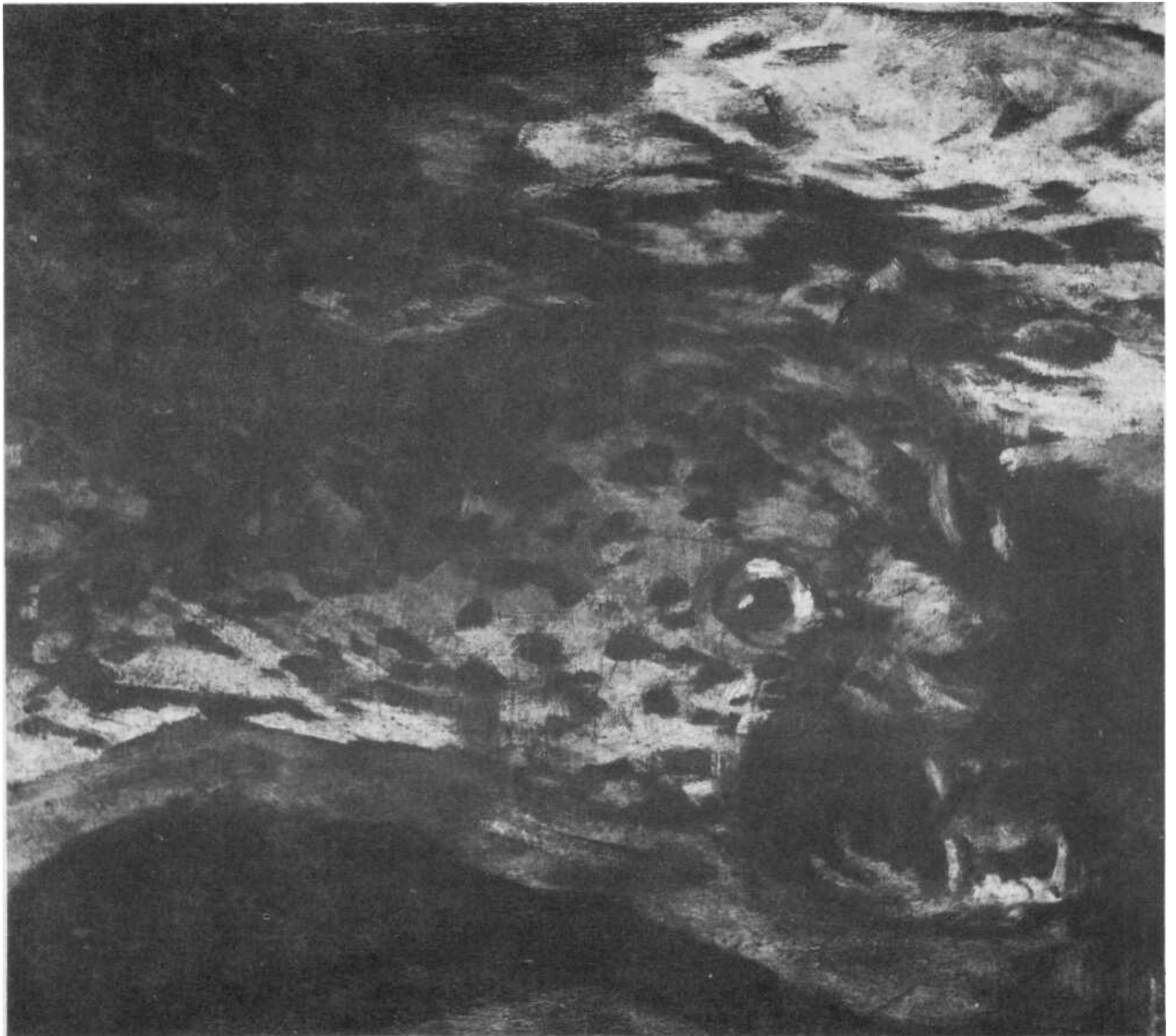


DOUBLE NUMBER 45 1969

AUCKLAND CITY
ART GALLERY

QUARTERLY



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1969: EDITORIAL

COVER

Girolamo Pieri Nerli, 1863-1926

Detail: *Lady in Green*. For complete picture, see page 10

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The *Auckland City Art Gallery Quarterly* is published by the Art Gallery, Parks and Library Division, Auckland City Council; and is concerned primarily with presenting information about works of art acquired by the Auckland City Art Gallery.

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Earlier this year a National Development Conference of New Zealand was called by the Government to consider possible broad aims for the country's future development, and although the emphasis was naturally on economic planning, aspects of cultural activities were also suggested for consideration, even if this topic was added as an eleventh-hour decision. A Social and Cultural Committee was appointed by the Conference Steering Committee, and amongst the terms of reference were: (i) Consider the concept of 'quality of life' and the elements which, in total, are conducive to the attainment of a fuller social and cultural environment complementary to the material and economic targets. (2) Identify the problems associated with the attainment of a desirable social and cultural environment taking into account the limitations imposed by cost and the availability of resources. (3) Examine the measures, organizational machinery, and policies for dealing with such problems. (4) Consider and examine, among other things, the cultural needs of metropolitan areas, rural areas, and smaller towns.

In May, at the Conference's Second Plenary Session, the Social and Cultural Committee recommended an investigation of ways to provide better cultural services and facilities in the community. This should include: (a) More support and encouragement for the inventive artist, (b) The possibility of re-establishing a service for smaller centres similar to the Community Arts Service, (c) How young people's cultural interests can be maintained after they leave school, (d) The pooling of resources by cultural organizations at the local level, (c) The use of school buildings for community cultural centres.

A co-ordinating committee for cultural activities should be set up. The committee believes it is necessary to have a body which surveys the arts and the cultural aspects of adult education and recreation. It should keep in touch with developments, encourage desirable trends, and advise Government. In particular such a body should look at: (a) The need to establish an institution to provide advanced training over the whole range of the arts, (b) The cultural needs of the individual and of the nation and their economic implications, (c) The problems of patronage and support of the arts in a small democracy, (d) The need for a permanent co-ordinating and planning body for all cultural agencies.

Signor NERLI
the painter



Photo: Hocken Library, Dunedin

G. P. Nerli
Dunedin
1896

Little more than a decade ago Nerli's reputation largely rested on his association with either Charles Conder or Frances Hodgkins, both of whom it is said were influenced by him early in their careers as painters. This view is being modified so that Nerli, as an individual painter, is now coming into his own with some significance within the context of New Zealand painting, and to a lesser extent, Australian painting. Certain facts about Nerli's life can be stated with assurance to which some hearsay information can be added, but as for a complete record of his life and work, much remains uncertain or unknown. Even his Christian names raise problems, for in Art Gallery catalogues in Australia and New Zealand, he is referred to in a variety of ways; sometimes (to give the two fullest versions) as the Marchese Girolamo Ballatti Nerli or at other times as

Girolamo Pieri Nerli. His method of signing his paintings does not help us greatly in this matter, but there is the possibility that he had three or four Christian names and simply modified his use of them as he saw fit. Nerli is reported by William Moore as saying that he preferred simply to be called Signer Nerli because the title Marchese would be inappropriate 'in a new country and in an atmosphere of hard work'.¹ Also, it would appear that to his friends and acquaintances he was known simply as Jack.

