

# Quarterly

of the Auckland City Art Gallery  
Number 46/June 1970



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## Introduction

*Gil Docking*

Last January the painter Rita Angus (1908-70) died in Wellington. She remains one of New Zealand's most important artists of her generation, and with this number of *Quarterly* we reproduce several of her works from the collection, including the recently acquired *Portrait of Betty Curnow* 1942 (cover).

Another influential painter we honour in this issue (page 4) is John Weeks OBE (1888-1965). Weeks, whose work is known to every serious collector of New Zealand painting, lived most of his life in Auckland and taught many students who subsequently became established painters.

After his death, a large group of works was found in his studio - bequeathed by the painter to a friend of the Weeks family, Mrs Hilda O'Connor. Following the wishes of Mrs O'Connor a number of people agreed that an effort should be made to keep a substantial selection of these

Rita Angus and Colin McCahon, Clifton, Sumner c1950



works together, rather than allow them to be fragmented and dispersed in single lots.

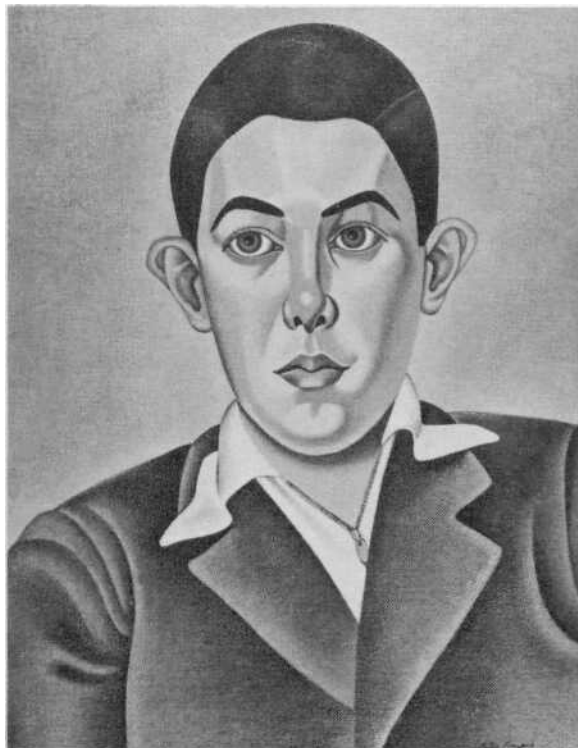
Accordingly an *ad hoc* committee was formed in 1966 to devise and implement a plan for this purpose. The members who assisted were: Sir Gilbert Archey, Dr Eric McCormick and Messrs James Turkington, Peter Brown, Allan Swinton, Pascoe Redwood and the present writer.

Of the works in the studio, 74 oils, 13 water-colours, 16 pastels, 13 drawings and 10 prints were selected as being representative of the best work of John Weeks. This collection was then offered to several business firms and a trust board who were approached in turn by the committee with the idea that the people concerned might be interested in buying the 126 works as a company collection: or lending or donating the collection to public art galleries. But these overtures were unsuccessful.

Finally in 1969, on the initiative of Councillor Mrs Wint Holland and Councillor Harold Watts, the Auckland City Art Gallery undertook to share the collection with the public art galleries at Dunedin, Christchurch and Wellington. This proposal was accepted and on 17 December 1969 the directors of the four galleries met in Auckland. They drew lots and selected individual works until the whole collection was distributed. The Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council generously made a \$2,000 grant-in-aid and each of the four galleries contributed \$2,000 towards the total purchase price of \$10,000.

By this means each of the four metropolitan galleries of New Zealand holds a quarter of the collection. The project demonstrated the spirit of co-operation which exists between the public galleries and has the advantage of making the work of a distinguished painter and teacher more accessible throughout the country: whilst the whole collection may be brought together for special occasions.

This sharing of a collection is unique in the history of New Zealand's art galleries. The scheme is recommended for consideration by any beneficiary who holds a large collection of works by a major artist.



RITA ANGUS *Head of a Maori Boy* c1938  
Oil on canvas, 16 x 12 inches. Purchased 1957

RITA ANGUS *Fog, Hawkes Bay* 1968  
Oil on board, 23 x 35 inches. Purchased 1969



## Some extracts from a notebook belonging to John Weeks

The notes on these pages are extracts from jottings made by John Weeks in a small black notebook probably in the early 'fifties.

