

AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY

QUARTERLY

Number Twenty-five 1963



PETRUS VAN DER WEVELDEN

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EDITORIAL

The present issue of *Quarterly* is devoted to some New Zealand painters working at the turn of the century. Two at least of these artists — Van der Velden and Nairn — exercised as teachers a profound influence on the course of painting in this country. Nerli was also well known as a teacher, mainly in Dunedin, and as perhaps the most influential teacher of Frances Hodgkins.

STAFF

We should like to congratulate Mr L. C. Lloyd on his recent election to a fellowship of *The International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works*.

PETRUS VAN DER VELDEN 1837-1913 New Zealand

RIVER LANDSCAPE (COVER)

Canvas 21 x 32

Presented by Mr Morris Yock, 1952

Previously unattributed, this painting is, on stylistic grounds, quite surely by the hand of Van der Velden, who worked in New Zealand from 1880 to 1898 and from 1905 to 1913.

An important retrospective exhibition was devoted to Van der Velden in 1959 by the Gallery in which several of his Dutch paintings were shown — as he had brought many out with him. Van der Velden belongs to the school of Israels, the Maris brothers, Anton Mauve and Mesdag, and this painting is typical of this group. The bravura painting of the sky appears in his New Zealand work, al-

though his latter period is much more expressionistic and dramatic.

Van der Velden was the first serious artist to paint in New Zealand, and his influence and example was particularly felt by the younger generation of New Zealand artists, among them Frances Hodgkins, who set off for Europe prior to the first world war. Van der Velden himself suffered considerably, and it was with some spirit of bitterness that he went to Australia in 1898 where no greater fortune attended him and he returned to New Zealand virtually a broken man.

It is of interest to know that the only description of his physical appearance and personality is contained in letters written by Vincent van Gogh to his brother Theo. —P.A.T.