Girolamo Nerli was born in the Palazzo Pieri Pecci, Siena, 1863. His father, an Italian nobleman, belonged to an old Tuscan family whose lineage dated back to the fourteenth century. His mother was of English descent, the

¹ William Moore *The Story of Australian art* Sydney, 1934. 2 vols.

daughter of Anne, Baroness Hamilton of Sweden, and Thomas Medwin, the author of a *Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron* and biography of Percy Bysshe Shelley.² Girolamo was a younger son and it was only after his two elder brothers had died without issue that he succeeded to the title. Count Gioacchino Pecci, later Pope Leo xm, was a cousin to Nerli.³

When it is considered that Nerli's name is so often linked with the Australian 'Impressionists', that his work was frequently called impressionistic and that he is also said to have shown in his paintings the influence of Monet's early style,⁴ then I think there is some justification in considering the state of Italian painting prior to Nerli's departure from Italy early in the eighteen-eighties.

As a starting point it is necessary to understand the artistic trends that were emerging in Florence when Nerli was still a small child. This was the period of the Macchiaioli, the most vital group of painters active in Italy during the nineteenth century. The group aimed to bring back into painting a feeling of immediacy that arose from direct contact with nature, and in this the influence of Corot and the Barbizon School played a part. Rather than painting in the studio they sought the freedom of painting in the open air. In certain respects they reflected the political fervour associated with Garibaldi, and their rejection of the Accademia is not unlike the suspicion the patriots felt for the Papacy. They saw the products of their art as a genuine expression of the society in which they lived and held that the truest evaluation of society resulted from the personal interpretation of individual artists. The refined, studied effects, and the bias towards historical and literary subjects favoured by the academic painters were seen by the Macchiaioli as a failure to come to terms with the realities of the contemporary world. Although Giovanni Fattori was the best-known painter of the group, it also included Giuseppe Abbati, Raffaello Sernesi, Silvestro Lega, Vito D'Ancona as well as Adriano Cccioni and Telemaco Signorini who both acted as their spokesmen. Giovanni (Nino) Costa, a painter who had a decisive influence on Fattori, was loosely associated with the group, but in 1870 he returned to Rome to champion painting against the tourism that so adversely affected art in the Eternal City. As with a number of art movements the name Macchiaioli was first applied to these painters as a critic's jest in 1861, and was derived from the word *macchie* which means *spots*. The artists themselves had used this word in describing their procedure of building up a composition through the use of patches or blobs of colour which were used to accent the interplay of light and dark. While there is a tendency to apply this term to their use of colour

patches, painted with bold brushstrokes, it applies equally to the system they devised for building up the composition of their pictures.

By 1880 the Macchiaioli had lost its unity as a group but at the same time, while never a popular movement with the public, its influence increased and spread to other art centres within Italy. Throughout the eighteen-seventies, as the corporate vision of the Macchiaioli began to wane, Milan's participation in the artistic life of Italy increased. One painter to gain considerable notice at the time was Tranquillo Cremona whose work was known for its sensuous qualities and his use of blurred tones that suggest a debt to the chiaroscuro of Leonardo da Vinci, and whose handling of the brush reveals characteristics that in some ways are superficially akin to the Macchiaioli's technique. Whereas the Macchiaioli were Realists the Scapigliati (the unkempt ones), to whose ideas Cremona subscribed, were Romantics with a strong belief in bohemianism. In Naples the work of Guiseppe de Nittis, a painter who had ties with the Macchiaioli, and that of Antonio Mancini, whose work was influenced by Cremona, are also relevant from a stylistic standpoint.

Nerli studied art in Florence at the Accademia di Belle Arti under Professor Antonio Ciseri and Giovanni Muzzioli,⁵ and while it is uncertain when Nerli did attend, it seems unlikely, because of his age, that he would have been a student before 1878. Ciseri's early paintings represented the academic product that the Macchiaioli rebelled against and although, by the time Nerli studied under him, Ciseri had developed a more individual style, his paintings were still cold and somewhat theatrical. His *Christ being carried to the sepulchre*, the best of his 'major' works, has a touch of grandeur derived from his early study of the old masters, but in his most famous work, the *Ecce Homo* in the Pitti Palace, a popular work that many would recognize without

² See note I.

³ Newspaper report of Nerli's death: details of newspaper unknown, but probably a Sydney paper ca 1926. Also, Eric Ramsden, Auckland newspaper report 1927: details of date and paper's name unknown.

⁴ Alan McCulloch *Encyclopedia of Australian art* Hutchinson, 1968.

⁵ Most writers, following William Moore, give Ciseri as Nerli's teacher, but reference to Muzzioli is found in the *Catalogue of the National Gallery of Victoria: Appendix II p29*. Prof Ciseri, 1821-1891, ran a private school as well as his professorship at the Academy, but here I have assumed that Nerli 'would have attended the Academy. Giovanni Muzzioli, 1854-1894, known as the Alma-Tadema of Italy, had a reputation for the sympathetic manner in which he could depict the qualities of marble. See also note 7.

knowing who had painted it, the trend, almost a mania, for anything historical is only too evident. During the latter period of the nineteenth century the concern over history was like a fever, and for the painter it implied not just historical subjects but also careful and accurate attention to period costume, setting and other details, while institutions saw it as a need for historical archives, universities regarded it as an essential requirement for academic study and in schools and colleges essays on historical events were regularly submitted for competition prizes. Too often history became a matter of detail divorced from human affairs; a series of disconnected events that had become lifeless.

As a painting like *A Bacchanalian Orgie* illustrates, Nerli did not entirely escape the fashion for historical subjects, but any interest he did have along these lines was subsidiary to his main intentions. Nerli's choice of such subjects may

⁶ Quoted from Dario Durbe *Macchiaioli* in *Encyclopedia of world art* McGraw-Hill, 1964. Vol 9, col 364.

Woman with turkeys
Oil, 24 X 36 ins



reflect the influence of his teacher Ciseri, but from a stylistic viewpoint his method of painting is much wider in outlook. By the time Nerli was at the Academy the ideas inherent in the Macchiaioli movement would probably have been acceptable to the students, or at least the more lively amongst them. When applied in a general way to Nerli's paintings the statement by Adriano Cecioni on the Macchiaioli's technique has some relevance: 'The truth is born of spots of colour and of light and dark values, each of which has an effect of its own that is measured by means of its relationships. In each spot this relationship is double - as value and as hue. When one says that the colour is right in hue but not in value, it means that it is too light in respect to the other tones. For example, in the hue scale, yellow has a greater value than white. But in the scale of light and dark its value may be lower, if the white is in the shade and serves as a background to a sunlit yellow. The colour never changes; the light has the property of altering it... because shade does not act like a cloth but like a veil.'⁶ Something

of the workings of this theory can be seen in Nerli's *A Bacchanalian Orgie* and *A study: Head of a Girl*, yet this latter work also suggests a loose affiliation to some of Tranquillo Cremona's paintings, notably *Lovers' Silence* in the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome. Although Cremona died in 1878 his work was well known beyond Milan and the bohemian way of life upheld by the Scapigliati undoubtedly would have appealed to young artists such as Nerli. In this respect it may be significant that it was in Milan, at an exhibition held in the Pinacoteca di Brera, that Nerli was awarded a medal for work he had submitted. However, not enough is known about Nerli's early work and career to state anything definite about his formative influences except that he was typically Italian in his general approach to painting and that his style is neither conservative nor avant garde but belongs very much to the period. The construction of a pictorial composition made up of small areas of modulated colour and tone combined with the use of simple colour harmonies and the suppression of detail plus the idea of catching nature in her less formal moods were factors characteristic of the Macchiaioli painters at their best, but in the general process of assimilation by other painters in the eighteen-seventies and eighties the more daring qualities of the movement had been lost or modified by less vigorous traits from other contemporary movements in Italian painting. The fashionable, the pseudo-romantic and literary elements that entered Italian painting at this period minimised many of the gains made by the Macchiaioli, and if we are to be realistic, it is from this background that Nerli comes. The uneasiness that was soon to make itself felt in the visual arts, and of which the symbolic implications found in Giovanni Segantini's paintings were symptomatic, arrived too late to have any effect on Nerli's style. At the time when Nerli left Italy, Segantini, who was five years senior to Nerli, would have been passing through his Millet period and merely on the threshold of his efforts to penetrate reality and so go beyond appearances.