In reading them it must be borne in mind that John Weeks made no claims to being a writer or a critic: he was a professional painter clarifying his thoughts about his art in this series of sometimes fragmentary memoranda to himself. They are of interest in so far as they let us into the mind of a man who in his period had looked at the paintings of the past with a practised eye, and whose *oeuvre* shows he was prepared in all modesty to follow in that tradition.

It was felt best to leave these in their original note form, and only the minimum of necessary editing has been done.

*Art should not be considered a luxury, but the birth-right of everyone. There has been too much insistence on academic formulae in training the student to express the OBJECT. Assist the student to express himself and a much greater and lasting benefit will be conferred both on him and the community.*

*It is a significant fact that most of the modern painters (wrong term) have passed through rigorous academic training (Matisse and others). They have felt the limitations and constricting power of such tyranny and have abandoned it for the wider field of expressing their experiences of and attitude to nature and life in a more simple and less standardised manner.*

*The post-impressionists felt this . . . What a hue and cry was raised when they put their efforts before the public! Thrown from the Salon where they were refused admission. Public unable to feel the intense truth by looking for the outward appearance of brilliant technique. These are now accepted in the world's finest galleries. Whistler and others were subjected to the same thing.*

JOHN WEEKS *Limestone Valley, King Country*  
Oil on board, 24 x 33 inches. Purchased 1970





*Why should the artist be expected to stick to some hard and fast accepted rule - already worn threadbare by constant repetition - and have no opportunity to express himself in the way he deems fit and can best convey his ideas and message?*

*What many seem to lose sight of is the fact that it is the painter's particular vision that makes his art - not his paints or the manner in which he applies them. A picture is great usually not for its great technical merit, but because of its intense individual expression of human emotion.*

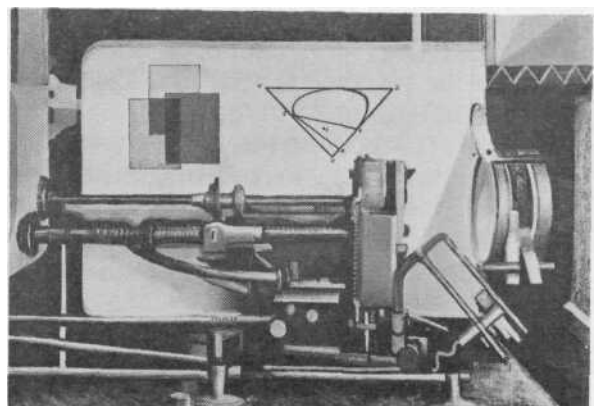
*This explains why many very fine works of art are not at all skilfully executed. While many paintings which are remarkably skilfully executed fail to come up to a work of art.*

*Great technique is of little consequence if the idea is unworthy in the first place.*

*Great progress has taken place in the design of a lot of the modern machinery with which we are acquainted.*

JOHN WEEKS *Landscape with farm-house*  
Tempera on board, 20 x 25 inches. Purchased 1970

JOHN WEEKS *Precision carbon holder* 1950  
Oil on board, 21 x 29 inches. Purchased 1970



*Railway locos, steamships, motor cars to mention but a FEW show a striking change from the earlier types of construction. Do the critics hold up their hands in horror at this change or evolution in this field? For some reason they do not.*

*If the painter's mind contains beautiful things his work will reveal it and will also be beautiful if he has the ability to express them.*

*It may be a type of beauty that does not appeal to many. But a genuine study of it will usually be rewarded.*

*The dislike of things upon seeing them for the first time is common in spheres beside art. The human mind will frequently dislike a person on first acquaintance but become a staunch admirer of that person when they become better acquainted and understand them.*

*Whistler one of the first to feel beauty in what [is] generally recognised as an ugly commonplace subject, the murky atmosphere of smoke around the Thames — distilling and revealing beauty as it were to others through art [in] what they failed to recognise in nature.*

*The musician frankly expresses his mind through his music. He does not involve nature other than the merest theme.*

