

Quarterly

of the Auckland City Art Gallery

Number 48 / December 1970



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Introduction

Gil Docking

In this issue we are pleased to publish an article written by Patricia Dunn on the three Indian works recently purchased for the gallery's Indian Art Collection.

Since the gallery was opened in 1888 its overseas collecting has been largely directed towards English and European art, this being a natural outcome of the continuing interests and associations of New Zealanders of Western origin.

But with the global re-orientation in politics and commerce taking place in our time, nations which are geographically closer to New Zealand are rapidly becoming very important to us. And with England bent on entering the European Common Market it appears that New Zealand's traditional associations with England will be radically affected during this decade.

If a public gallery is to remain a vital force in the community which it serves, that gallery should be sensitive to the changing conditions which affect the lives of its people. Consequently, there is a growing need for us to understand and esteem the diversity and richness of the cultural backgrounds of the civilizations of India, Asia, and countries sharing the Pacific Basin.

It is felt that the Auckland City Art Gallery can contribute to this understanding by collecting works of art from these countries - as well as continuing to collect from European centres. Such works of art can be of great value in the comparative studies of Eastern and Western thought and traditions, and will broaden and enrich the range and quality of the experience of people who visit the City Art Gallery.

Two miniatures of the Rajasthani School

Patricia Dunn

The two Indian miniatures reproduced here and on the cover belong to the Rajasthani school of the eighteenth century. This school had developed in the sixteenth century, under the patronage of Indian vassal-generals who were attempting to emulate the sumptuous court of the Mogul emperors - principally Akbar the Great and his successors whose patronage of the arts was extremely lavish. Prior to this, from the eleventh century onwards, Buddhist and Jain manuscripts on palm-leaf had been illustrated in miniature. With the introduction of paper in the fourteenth century and under the influence of Persian models brought by the Mogul conquerors, many more Indian texts and themes were illustrated in this way. By the sixteenth century the typical format and dimensions represented in the Auckland miniatures had been arrived at.

Despite these close links with Mogul art, early Rajasthani painting remained traditional in its illustration of the Indian epics: romantic Vaishnava literature centred on popular devotion to Krishna, and the musical modes. The favourite sets were the Bhagavata Purana, the Ramayana and the Ragamala. These works were highly idealistic and full of mystical symbolism. On the other hand, Mogul art was secular and concerned with recording the glories of the Imperial court and aspects of nature: especially portraits, birds, and animals, in which the early Mogul emperors took an almost scientific interest.

Firstly the direct imposition and developing prestige of Mogul culture, and secondly the continuous immigration of Mogul artists, as well as employment of Hindu artists trained in the



Krishna with Radha and the milkmaids
Indian miniature of the Rajasthani School,
12 x 8 inches.
Purchased 1970.

Imperial atelier, caused the style of later Rajasthani painting to be greatly influenced by the more immediate and naturalistic Mogul art. The various schools of Rajasthani, however, blended this influence into their own distinctive idioms, which, through their clarity of line and composition and their intensity of colour, retained the essential Indian qualities of serenity, simplicity and passion.

Musical themes were a favourite subject of Indian painting. The various musical modes known as ragas and raginis were personified as men and women of different types in different moods or situations. These themes were also illustrated in poems, often inscribed on the front or back of the corresponding paintings. Such sets of paintings were known as ragamalas - garlands of illustrations of the Indian musical modes - and combined the arts of painting poetry and music in order to evoke the appropriate emotional response from the beholder.

Krishna with Radha and the milkmaids comes from such a set and illustrates the Hindola raga: literally the swinging melody, sung in the period of the rains.¹ The swing, which fills the body with buoyant pleasure and uplifts the spirit, but which is also insecure and short-lived, whether painted, sung, played, viewed or felt, is the key to this picture.

But the work is not meant to be enjoyed merely for its physical references. The male figure on the swing is Krishna, the cowherd god whose blue skin symbolizes the infinitude of the great god Vishnu, of whom Krishna is the eighth incarnation, and whose yellow garment signifies the radiance of pure consciousness.² There is no attempt to make the scene look like a particular human situation. The town is a typical con-

glomeration of whitewashed buildings symbolizing Brindaban. The setting is the generalized idyllic landscape of the Krishna literature such as the Bhagavata Purana and Gita Govinda (sanskrit texts of the tenth and late thirteenth centuries respectively). The faces of Radha and the milkmaids, typically in strict profile, are identical and idealized: they are symbols of the human soul aspiring towards an ideal union with the beloved deity.

The theme and its generalized depiction are traditional. Yet the artist has made use of all the refinements of late Bundi style to recreate it. The fine linear style, acquired under the influence of the Mogul idiom, is perfectly suited to this narrative picture where each element in the story is defined with graceful precision and restrained vitality. The lively swaying arcs of the wide-hemmed skirts and the rhythmical pattern of arms, up towards the left and up towards the right, all bring out the gay movement of the swing - itself symbolical of the fulfilment of love. The alternation of autonomous areas of clear yellow, light vermilion and mauve throughout the veils, colis (short bodices) and skirts of the milkmaids against the pea-green pasture, further accentuate the mood of happy anticipation of love and fulfilment.