The links originally forged with the French Impressionists by such painters as Signorini and Martelli proved too insubstantial to last. The possible strength that Italian painting may have later gained from an association with Impressionism never came to anything. One factor preventing this was the resistance to French influence generally, a situation due to the strained political relations between the two countries plus the intense nationalism then felt by Italians. However, a few works by Impressionist painters did slip in. One such occasion happened in 1879 when Martelli persuaded Pissarro to exhibit two pictures with the Società Promotrice di Belle Arti in Florence. In all probability Nerli may have

seen these two paintings.

The reasons for Nerli going to Australia are not known, nor is the exact date of his arrival in Melbourne certain but it seems it was late in 1885.⁷ While in Melbourne he and Ugo Catani, a fellow Italian, studied under Arthur Jose de Souya Loureiro, a Portuguese painter with French training. Loureiro, who had arrived in Melbourne in 1884, was highly respected by the local painters for the freshness and breadth that his work displayed. It was probably through Loureiro and Catani that Nerli exhibited with the Australian Art Association⁸ in Buxton's Rooms, Swainson Street, opposite the Town Hall. The Association had just been organized as a breakaway group from the Victoria Academy of Arts and included amongst its founding members Tom Roberts, Ugo Catani, Arthur Loureiro, John Mather and John Ford Paterson. Late in 1886 Nerli left Melbourne for Sydney.

While it appears that Nerli's work went unnoticed in Melbourne, it did slowly gain attention in Sydney. Nerli became acquainted with the local painters and joined the Sketch Club attached to the Art Society of New South Wales. The Club, whose meetings appear to have been lively affairs, counted amongst its members such artists as Phil May, Benjamin E. Minns, Julian Ashton and Henry Fullwood. 'In the early days of the society', says one of its members, 'there was a fine spirit of camaraderie. During the two days before sending-in day, artists used to visit each other's studios in batches. We had lunches and afternoon teas together, criticized each other's work, and still remained the best of friends.'⁹

The artist usually associated with Nerli's stay in Sydney is Charles Conder. Although it is traditionally maintained that Nerli was a major influence in the development of Conder's painting style, some justifiable reasons to doubt the extent of this influence have been expressed by Dr Ursula Hoff.¹⁰ This role has now been switched to Tom Roberts while the

⁷ Moore (see note i) gives the arrival date as 1886 while the *Catalogue of the National Gallery of Victoria: Appendix II* gives 1885. Bernard Smith, however, in *Australian painting, 1788-1960* (p66) writes: 'Both Catani and Girolamo Nerli studied at the art school in Florence under Antonio Ciseri before arriving in Melbourne c 1884-5'.

⁸ Moore (see note i) gives this as the Victorian Artists' Society, the name by which the Victoria Academy of Arts and the Australian Artists' Association was known when they reunited in 1888.

⁹ See note I: p164. The first president of the Art Society of New South Wales, formed in 1880, was J. C. Hoyte.

¹⁰ Some of the various problems concerning how and who influenced Conder are discussed in Ursula Hoff's *Charles Conder: his Australian years* Melbourne, National Gallery Society of Victoria, 1960: p12 and 13, and note 4.

effect of Julian Ashton's and Nerli's paintings on Conder have receded to that of secondary importance. While it is known that Conder owned a painting by Nerli, the extent of their friendship is far from certain and may not have gone much beyond that of acquaintance. Any direct influence that Nerli did have on Conder appears to have been short lived and seems to be confined to the period after Conder had met Roberts late in 1887 and his going to Melbourne in October 1888, although it did linger on in some of Conder's paintings done in Melbourne. One work fre-

¹¹ Conder's *The Departure of the S.S. Orient*, Streeton's *Redfern Station* and Nerli's *Street scene on a rainy night* are all reproduced on p26—7 in Brian Finemore *Australian Impressionists* Longmans 1968.

Portrait of a boy
Pastel, 2.9 X 2.1 ins



quently cited as showing clear evidence of Nerli's influence is *The Departure of the S.S. Orient*, painted by Conder in 1888, and usually linked on subject and stylistic grounds, just as another work, *How we lost poor Flossie* 1889, is linked with Nerli's paintings of wet evening scenes with their watery reflections of the street gas-lamps and pedestrians. A similar influence suggests itself in Arthur Streeton's *Redfern Station*, a work painted in 1893.¹¹

In all probability Nerli's influence on Conder and other Australian painters was not so much a direct stylistic one, but came from the idea of reducing a painting to broad effects through the elimination of all unnecessary detail. In this respect he was more rigorous than Roberts whose brand of 'impressionism' was tempered with the realism associated with Jules Bastien-Lapage, a French painter with considerable standing amongst the painters of the period. It is obvious that the distinction Roberts and Conder made between the 'sketch' and a 'finished' painting seemed immaterial to Nerli. It is therefore not surprising to find newspaper critics referring to Nerli's street scenes as 'impressions'. However, in the realm of colour Nerli's work appears sombre in comparison to the higher keyed colour preferred by most of the Australian Impressionists. In the strictest sense this style was not that of the French Impressionists but was a composite style that was more inclined towards French Realism modified by what Australians thought Impressionism's play of light and colour should be, and, as is clearly seen in Conder's work, a touch of the post-impressionists' disposition towards the use of lineal elements that do more than just separate one image from another. Although *plein-air* painting was practised in Australia before Nerli's arrival, his particular procedure resulted in a greater feeling of immediacy than had hitherto been used by Australian painters, and it is likely that he may have prepared the way for Tom Roberts' more persuasive, doctrinaire approach.

If Nerli was to later make derogatory remarks about landscape painting, this disrespect is not evident in the work he did in Australia, for his output seems to have been fairly equally divided between landscapes and portraits. One of the paintings that helped to establish his reputation as a portraitist was *Boheme: a portrait of A. Dattilo-Rubbo*, a person who was to have an important influence on artistic life in Sydney. Amongst Nerli's admirers in Sydney was J. F. Archibald, whose radical weekly, the *Bulletin*, contained regular contributions from some of the best black and white artists in Sydney, including Phil May and David Low. At Archibald's insistence Nerli painted a portrait of Myra Kemble, a well-known theatrical personality, a

painting that hung in the vestibule of the Criterion Theatre for many years,¹² and which was originally exhibited with the Royal Art Society in 1888.

Some idea as to the effect that Nerli's work had on the general public in Sydney can be gauged by James Green's recollection. Nerli's 'wildly sketch *Bacchanalian Orgie*, a la Monticelli, was "caviare to the general", and the audacity of his Salome-suggesting, black and yellow symphony, *Repose*, with what a critic called **un tantino troppo di bravura** about it, took the Sydney public's breath away. But Nerli's mastery of both the human form and the most difficult colour problems, his excellence in composition, and his fine ability in drawing, with not a little of the poetry of Arno and the **chic** and **abandon** of Paris in his nature, made ample amends for any spice of affectation in his work, and helped to level up the painting of the colony to a higher standard.¹³

Sometime during October or early November 1889 Nerli arrived in Dunedin. His reason for coming to New Zealand was apparently connected with the *New Zealand and South Seas International Exhibition, 1889-1890*,¹⁴ for he seems to have had an official or semi-official position in relation to the New South Wales Loan Collection of paintings shown at the Exhibition. The fact that Nerli had nine works listed in the official catalogue, a number in excess of

any other exhibitor, and is known to have included other works besides these in the Exhibition, indicates a degree of freedom in arranging what was finally hung. He also carried out other work connected with the Exhibition; work he was engaged on when he first met A. H. O'Keeffe who has described the incident. Nerli 'was painting a great emu for a bay in the exhibition. He told me he was an artist. By the look of the emu it needed saying. However, he took me to see one of his pictures hanging in the Sydney court, *A Bacchanalian Orgie*, and it made me change my opinion.'¹⁵ One reporter, commenting on the 'Colonial' artists included in the Exhibition, mentioned 'Nerli, who is

¹² See note 3.

