

Quarterly

of the Auckland City Art Gallery

Number 47 / September 1970



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above: *Seated nude in profile* 1910

Pencil, 13 x 10 inches. Signed lower right *Rd. St. A.R.A.*
Inscribed lower centre *Rowlandson House, Hampstead Rd.*
Purchased 1955

The conversation 1911

Pen and ink on ruled paper, 12 x 7 inches
Signed lower left *Sickert* and dated 1911. Purchased 1952
The conversation was reproduced in *The New Age*,
25 January 1912: one of a number of Sickert's drawings
to appear in this influential weekly journal between
1911 and 1914.

Walter Richard Sickert

Lillian Browse

Walter Richard Sickert was born in 1860 and died in 1942. Thus he lived through the great revolutionary changes which, together with contemporary thought and ways of life, the course of art had undergone. In his early years, he among a group of young British artists, revolted against the academic teaching of art schools in England and turned towards France for inspiration. Sickert eagerly adopted the realistic attitude, the depicting of ordinary folk doing everyday things, which was one of the 'shocking' aspects of the Impressionists' aims, but he rejected their *plein air* approach and their total concern with the effect of sunlight upon colour. In 1883 a meeting with Degas lured him away from his first teacher,

Whistler, and he became, instead, a permanent disciple of the great master of the ballet. Degas' influence, together with the fact that Sickert started his career by going on the stage, probably prompted the latter's early series of music hall paintings.

Whistler, although he was born in America, came to understand and to paint with considerable beauty and feeling certain aspects of London, the city of his adoption. Its river mists, cloudy skies and heavy atmosphere made a profound and everlasting impression upon him and he inculcated his pupil with a like appreciation of the subtlety of the lower tones of the palette and the exact and sensitive degrees with which values





could be handled. Sickert's visits to Venice at the turn of the century also left their mark and he continued to paint in rich low colours until, urged by his friends of the Camden Town Group who were impressed by Van Gogh and the Fauves, he endeavoured to lighten his palette and to use more positive colour. The well-known canvases of *Ennui* and the charming pictures of Chagford and Bath, painted when Sickert was confined to England during the First World War, are a result of this conscious effort. So too are the last Dieppe pictures which include the *Baccarat* series and the famous portrait of Victor Lecour. From then, until 1930, the scale of Sickert's work increased, his colour again took on the richness of

the Venetians, and he achieved, amongst canvases of already high quality, a few masterpieces which were to prove his 'swansong'.

Like Degas, Sickert's subjects were clearly divided. A love of the theatre - especially the music hall - was in his bones, and it endured throughout his life. He also had a natural feeling for architecture, both in its interior and exterior aspects, and he was particularly drawn towards effects of light - in the music halls the strong spot-lights on the stage throwing the auditorium into semi-darkness, and out of doors, the rising or setting sun enhancing the mystery of the ancient streets and buildings.

Sickert's third main theme was domestic.

Although a man of culture who, when he chose, moved in elevated circles, he was enormously attracted by the tough, gay characters of the lower strata of society and their dingy, pokey dwelling places. In Dieppe, he painted the fisherfolk; in Venice, the girls secured for him by his landlady

left: *The objection* 1911

Pen and ink on ruled paper, 12 x 8 inches

Signed lower left Sickert and dated 1911; inscribed lower right *E light*

Presented by Roland, Browse and Delbanco 1961

From this drawing Sickert completed a painting (33 x 21)

of the same title in 1917, now in the collection of

J. O. Stanley Clarke. It shows the interior at Sickert's studio in Warren Street.

The drawing was first published in *The New Age*,

June 1912, as *Argument* (*Quarterly* 19).

below: *Reclining nude* c1908

Charcoal and ink heightened with white on grey paper,

9x 13 inches

Signed lower centre Sickert. Purchased 1955

and, in London's decayed and down-trodden Camden Town, pub frequenters, charwomen and any plebeian types who came within his orb. Not only did Sickert paint these various aspects of lower middle class society but he always had studios in the neighbourhood in which he frequently lived. The atmosphere of peeling wall-paper, iron bedsteads, tumbled gas stoves and Edwardian bric-a-brac seemed to release the springs of his imagination. As Gabriel White has written: 'Raciness and love of low life was not new in English painting. Hogarth revelled in it, but with a moral intention utterly alien to the later artist. Hogarth's chamber pot even had its didactic purpose: for Sickert it just happened to be under the bed. Plebeian subjects inspired Rowlandson as scenes full of lusty vitality and *joie de vivre* but Sickert on the contrary found in them only recollection, boredom and enigmatic moments of suspense.'

