

AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY

QUARTERLY

Number Twenty-six 1963



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EDITORIAL

In this number we report on some recent acquisitions to the Twentieth Century section of the collection. The inclusion of West Coast American artists indicates our hope of building up a collection of contemporary Pacific art.

EMILIO GRECO b 1912 Italian
THE LARGE WRESTLER (Grande *Lottatore*)
Bronze h 35 inches Signed *Greco*
Mackelvie Trust, 1962

This fine life-size work was the first large sculpture made by Greco in 1947-48. It is related to a similar, but smaller, figure made in 1947. The only other bronze of our work is in the Middelheim Park Museum, Antwerp. Two other heads of 1948 (Gallerie Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, and Gallerie d'Arte Moderna, Milan: repr Bellonzi, *Emilio Greco*, 1962, pls 4 and 5) are connected with the head of the figure here, both in physiognomic and conceptual terms; a bland and somewhat blind-eyed, rounded head, which in part recalls Goya's portrait of *The Blind Man*. Also, the whole pose of our figure is found in Goya's etching *The Giant*, although the head is totally different. Whether or not Greco was aware of Goya's *Giant*, it is interesting to see him adopt the same relaxed pose for a symbol of brute physical strength, with, to quote Lafuente Ferrari on the Goya, 'his menacing muscles disquietingly at rest'.

One must not discount, however, Greco's adherence to the immediate post-war Italian movement of realism, and recall the seated bronze *Boxer* (First Century BC) in the Museo

delle Terme. For Greco is very much part of the sculptural tradition of the Mediterranean, as evidenced by his work to date. Emilio Greco was born in Catania, Sicily, where he worked for a time with a marble mason: otherwise he was self taught. Immediately after the war he moved to Rome, where he held his first exhibition in 1946. He has been awarded three international prizes and his work is represented in many public collections, including the Tate Gallery and the Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris.

CONSTANT PERMEKE 1886-1952 Belgium
WINTER LANDSCAPE

Canvas 25 x 31 Signed *Permeke*
Purchased with a grant from the Arts Advisory Council of New Zealand.

We are fortunate to have acquired this work by one of the more important of European expressionists, for, although he is well represented in his native Belgium, the importance of Permeke's work and influence has only been recognised further afield in more recent years.

The landscape here is probably of the village of Jabbeke, where he settled after the first world war. Stylistically it can be dated about the middle thirties.

Permeke studied first at Bruges and Gand. By 1906 he was the leader of a group of painters and writers settled at Laetham. During the first world war he was wounded and sent to England, where he remained until 1918. Apart from a brief period in 1951 in Brittany, he worked either at Jabbeke or Ostend.

Permeke was devoted to the peasant or fisherman, and their natural environment, par-



ticularly the monumental physical presence of the manual worker, and his preservation of a solemn dignity. Thus the landscapes are corollaries of his figure subjects, containing as they do the same low-toned descriptions of simple forms and the sombre discipline of the Belgian landscape.

JANNIS SPYROPOULOS b 1912 Greek

THEMES AND VARIATIONS No. 79

Oil on paper 19½ x 14½ S. J. Spyropoulos

Purchased 1961

Spyropoulos was trained in the School of Fine Arts, Athens, and then, from 1938 to 1940, in Paris. It was not until 1950 that he had his first one-man show in Athens, although he had been represented in various group shows that

had toured Europe and the Middle East. In 1960 he was awarded the UNESCO prize at the Venice Biennale, an event which brought his paintings to general notice. Since then he has held one-man shows in New York, London, Munich etc.

Like most Greeks, he is devoted to his own country, and is never very happy away from it. This concern and love for his country are reflected in the innumerable themes and variations which he has made of his memories and feelings for the Greek landscape. Either dramatically or lyrically, these are expressed with those refinements of colour, tone and form which are so characteristic of the Mediterranean.

It is the misfortune of artists who happen

to live in countries of an august artistic past to be saddled with one archaic influence or another. Certain European critics have liked to see Byzantine elements in the painting of Spyropoulos. This must seem wholly mistaken

to anyone who has seen Greece and experienced its brilliant light, which alone seems to concern **Spyropoulos**, and that in a thoroughly contemporary manner, with no sentimental overtones of the past. P.A.T.



HOWARD WARSHAW b 1920 American
MAN TURNING INTO BEAR (**lower left**)
Gouache and pencil 25 x 19
Purchased 1963

FELIX RUVOLO b 1912 American
DRAWING I (**upper right**)
Ink 22 x 30
Purchased 1963

GEORGE MIYASAKI b 1935 American
OCTOBER LANDSCAPE (**lower right**)
Pastel and watercolour 23 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{5}{8}$
Purchased 1963

In 1962 the Art Gallery arranged an exhibition of thirty-five drawings by American West Coast artists, and it was from this collection that the drawings reproduced here were purchased.

In all these drawings the unique character of recent American art is apparent; that is the new feeling for a more expansive form of composition no longer based on a confining perspective nor on the cubist and post cubist analytical grid. That the subject of such works is sometimes no more than the artist's own



reaction to these new freedoms is of lesser importance now than the fact of the invention of a new pictorial space. This greater freedom to follow suggestions of nature and experience has resulted in a more unselfconscious approach to making drawings than was generally possible even as recently as ten years ago.