*If this attitude is taken by the painter he is instantly condemned.*

*Yet real culture consists in accepting the finest thought expressed irrespective of the medium used.*

*Experience of El Greco, Uccello in London after*

*return. Result of understanding by long study, experience.*

*Unfortunately the public of the Dominions have no opportunity of seeing exhibitions of some of the world's finest productions, past and present.*

*What a great thing - exhibition of say the primitive schools for a start - best examples of Giotto, Fra Angelico . . . to mention a few. One [an exhibition] of the works of Rembrandt and the other Dutch masters - Van Eyck, one of El Greco, Goya, Velazquez, Titian, Tintoretto, Da Vinci, etc.*

*One of the impressionists through to the post-impressionists, and one through to the best modern work of today . . .*

*What so many think about the tremendous difference between the work of the present day and the past would be revealed and show that the difference is not one of the fundamentals at all but only of environment.*

*An artist can paint a masterpiece in his backyard if he conceives it as such.*

*Another will go miles for a subject and is not satisfied until he comes across something in nature already arranged for him, and then merely gives a superficial rendering of the most obvious facts.*

*Many I find in looking at pictures so often think it necessary to look for trivial faults rather than for its big virtues. Personal experience in big art shows the same tendency to criticise the weaknesses of a painter rather than his strengths.*

*This attitude is of course borne out in general life and the vices of an individual are usually aired more often than his virtues.*

## Boy in a green jersey by Mountford Toss will Woollaston

The work of M. T. Woollaston entitles him to a place - along with Rita Angus and Colin McCahon - as a painter whose commitment and considerable body of work make him a solid figure on the yet imperfectly defined terrain of New Zealand painting. It is evident too that the distinction of all these three lies in their belonging to the company of painters who have not been content merely to 'represent' the New Zealand scene, but by their insight have transformed it - those whom Peter Tomory termed 'the image makers'.

The fact was given recognition when in 1963 the Gallery mounted a McCahon and Woollaston retrospective for the occasion of the Auckland

Festival. (It had been hoped to represent Rita Angus in that exhibition but she felt unwilling at the time to take part.) In his foreword to the catalogue Peter Tomory remarked that the two painters shared a characteristic rare amongst creative artists in this country, in that neither had made a prolonged stay abroad. 'So that their work has been evolved entirely within a New Zealand environment.'

The last statement remains substantially true at least of M. T. Woollaston: though his debt to Cezanne through the transmittance by Flora Scales of Hans **Hermann's** version of Cezanne's evocation of space by the manipulation of alternately diagonal and parallel brush strokes of





MOUNTFORD TOSSWILL WOOLLASTON *Boy in a green jersey* 1954  
Oil on cardboard, 17 x 13 inches. Purchased 1969

colour is fairly well known. As with Cezanne, too, his works have been 'constructions after nature': however far in the direction of abstraction they may have gone, they have never renounced the visible world as *the fons et origo* of form.

It is tempting to consider that the aspects of this New Zealand environment which have occupied Woollaston primarily are related to the landscape. He has himself written in his 'visual autobiography' *The Far-Away Hills* of how the country around Taranaki early assumed almost anthropomorphic proportions for him.

None the less there are many figures and por-

traits among his subjects. The Gallery has in the collection a 1936 *Figures from life* and the Cezannesque portrait *The artist's wife* (c1939), as well as some pen drawings.

The recently acquired *Boy in a green jersey* is a somewhat later work than any of these. It is painted in Woollaston's customary restricted range of tonality. The curving and spiralling lines of the half-figure 'symbolise' with the economy and sensitivity of Modigliani's portraits of peasant boys (one thinks too of his caryatids) the kind of reluctant curled-in-upon-itself quality associated with provincial adolescence.

R.F.

# Prints

## from the permanent collection

26 June to 31 July

## MAORI IN FOCUS

12 August to 1 September

### *The Auckland City Art Gallery*

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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.

ADMINISTRATION: Second Floor Town Hall, Auckland i.

TELEPHONE: 31-796 (Town Hall 74-650) POSTAL ADDRESS: PO Box 6842 Auckland

GALLERY 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.

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 Honorary Secretary, c/o Auckland City Art Gallery.

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.

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.

*Editor*: Ross Fraser.

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