The Auckland Art Gallery's most recent Sickert purchase, *The Cup of Coffee* was painted on the



artist's return from his last visit to Venice. There is another almost identical picture of the same title and these, together with a few other beautiful canvases of the same group, form the transition between Venice and London. *The Conversation*, drawn about five years later, is a fully fledged work of the Camden Town period. A peep into an intimate domestic situation, it prompts a variety of interpretations, but interpreted it must be. This is Sickert at his typical story-telling best.

Sickert was and is an artist's painter. The problems of picture-making occupied him constantly, not only when he stood before his easel, but also as a teacher, a writer and a lecturer. In all these facets he was both prolific and accomplished. In the early part of the century he held three exhibitions at Bernheim-Jeune in Paris. Had he chosen to remain under the aegis of the French dealers and become one of the 'Ecole de Paris', his name would surely rank today with that of Vuillard with whom his stature may most nearly be compared.

We are much indebted to Lillian Browse for this short essay on Walter Richard Sickert. Lillian Browse is, of course, a leading authority on the work of this painter, and author of the book *Sickert*, published by Rupert Hart-Davis in 1960.

Nude telephoning cibu
Pen and ink, 7 x 5 inches. Signed lower centre Sickert
Purchased 1955



LOVE: a banner from a painting by Robert Indiana

This work, along with seventeen more by other American artists, was first seen in New Zealand in 1969. The collection, called *Banners from New York*, was lent to this country by the Multiples Gallery Inc, New York. The banners are made of coloured felt and have been published in editions of twenty. In all cases they reflected the current work of the painters represented and as such gave a good indication of contemporary art movements in the United States.

Robert Indiana (ne Robert Clark) was born in New Castle, Indiana, in 1928. He attended the Art Institute of Chicago and the Edinburgh College of Art, Scotland. He has been grouped among pop artists and more particularly those who have developed the use of lettering and signs in their work: a group that includes Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, James Dine, Richard Smith, Andrew Warhol and Steven

Durkee. Although these artists obviously pursue their own directions, as a group they exhibit certain common interests. This is particularly so in their choice of subject matter. Cartoons, pin-ups, advertisements, packaged foods, items of clothing and a general involvement with mass-produced commodities characterises their work. In many ways too, it is a reaction against the more formal pursuits of late Abstract Expressionism. This attitude has been expressed by Roy Lichtenstein: 'Art since Cezanne has become extremely romantic and unrealistic, feeding on art; it is Utopian. It has had less and less to do with the world; it looks inward. . . . Outside is the world. Pop Art looks out into the world; it appears to accept its environment, which is not good or bad, but different, another state of mind.'¹ Indiana, describing his *Eat* signs said: 'The word "eat" is reassuring, it means not only food, but life.



ROBERT INDIANA b1928 *Love Banner*: coloured felt, 60 x 60 inches. Purchased 1970

When a mother feeds her children, the process makes her indulgent, a giver of life, of love, of kindness.¹²

Indiana's approach, particularly evident in the words and signs he uses, has always been essentially romantic. The stencilled words he uses often invoke Melville, Whitman, Negro spirituals and, on the other hand, 'the American dream'. At the same time, the physical appearance and structure of his work is allied to contemporary movements in geometric abstraction.

The words and signs employed often embrace social commentary - this aspect appearing in

works such as the *Selma, Alabama* painting of 1965 and the *Bogalusa* painting of 1966. In the *Selma* painting the stencilled words read: 'Just as in the anatomy of man every nation must have its hind part'.

Indiana, in an exhibition in New York in 1966, used the word *Love* as the main theme. The word formed the basis of both paintings and sculpture and has re-appeared in identical fashion in the *Banner*. The impact of these works and the *Banner* relies on the use of close-tone, high key colour - in this case red, blue and green. Apart from this, *Love* became something of a catch-

word in the nineteen sixties.