C. MCC.



HENRY MUNDY b 1919 British

OBJECTS LOST

Oil on canvas 43 x 60

Presented by the Contemporary Art Society,
1962

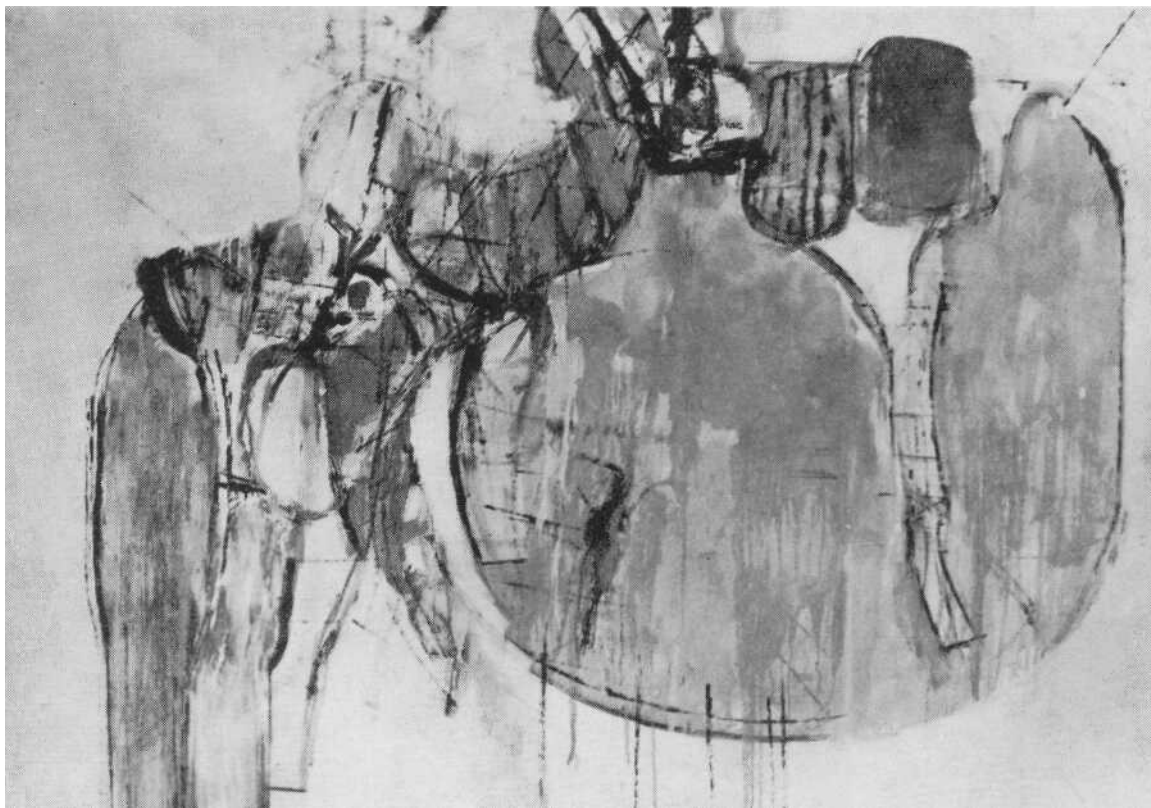
Henry Mundy was born in Birkenhead; and studied there and in London. He is one of a group of painters who have come into prominence in the early sixties, and who loosely banded themselves together (for exhibition purposes: they had difficulty in finding a venue for the large pictures they were painting) under the title *Situation*. Mundy, with Lawrence Alloway, Bernard Cohen, Roger Coleman, and others, was on the committee formed for this purpose.

The first *Situation* exhibition was held at the R.B.A. galleries in London in 1960. In his introduction to the catalogue, Roger Coleman wrote:

"The introduction of the majority of artists in *Situation* to the big painting was through its

gestural values but a considerable number of them have shed all but the most fundamental aspects of these values (those already mentioned) and now there is, as the exhibition is witness, a general move towards a simpler, in some cases more formal, use of the canvas. This move has two aspects to it; on the one hand there are those artists who are doing a definitely formal painting, and on the other there are those whose works have become simpler in the number of forms they employ, and in their treatment of them.

Paint as a substance plays a minor role in formal painting (it is generally closer to a dye than to matter); on the other hand its presence as a physical substance in the work of Ayres, Mundy and Green is important. Their works are gestural in a more particular sense, and are ordered less by the conscious intervention of the intellect and more by the physical handling characteristics of their material."



SHIKO MUNAKATA b 1903 Japanese

HEADS

BIRD ON BRANCH

Sumi and colours on paper 24 1/2 x 12 1/2

Purchased 1962

The gallery is fortunate in acquiring these two drawings by the master print-maker Munakata. They are irradiated with the same restless energy as his prints, and, while nothing appears contrived or laboured, every brush stroke seems inevitable, created and directed by some inner necessity.

The Zen principle of *muga* (it is not I that am doing this) directs Munakata's work; his

brush, his chisel, the artist himself, works in the service of some essential truth which only the renunciation of self can reveal. When the self does not control drawing, meaning must.

Munakata has said 'the mind goes and the tool walks alone'; and when this is achieved, art is no longer a painful process of revisions and doubts, but a single creative surge in which only the essential can survive.

In Eastern art this principle, this deference of self to spirit, has often been overlaid and distorted, but never completely lost: in Western art it is only now being rediscovered.

H.K.



exhibition calendar

ETCHINGS
of Giovanni Battista Piranesi
from
29 July

WATERCOLOURS
of early New Zealand
from
18 August

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