EDWARD FRISTROM Active New Zealand c1903-1917

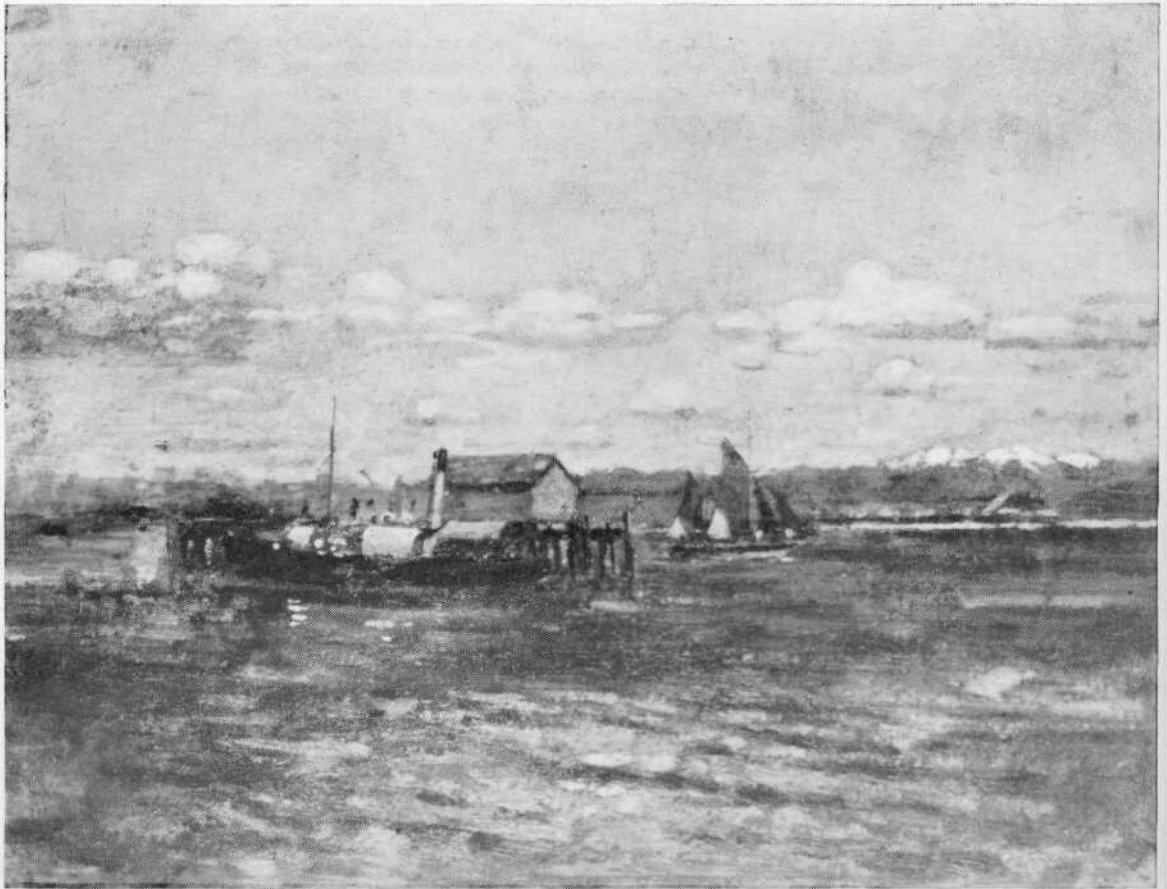
PORTRAIT OF A MAORI GIRL

Oil on canvas 19 x 15

Purchased 1961

The charming portrait of a Maori girl reproduced right, by Edward Fristrom, is the only portrait by him in the collection; its acquisition two years ago rounded out our representation of the work of this somewhat elusive artist, who was said to be noted for his paintings of Maoris. The Queensland Museum has a painting by Edward of an aboriginal, probably influenced by his brother Oscar who was also a painter and was well known in Australia for his paintings of aborigines.





Fristrom's Maori portrait — with its freshness and simplicity — seems much more successful as a painting than the subject pieces of Goldie and Lindauer, which were for the most part based, either literally or figuratively, on photographs. Edward Fristrom was born at Carlskrona in Sweden. He and his brother Oscar were seamen on the sailing ships. Edward came to Brisbane after his brother had settled there; married, and is recorded as being a member of the council of the Queensland Art Society in 1896. He exhibited frequently in Brisbane, and in New Zealand with the Auckland Society of Arts from 1904 to 1915, as well as with the Academy in Wellington. He was a master at Flam School of Art, Auckland, from about 1910 to 1916. He seems to have gone to America in the early 1920s, where he died.

—R.D.F.

JAMES McLACHLAN NAIRN 1859-1904
BARRETT'S REEF

Oil on cardboard 11 x 18

Purchased 1962

JAMES McLACHLAN NAIRN 1859-1904
WHARF AT KAIKOURA WITH SS WAKATU

Oil on academy board 10 x 13|

Signed J. M. *Nairn* (dated 1903 verso)

Purchased 1961

Born and educated in Glasgow, Nairn received his training as a painter at the Glasgow School of Art under Robert Greenless, and later, on the Continent. He was one of that group of more adventurous Scottish painters who attended the life-class in N. Y. Macgregor's studio. As one of the Scottish Impressionist painters, Nairn was considered both 'accom-

plished', and 'of distinct promise'. In 1889 he left Scotland for New Zealand, ill health compelling him to find a better climate.

Nairn arrived in New Zealand in 1890 apparently going first to Dunedin where, 'he exhibited his pictures and gave lectures on Art'. Moving to Wellington, he was appointed instructor in the School of Design. 'His artistic influence was lasting and deep to those that came to know his aims and ideals. Among those whom he drilled to look at nature as she is, his influence for the best and truest will never be forgotten'.

When Nairn died he was described as 'the most brilliant artist in New Zealand. His landscapes are not microscopic studies of trees, hills or plants—they are bits snatched out of the wide, open day, with light and air palpitating through the picture'. Earlier, some other critic had written of his landscapes, 'a little rougher and uglier than is necessary'.

Perhaps the two small paintings reproduced

here did appear 'a little rougher and uglier than is necessary', at the time of their painting. Nairn was a 'revolutionary' in the New Zealand scene, a lone Impressionist, aware of light and colour among a visually unaware and conservative community.

'One should do three sketches each day—one before breakfast, another before 12, and a third after 3 o'clock in the afternoon'. These may be such sketches, the execution is so rapid, sure and direct. Nairn painted many sketches like these in Cook Strait, Kaikoura and Wellington.

An interesting comment on the importance of both Nairn and Van der Velden in New Zealand's brief art history comes from an interview with Archibald F. Nicoll (*Art in New Zealand, Vol 1, No 1*) '... a chuckle may be extracted from the reflection that the foundations of Art in this ultra-English community were laid by a Dutchman and a Scot! That is the story in essence'.