¹³ This passage, quoted by Bernard Smith in *Place, taste and tradition Sydney, 1945* (footnote to p126), originally appeared in the *Australasian Art Review* I June 1899, pp23-4, under Green's pseudonym 'De Libra'. See also Smith's *Australian Painting, 1788-1960* Melbourne, Oxford UP, 1962: p66.

¹⁴ In the official catalogue it stated that the 'Exhibition will be ready for the reception of exhibits on October 1st 1889', and later, the 'space not occupied by November 1st 1889 will revert to the Commissioners for re-assignment'. The Exhibition Gallery was opened on 26 November 1889 and closed 3 May 1890.

¹⁵ A. H. O'Keeffe *Art in retrospect: earlier Dunedin days -paint and personalities* (reprinted from the *Otago Daily Times*) in *ART IN NEW ZEALAND* (No 47) vol 7 no 3 March 1940, p160.

A Bacchanalian orgie
Oil, 12 x 24 ins



evidently a clever colourist and draughtsman.¹⁶

Nerli's movements during 1890, 1891 and the first half of 1892 are uncertain and although several writers state that he was in Dunedin throughout this period there are good reasons to suspect that much of this period was, in fact, spent in Sydney.¹⁷

¹⁶ H. V. Miller *A century of art in Otago* Wellington [1950] p.17. Unfortunately no source references are given in this book.

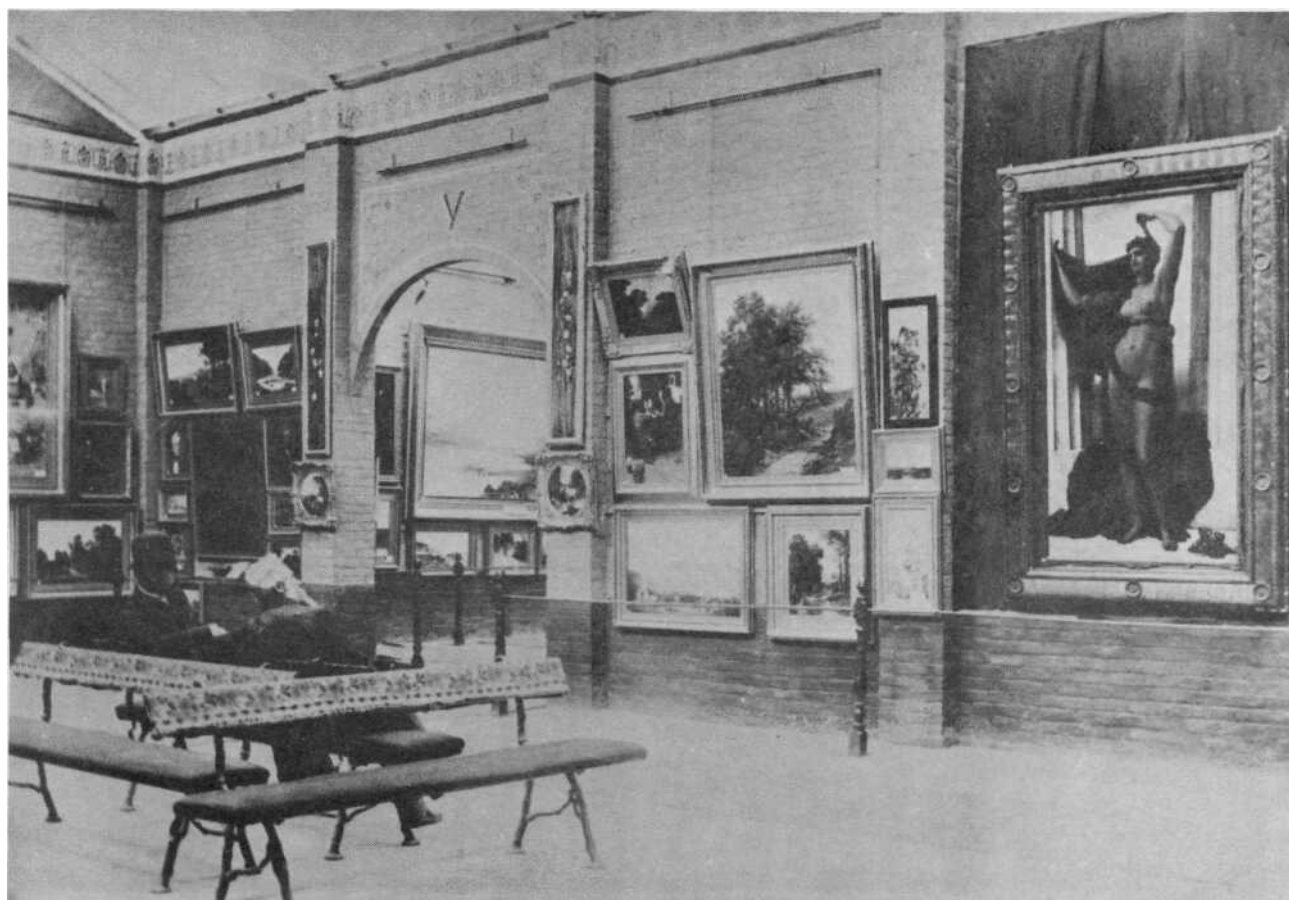
¹⁷ The main source for the belief that Nerli was in Dunedin during the whole of 1890, 1891 and the early part of 1892 seems to be based mainly on A. H. O'Keeffe's comment (see note 15). However, O'Keeffe was recalling events that happened nearly fifty years earlier, and as his reference to Nerli's portrait of R. L. Stevenson suggests, no clear demarcation is made between each event for all are run into one narrative as if they happened about the same time. In reading the account given by Moore (see note i) the implications suggest that Nerli went to Apia from Sydney.

¹⁸ Quoted by William Moore, see note I. Moore also gives further details about Nerli's portraits of R. L. Stevenson.

In August 1892 Nerli sailed for Samoa. A brief account of this visit was given by the Marchesa sometime after Nerli's death. 'On reaching Apia,' she writes, 'my husband immediately presented his letters of introduction to Robert Louis Stevenson, who received him with great cordiality. The two men soon became friends, and, with the connivance of Mrs Stevenson, Nerli was able to secure twenty-seven sittings for the life-size bust portraits in oil, pastel, and charcoal, which he made of the celebrated author. "Well, Nerli, your victim is ready," said Stevenson, as he sat for the first portrait, Mrs Stevenson with ready tongue replying, "With such a sitter, the victim is the artist." When the three portraits were finished the author remarked, "The oil represents me as I am, the pastel as I would like to be." Nerli met Stevenson again during the latter's visit to Sydney, and accepted an invitation to pay another visit in order to paint a portrait of Mrs Stevenson. But death intervened and the two men never saw each other again.'¹⁸

New Zealand and South Seas International Exhibition, Dunedin, 1889-1890

Photo: Hocken Library, Dunedin



Stevenson, to commemorate the ordeal of having to sit for Nerli, wrote in the painter's autograph book the following light-hearted verse:

Did ever mortal man hear tell of sac singular a ferlie,
 As the coming to Apia here of the painter, Mr Nerli?
 He cam; and Oh, for a hunner pound, of a' he was the pearlie,
 The pearl of a' the painter folk was surely Mr Nerli.
 He took a thraw to paint mysel', he painted late and early;
 Oh wow! the mony a yawn I've yawned in the beard of Mr Nerli.
 Whiles I would sleep and whiles would wake, and whiles was
 mair than surly,
 I wonder sair, as I sair there fornenst the eyes of Nerli,
 O will he paint me the way I want as bonny as a girlie,
 Or will he paint me an ugly tyke, and be damned to Mr Nerli.'
 But still and on and whichever it is he is a canty Kerlie.
 The Lord protect the back and neck of honest Mr Nerli.

