows you to create an online social network of your own. Check out Chrysalis Seed's network: *www.csartspace.org.nz*

Peter and Jessica Crothall
Founders of Chrysalis Seed: *director@cs.org.nz* or (03) 374 5721 Available to share their experience in starting arts groups, from an informal gathering to a national organisation

'Every artist needs support—but it is important who are in these networks. You want networks that are going to last long-term. I have valued support within the art world, they give me very good career advice. They also encourage me on tracks that are starting to open up in the work—and this is important feedback for a young artist.

'But … some of the most important networks for me include people who know nothing about art. People who give me courage to make the tough decisions, challenge me: those who will support me when things fall to pieces. Establish networks in a number of different areas with people that you can trust and with people you truly respect. "He who walks with the wise grows wise" (Proverbs 13.20).'

DARRYN GEORGE ARTIST

Strengthening your art

Don't be in a hurry to succeed. It takes time to develop concepts with substance and shelf-life

Stay informed about contemporary trends and issues

Develop your ability to articulate your ideas (in writing or verbally)

Consider a regular job to remove the burden of financial return

Professional practice

Set strategic goals and plan how to reach them

Make artwork for a specific target market's preference and price structure

Communicate with, and be accessible to, your audience. Maintain and circulate newsletters, portfolios and a web presence

Apply for residencies, grants and awards (perservere!)

Consider an arts-related job or internship as a valuable 'foot in the door'

Develop business or technical skills through further training

Looking after yourself

Acknowledge your spiritual needs. Tap into a higher power through prayer, meditation, study, practical serving, bible reading, silence, and worship with others

Take care of your body through diet, exercise and professional help if necessary

Be aware of and address any emotional or psychological issues. Your GP can direct you to the appropriate professional

Enjoy expanding your knowledge and experiences in interests beyond art

YOUR ART AND YOUR LIFE

Whatever the nature of your art, long-term success requires that you balance your artistic development, the business elements of your practice and your own wellbeing in life beyond art.

'You will repeatedly need to find your own way back to your vision and goals. Notice what tools, places, writing or practices revive your self esteem and bring you back to the focus of what you are hoping to achieve.'

SARAH AMAZINNIA & KATE SPENCER
FUSE ART BUSINESS INITIATIVE

FUELLING YOUR ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

The Chrysalis Seed art & faith library
The Arts Centre (Christchurch). Weekdays 1–4pm
All the books and magazines you need to fuel an arts practice centred on Christian faith and relevant to contemporary culture

***CS Arts* magazine back issues online**
www.cs.org.nz No introduction should be necessary. Seven years of articles, interviews and reviews can be downloaded free, or search for items on specific topics and artists

***New Zealand Herald* art news**
www.nzherald.co.nz, under the 'Entertainment' tab. Regular news, reviews and opinions straight to your desktop

Art News* and *Art New Zealand
Quarterly magazines, around $10.00 each

Artbash *www.artbash.co.nz*
Irreverent, open-slather online forum for art criticism, exhibition reviews and general opinions

'I need balance as an artist. I find it important to be careful not to place too much importance on the art being your main focus. Sometimes it is just part of your life, and being a good father and a good husband is the priority in life.

'There are stages in life—sometimes I have been obsessed with art; other times I have had to do jobs I didn't like, picking art up again at a later time. So if there are times when for three or four years you have to just think about it, well, fine. Life then feeds back into your art.'

MARK LANDER ARTIST

'Being an artist is a profession, and as such you only get returns for what you put into it … I often don't feel like painting, but it's my job, so I have to do it … As an artist you have a responsibility not to just rely on your own inspiration, but to be aware of your audience.'