Describing the paintings of the same subject, Lucy Lippard wrote: 'Only the warm glow refers obliquely to the subject matter; otherwise these are exuberant, exquisitely rendered works, decorative in the good sense and the product of sophisticated innocence.'³

MULTIPLES: THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION

The classification of the Indiana *Banner* as a 'multiple' raises the question of what constitutes a multiple, and also the relationship of a multiple to a traditional print. In attempting to clarify this, one is led into a problem which is largely one of semantics. At first glance, the concept of a multiple would appear to be elementary. The artist produces an art object that is capable of being duplicated by craftsmen and then mass produced by mechanical techniques.

This mass production and the consequent reduction in price of the object greatly increases its availability to collectors - particularly the impecunious variety. Yet even at this stage, problems of definition and comparison occur. Inevitably the multiple is compared to a traditional print and their relative merits debated. The apologists for the traditional print usually argue along the following lines. The multiple, as it is

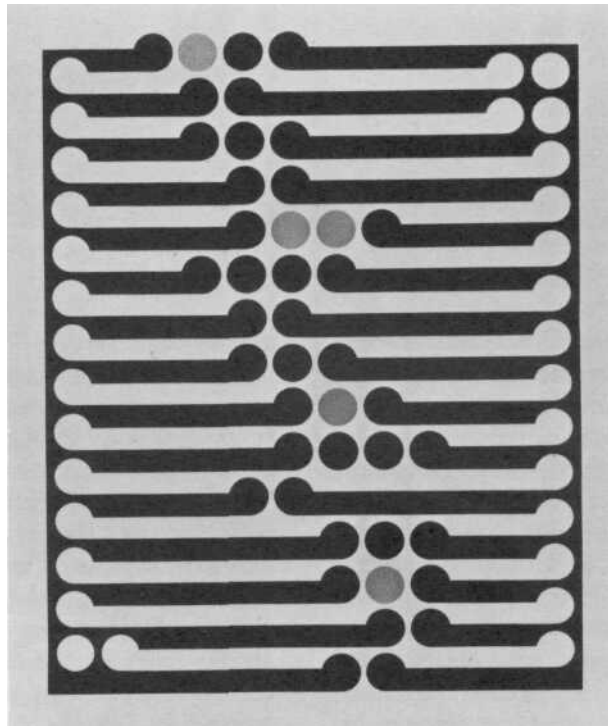
mass produced, cheap, unsigned, unnumbered and has artist direction but not participation, can be classed as an 'industrial print' and *ipso facto* as a limited aesthetic.

Those taking the part of the multiple rejoice in the fact that as well as being inexpensive and widely circulated, the multiple bypasses so much of the apparently pedantic procedure associated with traditional prints. Such things as signed and numbered editions, various states of proofing and consequent market fluctuations are side-stepped.