Vailima, Samoa, September, 1892.¹⁹

The visit to Sydney by Robert Louis Stevenson referred to by the Marchesa Nerli, and at which time Nerli met the writer once again, occurred during December 1892.

Sometime before June 1893 Nerli was again in Dunedin. With him he had one of his portraits of Stevenson which O'Keeffe said 'went begging for £8 in Dunedin'.²⁰ As a means of earning a living Nerli opened his studio to private pupils and amongst the first to avail themselves of these lessons were Frances Hodgkins and two of her friends, 'Lulu' Roberts and 'Peep' Gibson. In writing to her sister Isabel, Frances Hodgkins states that she wanted 'to make the most of Nerli's lessons' and that 'Nerli has been most awfully good to me and gives me an extra lesson on Saturdays at his studio'.²¹

Although Frances Hodgkins had reached her mid-twenties, her work up to this time was amateurish, but after her first contacts with Nerli her watercolours begin to show some glimmerings of what is meant by composition and technique. Another painter who studied under Nerli, probably from about this time, was Grace Joel. Nerli also began a life class - a somewhat daring enterprise for the period - which was apparently confined to men, amongst whom were William M. Hodgkins and Dr J. H. Scott. In a letter to her sister, Frances Hodgkins reports that 'Mrs Scott showed me Dr S's drawings from the nude model today, they were hidden at the back of her wardrobe; they are very good indeed and very modest'.²²

Later in 1893, during November, Nerli exhibited with the Otago Art Society. The reviewer in the *Otago Daily Times* noted that 'Attention is at once arrested, and naturally arrested by a portrait, by Signor Nerli, of a lady well known in society circles in this city, though she is no longer a resident of Dunedin. This work, which is three-quarter-length and life-size, occupies what may be considered the



pride of place in the gallery. It shows the lady in question attired in a ball dress, over which is thrown a fur-fringed cloak held back by the hands. The dress itself is a delicate opalescent green, full of shimery light which reflects here and there the tender pink of the ball-robe lining. The pose of the figure is most graceful, and the artist's treatment of the drapery is remarkably skilful. After this work Signor Nerli's best in the gallery is his portrait of a Dunedin young lady. Indeed, it is doubtful whether, in point of technique,

this study is not superior to the other, for it is a marvel of technical excellence. The texture of the boa, which the subject is wearing, is represented with truly remarkable artistic skill, and the flesh tints are exquisitely reproduced; and there is a total absence from the picture of any attempt to capture the eye by meretricious, slovenly painting.'

If Nerli's paintings impressed the art circles in Dunedin, so also did the man himself, for as A. H. O'Keeffe described him, he was 'a memorable figure . . . rather tall, with black, pointed beard', who was free and easy in his ways and who 'would borrow a fiver, or if he had one you could have it'.²³

During February the following year, 1894, and in collaboration with L. W. Wilson and J. D. Perrett, Nerli opened a private school, the Otago Art Academy. The advertisement appearing in the *Otago Daily Times* for 13 February announced courses in 'Oil, Water-colour, and Pastel Painting*' as well as 'Special Classes' for which had been engaged the services of a 'Professional Lady Model'. While next to nothing is known about the operations of this school it must have met with some success for, as E. H. McCormick has suggested, 'the official School of Art . . .

¹⁹ Quoted by A. H. O'Keeffe, see note 15, and in part quoted by William Moore.

²⁰ See note 15. It is not certain whether this is the same portrait that Eric Ramsden (see note 3) states 'remained for a considerable time in the McGregor Wright Gallery at Wellington, waiting for a purchaser. The price was 40 guineas. The merit of the portrait, and its historical association, was eventually recognized by Mrs Turnbull, a Scotch visitor, who paid the required sum for it.'

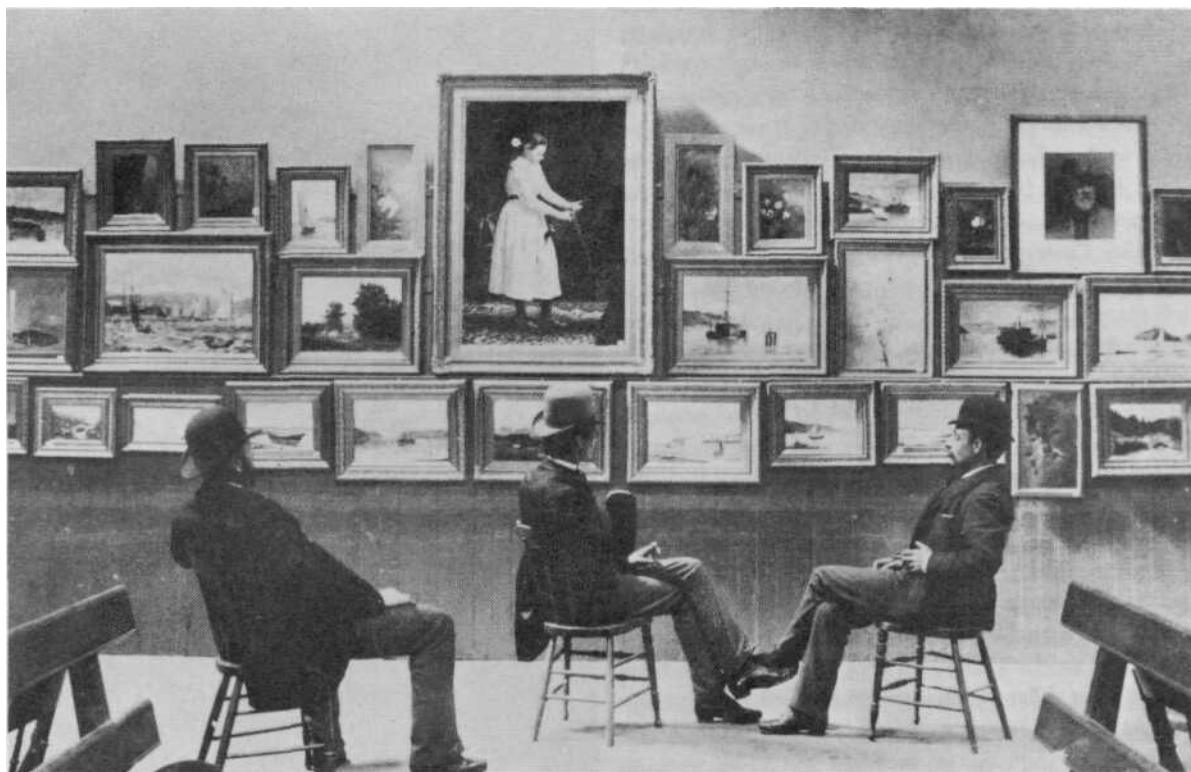
²¹ E. H. McCormick *The expatriate* Wellington, 1954: p26, and his *Works of Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand* Auckland, 1954: p33.

²² See note 21, *The expatriate*: p27.

²³ See note 15.