KEES BRUIN ARTIST

HELP WITH PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Chrysalis Seed online arts directory
www.cs.org.nz
A portal to organisations and resources to help with all aspects of your arts practice

***FUSE* Art Business Initiative**
www.artists.co.nz/fuse
Christchurch-based business course, short talks and resources designed specifically for the working artist. Next course starting October '08

Fuel 4 Arts
www.fuel4arts.co.nz
Connect with the global knowledge base of arts marketing tools and ideas

Artists Alliance
www.artistsalliance.org.nz
Membership-based organisation established to 'represent and advance the professional interests of the visual artists of Aotearoa/New Zealand'. Publishes the bi-monthly magazine Art All

'I set goals. I have a mission statement. It is okay not to meet every goal, but it is important for me to review what I was intending. Writing things down and keeping a journal is vital … Right now I manage my life as an artist by taking small, bite-sized planning projects—short term strategies to help me realise my long term goals.'

ALLIE EAGLE ARTIST

STAYIN' ALIVE

Art & Soul
By Hilary Brand & Adrienne Chaplin, published by Solway. A practical guide to developing a Christian worldview from which you can approach art

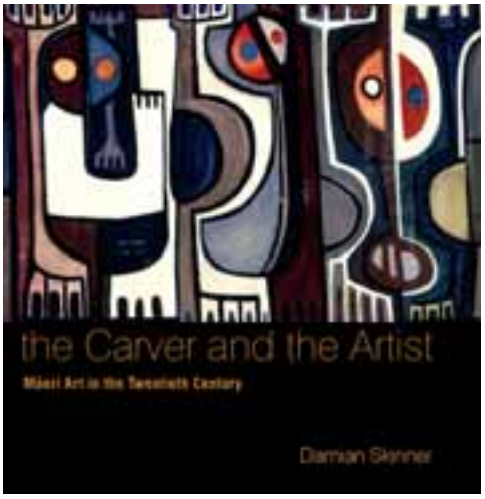
Imagine
By Steve Turner, published by Inter-Varsity Press. A call for total engagement with the arts—reflections to help Christian artists embrace passionately and intelligently both their art and their faith

Celebration of Discipline
By Richard Foster, published by Hodder & Stoughton. A classic guide to Christian spiritual excercises that have been used throughout the centuries and into contemporary practice

A church near you
www.finda.co.nz
Even better, ask someone to take you along and explain everything. Like shoes, you may have to try on a few to find the one that fits

Living Wisdom
www.livingwisdom.co.nz
Counselling, courses and resources for personal fulfillment and successful relationships

BOOK REVIEW



the Carver and the Artist
Maori Art in the Twentieth Century

Damian Skinner

Auckland University Press, Auckland, New Zealand, 2008, 224 pages, colour and black and white photos, hard cover. ISBN 978 1 86940 3737.

Damian Skinner's book *the Carver and the Artist* documents the relationship between the traditional Maori arts found in the Maori meetinghouse and the formation of a contemporary Maori arts scene in New Zealand. As with other university publications, don't expect any discerning comments on Christian spirituality in the Maori arts. This book is purely an information-gathering exercise—something I might add, which Skinner does quite well.

Based on Skinner's PhD thesis *Another Modernism: Maoritanga and Maori Modernism in the 20th Century*, this book is a methodical working-through of Skinner's basic premise that the artwork of contemporary Maori artists needs to be rooted in a firm understanding of the traditional Maori arts. Following his premise, he meanders down different paths of thought, taking the reader on a journey through New Zealand art history as seen from a Maori artist's point of view.

Readers are introduced to the dynamic figure of Apirana Ngata, who powerfully moulded the form and content of traditional Maori meetinghouses from the 1920s on. Ngata's anachronistic idealising of meetinghouse designs both protected the meeting house as a source of Maori *mana* and set in concrete the 'correct' forms, which later 'traditional' Maori artists were encouraged to follow. If Ngata was the architect, then one of his first students—Hone Taiapa—became the chief carpenter. Taiapa didn't deviate from Ngata's blueprint, continuing to teach and maintain the integrity of 'traditional Maori' designs.