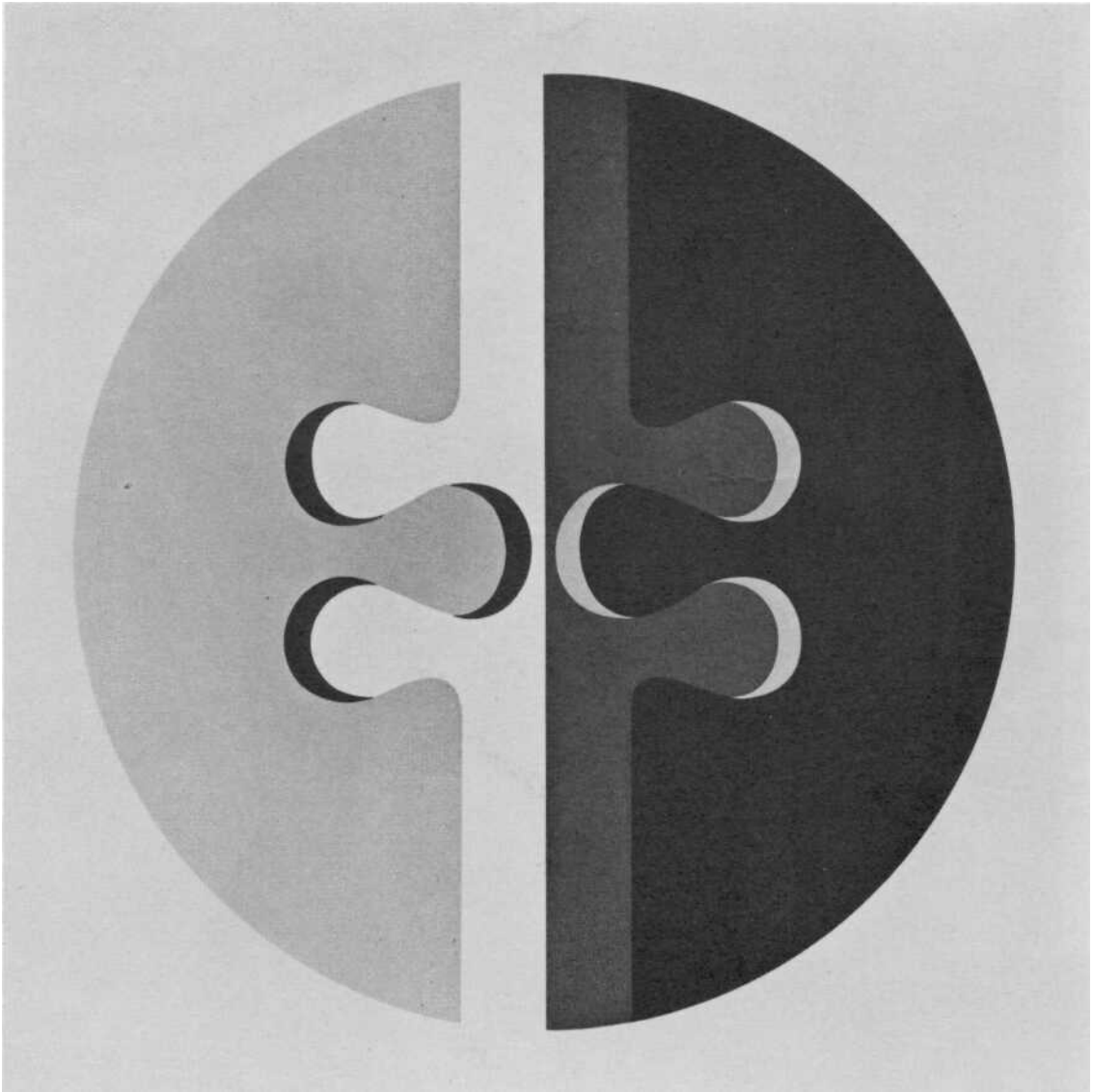
The problem becomes more sinister when a third print-making variant in the form of a compromise is found to exist. Ostensibly this is a multiple - procurable, however, in two versions. Although the images of both prints are identical, one is embroidered with the artist's signature. This embellishment can increase the price by anything up to tenfold or higher.

Coupled with this, some 'multiples' are produced in limited editions when, in fact, they should be produced until the demand is satisfied. Apart from the last case, the question of artist's print/multiple is largely academic. There is no reason why they cannot co-exist, and it is desirable that they should do so.

In the United States particularly, materials used in the production of multiples cover a wide



GORDON WALTERS b.ipip *Tawa*
Screen print, 21 x 16 inches.
Purchased 1970



range; in many cases, artists depart completely from the traditional print media. Constructions using Plexiglass, aluminium, stainless steel, laminated plastic, electrified light boxes and felt are used instead of etching, silkscreen and lithography.

A set of multiples published by the Barry Lett Galleries has recently been acquired by the Gallery. In each case, the twelve artists invited to participate have had their work silkscreened by a professional printer - a collaboration which at times can produce more successful results than an artist working on his own.