Although Walsh's name and influence have been eclipsed by those of his more flamboyant contemporaries, his work was undoubtedly an important element in the developing New Zealand style. Like Nerli and Van der Velden, Walsh was not a New Zealander by birth, but, although it may seem a romantic attitude,

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GIROLAMO PIERI NERLI 1863-1926

A STUDY: HEAD OF A GIRL

Oil 14 x 10

Purchased 1962

ALFRED WILSON WALSH 1859-1916

CAMPING AT CAVE 1894

Watercolour Hi x 8

Purchased 1962

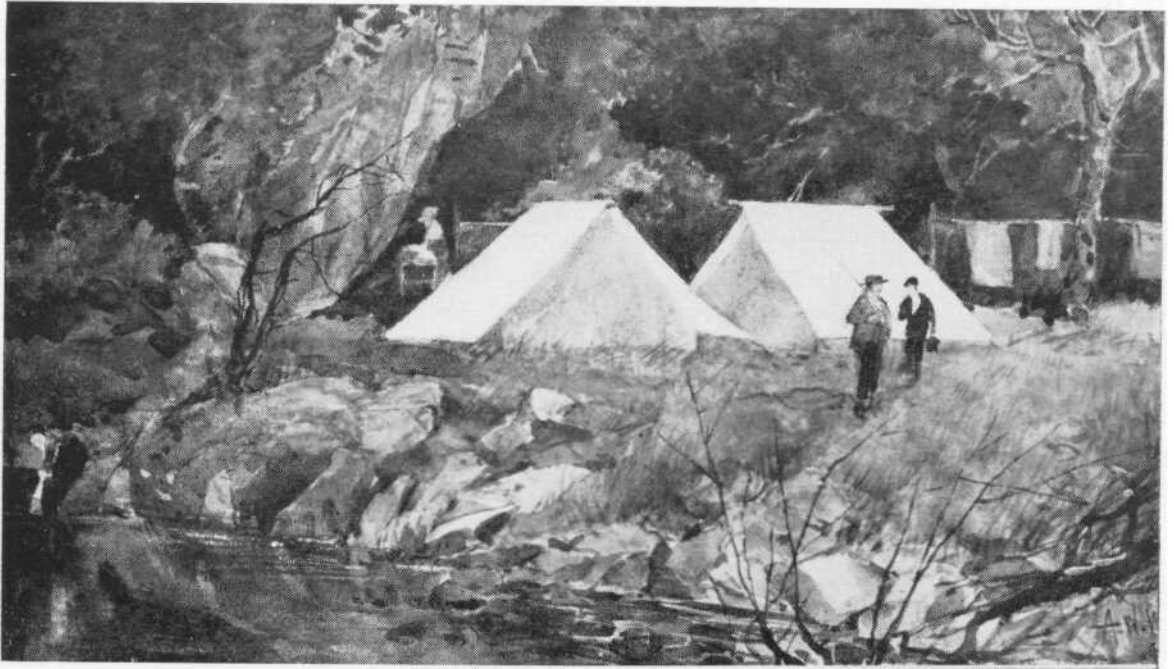
there is some substance to the assumption that his antipodean origins gave his work a more relevant influence.

While the professionalism and 'grand manner' of the two Europeans was of the greatest importance to the first generation of native painters it was an ambiguous influence; it tended to reinforce the already present desire for the imitation of European models and to obscure the influence of the New Zealand painters' own environment. It would not be an exaggeration to consider this initial influence responsible for the neurotic compromise that persisted in New Zealand painting, almost without relief, until the 1940's.

It would be a mistake, however to regard the influence of the European professionals who taught here at the turn of the century as entirely baneful, for, whatever its harmful aspect, it rescued New Zealand painting from the slough of triviality and sentiment that the Southern school of W. M. Hodgkins, J. C.

Richmond and J. Gully might have steered it into. There is no question but that painting of the quality of Girolamo Nerli's *Head of a Girl*, was a necessary antidote to the insistence of Hodgkins, and his contemporaries, on a New Zealand school founded on the study of atmospheric effect, the poetic literary content of the landscape and a thorough misunderstanding of the painting of J. M. W. Turner.

Walsh's painting has qualities of light and structure that demonstrate an understanding of some of the special problems presented by the New Zealand landscape. Had he been a more articulate teacher, New Zealand painting at the beginning of the twentieth century may have taken a different course. The directions hinted at in his work were to remain almost completely unexplored until the flirtation of two generations of painters with England and Europe had ended in disillusionment and their native landscape, revealed in the harsh antipodean light, became at last meaningful.—H.K.



exhibition calendar

THE AUCKLAND FESTIVAL 1963

M. T. WOOLLASTON
COLIN MCCAHERN

A Retrospective Exhibition

from 13 May

POLISH POSTER ART

from 21 May

Australian Aboriginal
BARK PAINTINGS

from 14 May

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