With the urbanisation of Maori in the 1950s, a second, parallel school of Maori artists arose in the Pakeha art schools of the cities. Names from this generation include Arnold Wilson, Fred Graham, Sandy Adsett, Cliff Whiting, Para Matchett, Selwyn Muru, Marilynn Web, John Bevan Ford, Katerina Mataira, Cath Brown and the enigmatic Ralph Hotere. These artists chose to express their Maori identity using European art media and systems of thought.

Skinner argues the importance of bringing together these two separate traditions in what he perceives to be the future of the Maori arts in New Zealand. Borrowing the term 'modernism', he loosely defines 'Maori Modernists' as a synthesis of European modernism and Maori abstraction. We see the realisation of his thoughts in the excellent examples of Lyonel Grant's work in the Ihenga Tangataru Marae meetinghouse. Here Skinner concludes his book with a satisfying reference to both modernism and 'traditional' Maori arts practices found in the innovative *whakairo* and *kowhaiwhai* designs upon its walls.

But to side-step the issue of modern/traditional/postmodern labels, it is not the external form that hinders the innovation within Maori meetinghouse designs. It is instead the thematic content undergirding those forms. Ngata, in his wisdom, effectively placed a *tapu* upon his idealised ancestral house. If Christianity can offer anything at this level, it is a freedom from legalism and this gives hope to those communities labouring beneath a heavy yoke of *tapu* constraint.

One obvious issue that didn't seem to be considered by Skinner's book is degrees of quality in art. Put simply, there is good art and there is bad art. Personally I don't think it matters if you work in the traditional straight-jacket offered by Ngata and Taiapa, or if you freely enjoy the limitless chatter found in the postmodern movement of recent years. What matters to me is the quality of your work. It is what you do as an artist with your creative resources, both in form and content, which determines its success. The tide of good promotion and marketing hype can surge only so far, before–in time–it recedes to reveal the true quality and depth of our work.

Anaru/Andrew Panoho

FILM REVIEW

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly

Directed by Julian Schnabel

Like coming to after a coma, this poignant little film is a wake-up call—it can be so easy to be consumed with gratifying ourselves that we miss what really matters.

A minimum of background or scene-setting information at the opening mirrors the central character's own lack of awareness of his situation. Jean-Dominic Bauby, editor of *Elle*, suffered a 'cerebrovascular accident' that disabled his brain stem. He came to in a hospital room with locked-in syndrome—fully conscious, but unable to control anything but an eye. We are shown the world through his one good eye: blurred and occluded shots with a narrow field of view. This simply and successfully articulates his experience, albeit one impossible to fully grasp from the comfort of a theatre seat.

The plot is driven by an interesting one-sided dialogue, in which Bauby responds in his mind to the other characters. Obvious comparisons are drawn with others who are 'locked in'—Bauby's geriatric father (confined to his apartment) and an acquaintance who endured a harrowing four-year hostage ordeal in Beirut. This theme could be extended to Bauby's friend, who struggles to express himself honestly while visiting, and his lover who cannot bring herself to visit.

Bauby's determined speech therapist, Henriette Durand (Marie-Josée Croze) teaches him to dictate by blinking as she reads a list of letters, ordered by frequency of use.

It got me considering what freedom, as the antonym, actually consists in. I found suggestions in the characters able to see hope and potential in the situation. One such character was Bauby's de facto wife, whose conflicting emotions are vividly expressed in a standout performance. In a scene in which she translates a phone call with the lover (Bauby had learnt to communicate by blinking) her sacrificial love is set against the other's ultimate selfishness.

The film explores the futility and danger of self-absorption. For a while the scenes are limited to Bauby's hospital room. As the film progresses, the clarity improves and the camera angle widens. More scenes and then memory and imagination sequences are introduced as Bauby sees beyond the present reality. Later, external points of view are added as he becomes aware of the perspectives of others.