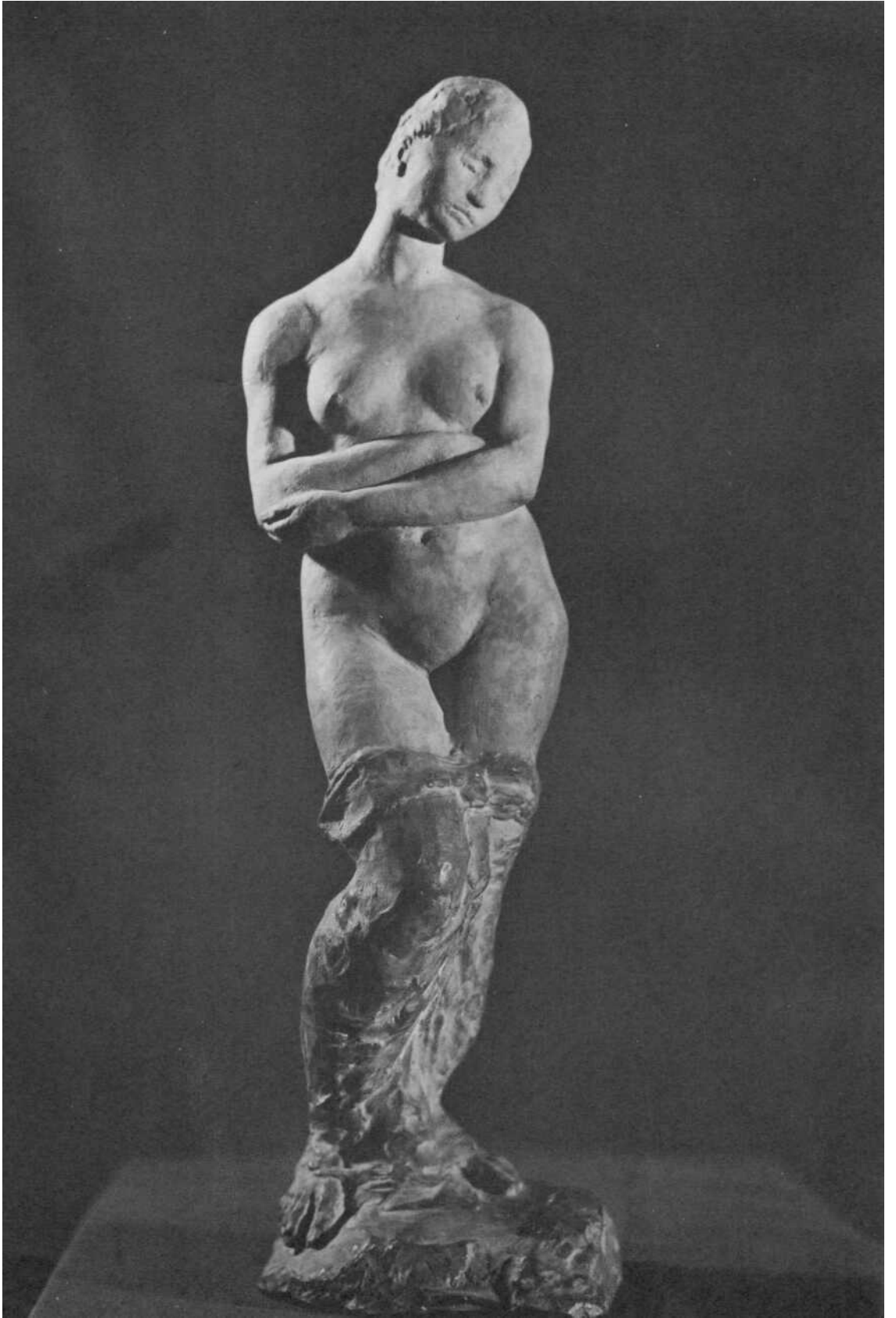
In all cases, these prints reflected the work of

these painters and as such, provided an excellent record of directions in New Zealand art in the late 1960s.

The artists represented are: Colin McCahon, Milan Mrkusich, Ralph Hotere, Ross Ritchie, Patrick Hanly, M. T. Woollaston, Michael Smither, Donald Binney, Mervyn Williams, Robert Ellis, Michael Illingworth and Gordon Walters.

D.A.

SOURCES: 1, 2. *Vogue* (New York) March 1965, p185.
3. Lucy Lippard, *New York Letter Art International* VolIX/6, p115.