Lady in green
Oil, 90x33 ins

D. C. Hutton, D. E. Hutton and G. P. Nerli
Photo:Hocken Library



countered the threat of the rival Art Academy by a time honoured stratagem . . . ,²⁴ of offering Nerli a position at the School. In a letter from Mr Pryde, the Secretary of the Otago Education Board, dated 7 February 1895, Nerli was informed: 'Sir, I am directed by the Chairman to inform you that you have been appointed to the position of Teacher of Painting in the School of Art and Design. The appointment is for the session at a salary of .£ 150 per annum, payable monthly and is subject to the stipulation that the Board shall be entitled at any time to terminate your engagement on giving one months notice for any cause which the Board may consider sufficient.'²⁵

Hardly had Nerli begun teaching when David C. Hutton, the Principal of the School, had recourse to address a letter to the Education Board about Nerli's 'carrying on [of] private classes'.²⁶

It has been suggested that the appointment of Nerli as instructor in painting may have influenced Frances Hodgkins' decision to return to the Otago School of Art and Design in order to undertake the South Kensington examinations,²⁷ but that in later life this admiration for Nerli's teaching ability was minimized and her memory of him conditioned by other more unconventional traits. Years later she reports him as saying at this time: 'In the morning I open the student, and then I go over to the public house and rest. In the afternoon I shut the student up. Good to get the salary, but I do not like the Accademia - too much work.'²⁸ While this parodies Nerli, it undoubtedly contains an element of truth. Whatever the situation was in relation to Nerli's teaching habits the number of students attending the School increased by thirty-seven over the previous year to reach a total of 360 students. In an official report it was noted that 'Owing to the crowded state of the painting and life-class rooms, it was found necessary to make two divisions of each class.'²⁹

The main body of Nerli's own work painted in Dunedin is confined to portraits or near-portraits executed either in oils or watercolours, although he did do a few landscapes like *The Quarry*, *Water of Leith*, *Dunedin*. Included amongst his portraits are those of W. M. Hodgkins, Arthur Hadfield Fisher and Mrs J. H. Scott - a portrait which, according to Frances Hodgkins, 'was not like" her'.³⁰ Besides the contacts Nerli made with the students and staff at the School, or the social connections arising out of his activities as a portrait painter, he also established firm contact with other painters who shared similar ideas to his own. To this end the then recently formed Easel Club must have played an important part. At its first annual meeting, reported in the *Triad*, July 1896, we learn that its president was L. W. Wilson

and the members of the committee comprised Miss Jenny Wimperis, Miss Grace Joel and Messrs Nerli, A. H. O'Keeffe and R. H. Hawcridge. Just exactly what the Club's activities

²⁴ See note 21, *The works of Frances Hodgkins*: p3p.

²⁵ Otago Education Board *Letterbook no 41* letter 214 (Hocken Library, Dunedin).

²⁶ Otago Education Board *Register of Inward Letters*: 16 February 1895.

²⁷ See note 21, *The expatriate*: p3i.

²⁸ Quoted by Myfanwy Evans in *Frances Hodgkins* (Penguin Modern Painters) 1948.

²⁹ *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives*: 1896, Section E - I p83 and E - ic p8.

³⁰ Una Platts *The origins of Frances Hodgkins* Dunedin, 1969: pi4-

The blue girl
Oil, 25 x 17 ins



were, or how long it survived, is not known.³¹

While, on the whole, Nerli's work seems to have found general acceptance amongst the exhibition-going public in New Zealand, there were those who held reservations. In this respect the report of the Canterbury Art Society's Exhibition, June 1896, is revealing for the reviewer, in discussing the paintings by Nerli, prefixes his comments with: 'It is satisfactory to be able to note that Signor Nerli

³¹ See note 30: p31.

³² Christchurch *The Press* i June 1896: p6.

³³ See note 29: 1897 E - ic pig.

³⁴ See note 29: 1897 E - 1C pig, and note 25, letter II November 1896.

³⁵ See note 15.

Portrait of a woman
Watercolour, 15Jx 10J



(Dunedin) has departed for the nonce from his usual style of vagueness and suggestions of his subject only. This school of painting, like many other fads, is happily on the wane, the days of three splashes of paint to the right and three to the left, constituting the picture, being numbered, we are glad to say.³²

At about the same time the Otago Art Society decided to 'offer a silver medal for the best study of a head from life, painted in either water or oil colours' by any student in Nerli's class at the Otago School of Art and Design. Mr Charles W. Foster, on the recommendation of the Art Society, was appointed the judge of the competition, but only four students participated. As Mr Foster's report was unfavourable, a decision with which D. C. Hutton agreed, the medal was not awarded.³³

It is likely that this incident reflects the obvious discontentment that Nerli must have felt at being tied-down by the regular routine demanded by the School. That the relationship between him and his students, both public and private, had declined is reflected in Frances Hodgkins' outburst that Nerli's comments on her work were now 'absolutely useless'. In October, Nerli, 'without any apparent reason, unexpectedly left' the School and on 11 November 1896 the Principal, D. C. Hutton, informed the Otago Education Board of Sigr Nerli's absence from duty.³⁴ By this time it appears certain that Nerli had already left Dunedin.

The chances are that Nerli stayed in Wellington for some months in lodgings provided by McGregor Wright. It is known that he was on friendly terms with James Nairn whom he appears to have met earlier while in Dunedin. It is quite probable that an incident related to A. H. O'Keeffe dates from this period. 'I remember', writes O'Keeffe, "'Bonanza' Young making him a suit of clothes. He then went to Wellington, and wrote from there to a brother of the brush in Dunedin to tell Young that the clothes fitted him well, but he would never get paid for them. The artist thought it would be a good joke to show Young the letter. Young thought it was the limit, and said he would summons Nerli. The friend thought it had gone far enough, and explained it was a joke.³⁵ Another story related by Eric Ramsden about Nerli's stay in Wellington tells how 'he painted the four panels of a door of his bedroom. What has since become of the door heaven only knows. Possibly the next tenants were a little more orthodox in their tastes and painted out the work of the Italian.'

At the time of Nerli's departure from Dunedin his financial affairs appear to have been in a chaotic state; a situation known to many more than just his creditors.

Frances Hodgkins, in a letter written to her mother in Wellington, sought confirmation about one of these rumours: 'The last I heard of Nerli he was at Mt Eden [gaol]. Is that true?'³⁶ Although we do not know Mrs Hodgkins* reply, the answer would seem to have been in the negative.

While Nerli did make his way north to Auckland, his journey there was by no means rushed - for instance, he must have stayed in Rotorua for some little time; a fact evident by the pictures he painted of the region. Amongst the reasons for Nerli going to Auckland was that his friend J. Douglas Perritt had just recently settled there.

At the time of the seventeenth Annual Exhibition of the Auckland Society of Arts, held during April 1897, Nerli is listed amongst the working members with his address simply given as Auckland. Included in the catalogue are nine paintings entered under his name, amongst them *Maori heads from life* and two landscapes painted at Rotorua.³⁷ Reviewing the exhibition in the *Auckland Star*, the reporter noted that 'Signor Nerli is comparatively a newcomer to Auckland but he comes with a reputation as an artist especially skilful in figure painting'.