So where (and how) can we find hope amidst despair? Bauby realises that he has two things that are not locked in: his imagination and his memory. This shows the value of having 'your treasures in heaven' and a vision for your life. Memory is sometimes shown in the film as montages of old photographs and split-second, archival-quality film clips, a reminder of its brevity and vulnerability. Imagination sequences are sometimes shown as on-screen television footage, commenting on memory's potential lack of reality and escapism.

These departures are accompanied by a rich and varied soundtrack—including classical strings and keys, guitar and vocal-driven music and atmospheric tracks—which is often cut short as the sequences snap back to reality. Interspersed throughout is an image of Bauby's despair—a deep-sea diver hanging motionless in mid-ocean to the claustrophobic beating of his heart (panic, or egocentrism?). I found this slightly overcooked, and out of place given the eloquence of the rest of the film.

The film portrays Bauby's emotional journey: from shock, self-loathing and rejection of hope ('Please, no miracles')—through anger, grief, self-pity, cynicism and regret—to acceptance, contrition, respect, hope and determination. He is able to take the advice of his acquaintance to 'cling to what makes you human', maintaining his sense of humour throughout. There's not much character development beyond that of Bauby. This may have been limited by the first person, egocentric storyline. I would have liked to see the experiences of the wife, therapist and scribe more fully explored. Interestingly, the physical similarity of the female leads made it difficult to distinguish their characters (compounded, maybe, by my dependence on the English subtitles rather than voice).

Ultimately, Bauby's story offers grace: the possibility of redemption impossible to achieve through our own actions. He is struck with a revelation of his failure as a father and husband, and his inability to put things right. His wife and children are able to cross the barrier and begin to restore the broken relationship. We have the sense that Bauby was given a second chance to get it right, and that he succeeded. The admixture of grief and fulfilment in the conclusion will stay with me for a long time.

Rob d'Auvergne

Jet (detail), 1984, Andrew Clarkson, photograph.

IN TRANSIT

With this last edition of *CS Arts*, it's a good time to glance back over the last 12 years. It was in 1995, while studying in Pasadena, that we received the inspiration from God to start this work for artists in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We wanted to establish a community of artists that was centred round Jesus Christ. We have been driven by the conviction that Jesus is good news for artists. Frequently, in both art and church history, Jesus and the church have been associated with censorship, condemnation and ambiguity towards the visual arts. This is one of the reasons that the visual arts institutions in Aotearoa today have such a strong secular agenda and bias.

Focussing on contemporary visual artists

With this in mind, we have explored ways of locating and encouraging Christian artists, and also of presenting an informed Christian perspective on issues affecting the wider visual arts community. Starting in 1997 we initially sought to serve artists of all disciplines. By 2002 it became apparent that we would more effectively communicate to a sub-section of the arts community. Focussing on contemporary visual artists allowed us to serve a smaller network of people in more depth.

A Christian perspective

In all of our activities we have been seeking to remind the secular visual arts community in New Zealand that a Christian perspective does indeed exist. We think it deserves to be taken seriously in both the training and professional practice of artists today. Not only does this perspective represent a significant number of practising New Zealand artists, it has inspired some of the most innovative periods in western art. Colin McCahon, the greatest in our own recent art history, arguably worked from a position of personal Christian faith. We have been seeking to help resource artists from this perspective. In the long-term, we want to see a multiplying movement of artists as life-long followers of Jesus.

The work evolves

On launching the vision we expected to see groups of artists emerge and multiply within the first year or so. However, this has been the least successful of our initiatives.

By 2003, after trying several different projects and events, the magazine had become the best-received and most effective way of expressing our mission. 2005 to 2008 has been the period during which the work of Chrysalis Seed has been established nationally. This last edition of *CS Arts* goes out to 6,000 addresses around New Zealand and beyond, with a print run of 11,000 copies. It goes to most tertiary art schools, galleries and high school art departments, as well as individual artists.