A terracotta figure by Wilhelm Lehmbruck

The terracotta figure *Contemplative girl* by Wilhelm Lehmbruck was presented to the gallery by the Mackelvie Trust in 1968, having formerly been in the collection of Dr Haubrich in Cologne. It is a beautiful piece from Lehmbruck's early maturity - the maturity of his style that is to say: the sculptor himself died young - and enables us to add a work of sculpture to the small but sensitive etching of a recumbent nude already in the collection.

Like August Macke a Rhinelander who found his artistic identity among the French, Lehmbruck had studied with Karl Janssen in Dusseldorf, travelled on his studies to Italy, before at the end of the first decade of this century settling for a long period in Paris. His work of about this time has always been regarded as influenced by Maillol: but Werner Hofmann points out fundamental differences in the two men's sculpture. The figures of Maillol have a robustness, a sense of being deeply rooted in the sun-baked earth; whereas those of Lehmbruck, in spite of a similar disposition toward roundness in his forms, are softer and more tender in their gestures, more inward and unassuming in mood.

As Lehmbruck continued, his sculptures tended to lose some of their fullness and ripeness and become increasingly shaded with reminiscences of the Gothic. As Hofmann writes: 'The plane forms are vibrating with an unquenched desire. The mass becomes open, transparent, the subtle interplay of contours more important than the interior modelling.'

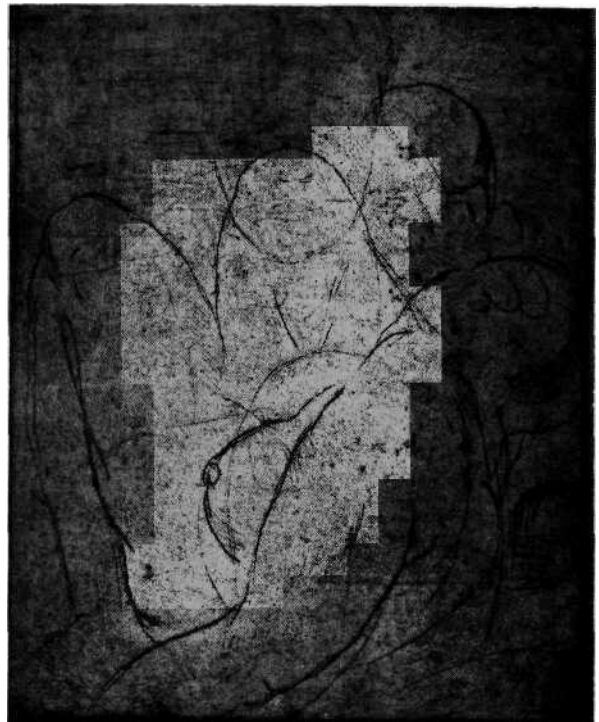
Our terracotta *Contemplative girl* belongs to the time of this turning point - to the years when

Lehmbruck made his *Kneeling woman*, his *Rising young man*.

It is evident that Lehmbruck's work derives in part from Art Nouveau, with its sinuosity and organic movement, and from the expressionism of the period. However it was his achievement to avoid the excesses of these styles, refining and tempering the romantic melancholy of his Northern temperament with a physical and spiritual harmony gained from his Mediterranean influences.

Lehmbruck left a number of drawings and etchings, products of a constant search for new forms. In such an etching as *Recumbent nude*, though it is discernibly the work of a sculptor, is revealed the power he had to express round sensuous forms in terms of planes and decorative curves. He himself wrote: 'A poet who lays out planes does not differ from the sculptor who sees the mass of his sculpture as a plane which he too lays out. So there is no monumental, architectural art without contours or silhouettes, and silhouettes are nothing but planes.'

R.F.



WILHELM LEHMBRUCK 1881-1919

Contemplative girl 1911
Terracotta, 20 inches high
Signed *Lehmbruck* on base
The Mackelvie Collection

Recumbent nude
Etching, 8 x 7 inches (p.s.)
Stamped *W. Lehmbruck*
Purchased 1962



FROM 31 OCTOBER

Watercolours by The Reverend John Kinder

FROM 31 OCTOBER

The Auckland City
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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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