At sometime during his stay in Auckland Nerli joined the Savage Club and to mark his interest in the Club's activities he presented to his fellow members a painting of a savage brandishing a mere. Eric Ramsden recalled that the figure was 'more Samoan than Maori' looking and suggested that the painter was presumably still under the influence of his visit to Samoa when he painted it.³⁸

The following year the catalogue of the Auckland Art Society's annual exhibition once again lists Nerli as a working member with his address given as the Victoria Arcade, Auckland, but no works by him were included in the exhibition. It seems likely that at the time of this exhibition, held late in April, going into May, 1898, Nerli had already left Auckland and was making his way back to the South Island. While in Christchurch he married Cecilia Josephine Barron - apparently known as Nellie Barron - whom he had met in Auckland and who came from an old Irish family that had settled in New Zealand.³⁹

After this no other mention has yet been found concerning Nerli's period in New Zealand and it may be assumed that he left the country shortly afterwards. Nor are his movements known after his departure except that he finally returned to Italy.⁴⁰ One story relates how he became Court Painter to the Vatican but as yet no evidence has been forthcoming to substantiate this fact.⁴¹

During World War I Nerli was in London in association with the Italian Embassy as director of the Prisoner of War

Department while his wife worked with the Italian Red Cross.⁴² In 1915 Nerli appears to have sent a painting of *Kensington Palace* out to New Zealand, for it is listed in the catalogue of the Auckland Society of Arts Annual Exhibition for 1915.

Nerli's final years were spent at Nervi, near Genoa. Here

³⁶ See note 21 *The expatriate*: p34. The letter was dated 22 November 1896. See also *The works of Frances Hodgkins*: p42.

³⁷ The catalogue numbers are n, 19, 22, 58, SOA, 92, 101 and 140, the last entry being a watercolour.

³⁸ See note 3, E. Ramsden reference.

³⁹ See notes i and 30: p26, and note 3 E. Ramsden reference.

⁴⁰ *National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art* Wellington. 1940: P56-

⁴¹ See note 16: p40.

⁴² See note I: vol 2 p210.

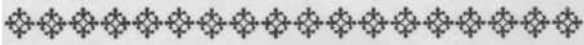
A study: head of a girl
Oil, 14 X 10 ins



he died in 1926 in the Villa Durazzo. Amongst the last works he painted was one of a notable eighteenth-century dramatist, *Goldoni in Paris*, a painting that was purchased by the Municipality of Genoa.⁴³

G.H.B.

⁴³ Same as note 42, and E. Ramsden reference, note 3.



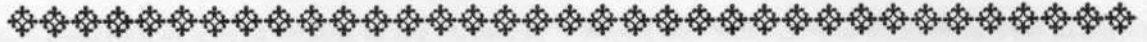
Portrait of Jane Eyre
Oil, 25 X 18 ins



Detail: *Portrait of Jane Eyre*



THE MARCO D'OGGIONO MADONNA



In 1482, at a time when Leonardo da Vinci was approaching his thirtieth year, he petitioned Ludovico Sforza, offering his services. Sometime later - the date remains uncertain - he entered the Duke's employ. For almost two decades Leonardo served the Duke of Milan as civil and military engineer, architect, designer and director of court festivals, sculptor and painter. As an outcome of his artistic activities Leonardo established a modest studio, employing a number of apprentices to help him in his numerous assignments. At one time it had been thought that Leonardo had established an 'Accademia Leonardi Vinci' in Milan, but no real evidence exists to support this. He did, however, share his house with his apprentices and pupils, amongst whom was his *protege* Andrea Salai as well as Antonio Baltraffio, Ambrogio Preda and Marco d'Oggiono. Amongst the noblest artistic products of Leonardo's residence in Milan were the *Madonna of the Rocks* and *The Last Supper*, a work that, owing to the painter's experimental methods, was already a 'muddle of blots' when Vasari saw it in 1556. With the fall of Milan to the invading French in 1499 Leonardo found himself in doubt whether to remain in Milan. These doubts were soon confirmed when the Duke of Milan's counter-attack failed, and during the sacking of the city, Leonardo's large scale equestrian model was destroyed. Although Leonardo quit Milan, there remained behind a large number of followers and imitators whose work possesses only a marginal significance outside the orbit of Leonardo's overwhelming influence.

When faced with the works of these Milanese painters the impression frequently gained is that of men more concerned with preserving the ideas derived from Leonardo's teachings as a set of formula than in developing these ideas for their own benefit as individual painters. While some were painters enough to make some attempt at originality, the effort required to master the perfections of Leonardo's style often proved to be beyond their grasp and so became a hindrance. Even the better painters often fell into the trap of overdoing certain characteristics of Leonardo's style which soon lead to sweetness and prettiness. However, the best of these pictures are far from devoid of artistic merit.

When faced with a painting like Marco d'Oggiono's *Madonna suckling the Child* we cannot ignore these unavoidable facts. Not only was d'Oggiono a pupil and imitator of Leonardo, he was also the painter of several copies after

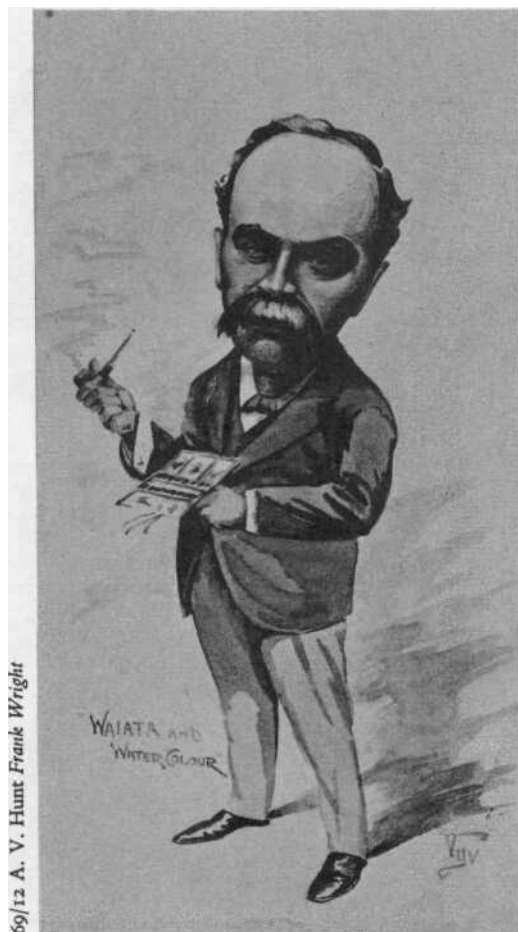
Leonardo - copies like *The Last Supper* at Burlington House which clearly shows what this famous painting must have originally looked like, or of lost works by Leonardo like the *Saint Sebastian* at Berlin.

If the general composition, pose of the figures and overall style of the *Madonna suckling the Child* are considered, then it is easy enough to find similar parallels in a number of pictures by Leonardo. For example, the general composition, although long established as a type before Leonardo commenced painting, was one he favoured and a particular feature of which were the distant vistas seen through open windows. The use of the curtain, however, is an image not found in Leonardo's Madonnas. The legs of the young Christ suggest the Child in Leonardo's *Benois Madonna* while the upper portions of the Child's body is somewhat similar to the Child in the *Madonna Litta*. The left hand of the Madonna follows the general pose in the *Dreyfuss Madonna*, or in reverse, of the hand belonging to Cecilia Gallerani, *The Lady with the Ermie*, and so one could go on drawing superficial similarities, but more significant is Marco d'Oggiono's handling of the emotional undercurrents associated with the subject, for the effects gleaned from the *Madonna suckling the Child* is of an entirely different calibre to that experienced when looking at a Madonna from Leonardo's hand. As with other Milanese painters, Marco d'Oggiono employs the *chiaroscuro* so readily linked to Leonardo's name but the younger painter lacks Leonardo's subtle gift in the modelling he gives to his forms. Perhaps the most noticeable feature of this painting that makes it belong to Marco d'Oggiono is the general shape he gives to the Madonna's head. The slightly bulbous shape of the forehead and the rather slack skin of the face are characteristics found in other paintings by d'Oggiono. The excellent state of preservation observed in this painting is a factor that should not be overlooked for it attests to the painter's skill as a technician.