Images of the future

As we move into the next phase and season of the vision of Chrysalis Seed, several metaphors can speak. Discontinuing *CS Arts* is like a tree being felled in order to allow new shoots to arise from the live stump that remains. The magazine has run its course in its present form. The theme of this final edition is a reference not only to Jesus Christ, but also to the magazine. In a sense it is dying. The spirit and work of the magazine will continue through new forms and structures. The vision and work of Chrysalis Seed will continue vigorously in fresh ways.

An airport

The picture of an airport can describe our website, which will be the main way we will continue to serve the arts community. This year our website editor has been putting considerable time and energy into redeveloping it into an interactive hub for like-minded artists around New Zealand. We want to connect artists quickly and effectively with existing resources, rather than duplicating them poorly. An airport is a portal. It doesn't own most of the aircraft travelling in and out of its airspace. Being a means of transit from one place to another, airports connect places, people, resources, and therefore information.

It is all part of our strategic goal: to 'provide services that support artists, and stimulate a professional and faith based arts practice.' We are retaining one full-time staff member, along with marketing, design and proofreading personnel. Our art and faith library will remain open to the public. We will develop it into to a full lending facility if sufficient demand is established.

We will be devoting the first third of 2009 to travelling around New Zealand visiting artists. Our aim of seeking to encourage, discover and resource artists could include encouraging existing groups, discovering new initiatives, and offering knowledge and experience where appropriate.

Profiling contemporary Christian artists

As part of both encouraging Christian artists and presenting their collective perspective to a wider audience, we have worked hard to profile professional contemporary artists who follow Jesus. This has been the driving motivation behind the 16 group exhibitions that we have organised between 1997-2008.

Numerous interviews, notices and exhibition reviews in *CS Arts* magazine have also been published as part of telling their story. We look forward to three new CS group exhibitions in the next eight months: one in the Ashburton gallery, one in Darfield (Selwyn gallery), and another at the Centre of Contemporary Art in Christchurch.

Giving thanks

We celebrate the many people in the past and present of Chrysalis Seed. We are thankful to Jesus Christ for the exhibitions, publications and groups that have emerged over the last 12 years. Most of all, we look forward with confident faith that the vision of Chrysalis Seed will not only continue, but will be fulfilled through new structures, networks and people, some as yet unknown.

Peter & Jessica Crothall

www.cs.org.nz

an interactive hub for contemporary visual artists

The *CS Arts* archives

All 31 issues of the *CS Arts* magazine, free to download. Full of fascinating stories, articles and reviews, the series is a great contextual studies tool—or simply a place to get fresh inspiration and encouragement in your arts practice.

You can search for specific topics or artists by typing a keyword in the 'search this site' bar. Or try browsing the *CS Arts* section of the art and faith directory.

If you'd rather not download the full editions, some shorter individual items are available to read online.

And it doesn't end here—fresh new reviews and other items will be posted on the website on a regular basis.

The art and faith directory

Your first port of call for resources to inspire and equip an arts practice that is both contemporary and faith-based.

Get connected with other artists around the country. Explore a wealth of information and resources on the interaction of art and faith. Be directed to listings of the services your professional practice requires. Browse the *CS Arts* archives, and find out where all the latest New Zealand art news and events are published.

Art news

It's essential to stay up to date on the latest competitions, funding and residency opportunities and general art news. We regularly overview the stories that New Zealand artists need to know, and suggest where to find out more.

This is also the place to find out what is happening in Chrysalis Seed and in other art and faith initiatives around New Zealand.

The chrysalis seed arts community

This parallel website is an online network that allows you to take things a step further. Now there's a place to:

- Meet other like-minded participants in the arts
- Exchange information, resources or practical help
- Promote or get feedback on your artwork and exhibitions, and
- Start or participate in topical discussions and groups.

It is safe and easy to join. Members can build an online profile of images and videos. Everyone is welcome in a spirit of openness and mutual encouragement. Visit **www.csartspace.org.nz** to see what's going on!

chrysalis seed trust

chrysalis seed trust

CS ARTS

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www.cs.org.nz