While it would be foolish to suggest that the *Madonna suckling the Child* is a great masterpiece, nevertheless, in the absence of any other works in the country from this period, Marco d'Oggiono's painting does sum up a good deal that had been achieved in painting at a time when the Italian Renaissance had reached a critical stage as far as the visual arts were concerned.

Marco d'Oggiono, c1475-c1530
Madonna suckling the Child
Oil on panel, 25 x 20 ins
Mackelvie Collection





ACQUISITIONS

The recent additions to the Auckland City Art Gallery Collection given below continues on from the previous list published in the last issue of the *Quarterly*.

69/10 A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
Dr Bakewell
Watercolour, 12 x 9 ins
Purchased

69/11 A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
Louis J. Steele
Watercolour and collage, 12 x 9 ins
Purchased

69/12 A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
Frank Wright
Watercolour, 12 x 9 ins
Purchased

A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/13 *Frederick Ehrenfried Baume*
Watercolour, 12 x 9 ins
Purchased

A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/14 *Carl Schmidt*
Watercolour, 13 x 7 ins
Purchased

A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/15 *Right Rev Churchill Julius, Bishop of Christchurch*
Watercolour, 13 x 9 ins
Purchased

A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/16 *Right Rev Frederick Wallis, Bishop of Wellington*
Watercolour, 14 x 7 ins
Purchased

A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/17 *Right Rev Cecil Wilson, Bishop of Melanesia*
Watercolour, 15 x 7 ins
Purchased

A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/18 *Most Rev Samuel T. Nevill, Bishop of Dunedin and Primate*
Watercolour, 14 x 7 ins
Purchased

A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/19 *Inspector Hickson*
Watercolour, 15 x 7 ins
Purchased

A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/20 *William Crowther, MHR*
Watercolour, 12 x 6 ins
Purchased

A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/21 *William Crowther, MHR*
Watercolour, 13 x 8 ins
Purchased

A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/22 *Lord Plunket (?)*
Watercolour, 12 x 9 ins
Purchased

A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/23 *William Coleman (?)*
Watercolour, 14 x 10 ins
Purchased

A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/24 *Rev William Beatty (?)*
Watercolour, 15 x 8 ins
Purchased

- A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/25 *E. W. Payton* (?)
Watercolour, 12x9 ins
Purchased
- A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/26 *John Logan Campbell* (?)
Watercolour, 13 x 8 ins
Purchased
- A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/27 *C. F. Griffiths* (?)
Watercolour, 13 x 8 ins
Purchased
- A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/28 *Unidentified subject*
Watercolour, 13 x 8 ins
Purchased
- A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/29 *Unidentified subject*
Watercolour, 13 x 8 ins
Purchased
- A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/30 *Unidentified subject*
Watercolour, 13 x 9 ins
Purchased
- A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1859-1929
69/31 *Unidentified subject*
Watercolour, 13 x 8 ins
Purchased
- A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/32 *Unidentified subject*
Watercolour, 15 x 7 ins
Purchased
- A. Vyvyan Hunt, 1854-1929
69/33 *Maori head*
Pen and ink, 6| x 4j ins
Presented by Mrs R. M. Vyvyan Perkins
- Petrus van der Velden, 1837-1913
69/34 *The artist's hands*
Pencil, 9 x 13 ins
Purchased
- Richard Killeen, 1946-
69/35 *Man and window reflection* 1968
Oil on board, 48 x 32 ins
Purchased
- Frances Hodgkins, 1869-1947
69/36 *The Edwardians*
Oil, 40 X 40 ins
Purchased
- Robert Ellis, 1929-
69/37 *Motorway/City* 1969
Oil on board, 48 x 41 ins
Purchased
- Paul Beadle, 1918-
69/38 *Happy holidays* 1968
Bronze, 11 ins high
Purchased
- Jan Nigro, 1920-
69/39 *Standing woman* 1968
Pencil, 16| x 6 ins
Purchased
- Patrick Hanly, 1932-
69/40 *'Inside' the garden* 30 1962
Oil on board, 50 x 35 ins
Purchased
- Milan Mrkusich, 1925-
69/41 *Golden centre, earth emblem* 1962
Oil, 42 x 34 ins
Purchased
- Philip Trusttum, 1940-
69/42 *Yellow painting* 1968
Oil on board, 50 x 35 ins
Purchased
- William A. Sutton, 1917-
69/43 *Pastoral* 1959
Oil, 54 x 54 ins
Purchased
- Mountford Tosswill Woollaston, 1910-
69/44 *Boy in a greenjersey* 1954
Oil on board, 17 x 13 ins
Purchased
- Philip Trusttum, 1940-
69/45 *King's throne* 1968
Pen and ink, 11 x 8 ins
Purchased
- Eric Lee-Johnson, 1908-
69/46 *Warkworth* 1968
Pen and ink, 10x 14 ins
Purchased
- Ted Smyth, 1937-
69/47 *West coast*
Gouache, 2 8 x 43 ins
Purchased
- Frank Wright, 1860-1923
69/48 *Harbour with sailing boats*
Watercolour, 7x11 ins
Purchased

AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY: WELLESLEY STREET EAST: AUCKLAND

Location: During alterations to the Gallery Building the entrance is off Wellesley Street East along the path behind the Auckland Public Library and bordering Albert Park. The Administrative Offices are temporarily located on the second floor of the Town Hall Building, at the corner of Queen Street and Greys Avenue.

Telephone: 31-796 (Town Hall: 74-650)

Hours: Monday 12 noon to 4.30 pm, Tuesday to Saturday 10 am to 4.30 pm; Friday remains open until 8.30 pm. Sunday 2 pm to 4.30 pm.

Gifts and Bequests: Gifts to the Art Gallery in the form of cash from income upward to \$50 are allowable for purposes of income tax deductions. Gifts in the form of paintings, or other property do not qualify for such deductions. Gifts to the Art Gallery of money or property would not attract gift duty, and the value of such gifts made during the donor's lifetime would not form part of his dutiable estate. An exception to this is where an intending donor declares a gift to the Art Gallery, but reserves to himself, during his life, an interest in the property so that the full beneficial interest does not attract duty, but the property remains part of the donor's estate and qualifies for purposes of estate duty.

Auckland Gallery Associates: The aims of the Associates are to stimulate and sustain public interest in the Art Gallery; to extend the Gallery's influence throughout the community; and to acquire funds through gifts, subscriptions and bequests, for the purpose of adding to the Art Gallery's collection of New Zealand painting, drawings and sculpture.

Any member of the public is eligible for membership. Members are invited to previews of exhibitions arranged by the Art Gallery, to lectures, discussions, film evenings, and social functions arranged by the Associates. Regular newsletters are sent out, and Members also receive the Art Gallery's *Quarterly*. Further information can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, c/o Auckland City Art Gallery.

Publications: The latest publications from the Auckland City Art Gallery are listed below, and are available from the Reception Desk at the Gallery. Postal orders should be addressed to the Gallery and should include postage.

Auckland City Art Gallery Quarterly: index nos 1-32. 1969
[8]p 22 cm
Price: Ten cents

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An index to the *Auckland City Art Gallery Quarterly* has been compiled and printed to cover the material published in numbers 1 to 32. It will be seen that the index covers only those issues of the *Quarterly* that appears in the old format. It had originally been intended to make the size of the index coincide with that of the *Quarterly* in order to facilitate a neater binding of the index with the periodical. Unfortunately, through a misunderstanding with the printer (not our regular printer) the size had been reduced to something smaller than that intended. It is hoped to have a further index ready soon to cover numbers 33 to 45 of the *Quarterly*, from 1966 to 1969.