All the figures are adorned with jewellery: forehead pendants, earrings, necklaces, armbands and anklets, mostly indicated by the ancient and highly decorative method of applying rows of tiny white dots standing well out above the rest of the painted surface. Fine garments trimmed with gold, palms of hands and soles of feet dyed with cochineal, and fingertips and toe-nails tinted with henna also add to the festive appearance of the ladies. Milkmaids of course would

never have looked like this; however, the aristocratic owner of this work would not have been interested in real milkmaids, but rather in the yearned-for mystique of simplicity for which they stood. Just as the French court of the eighteenth century sought relaxation in the guise of shepherds and shepherdesses, some members of the Indian aristocracy played out the stories of Krishna and Radha in costume.³

Another important element in this mood is indicated by the darkening sky, which sounds a note of foreboding. The first rain is refreshing after the long languid summer and inspires the gay expectant mood of the lovers: but the continuous rains that follow are accompanied by separation and consequent feelings of profound desolation. This depiction of the confluence of spiritual and physical idealism with the ups and downs of human emotional life aims to attract and involve the spectator in the delights of nature and in this special, ephemeral aspect of love.

The fine profile and hair-line detail characteristic of the art of the Bundi period are seen again in the exquisite head of the *Portrait of Raja Man Singh* (cover). The head could have been painted by a Bundi or Jaipur artist. But two later additions - the halo, removed during restoration, and the plain background - are typical of the Jaipur style.⁴ Precise dating of Rajput paintings is difficult because of their conservatism and lack of date and signature.⁵ Moreover, as probably happened here, they were treasures - carried off as booty and transformed to meet the artistic taste and iconographical requirements of the new owner.

The treatment of the horse is much broader and relates rather to the style of the Kotah school of the early nineteenth century. This school made

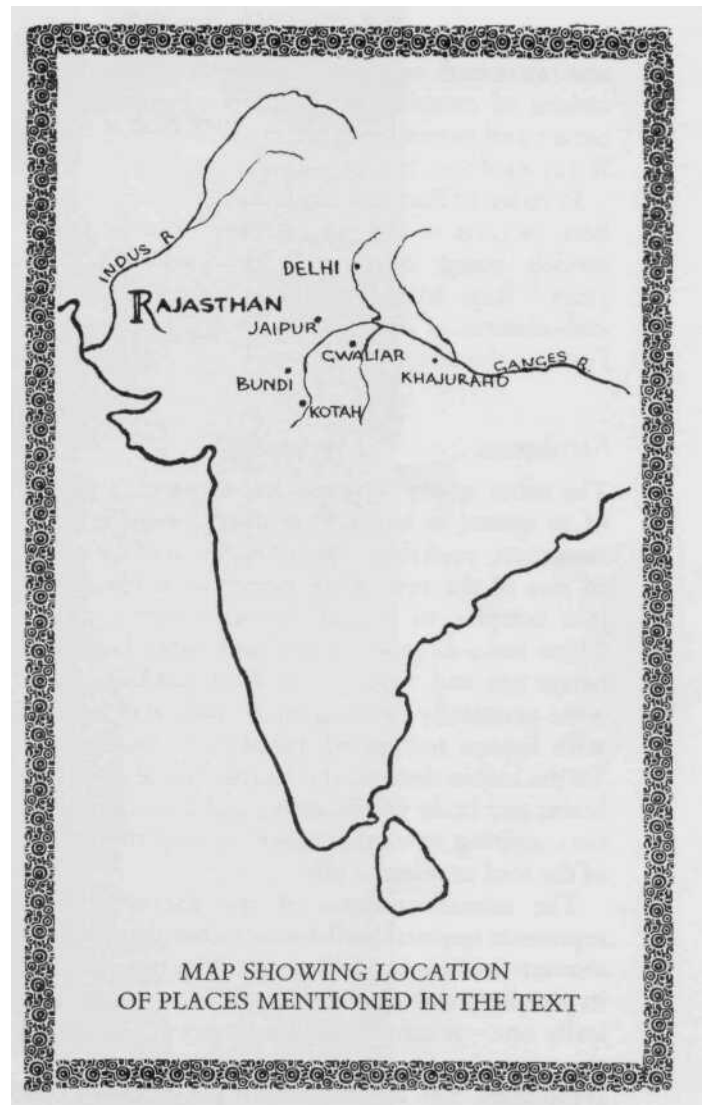


Figure of an apsara
 Indian temple figure in sandstone, 31 inches high.
 Purchased 1970.

animal painting a special feature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁶ There are many indications of overpainting in the background, the nature and extent of which is to be studied when X-ray evidence becomes available.

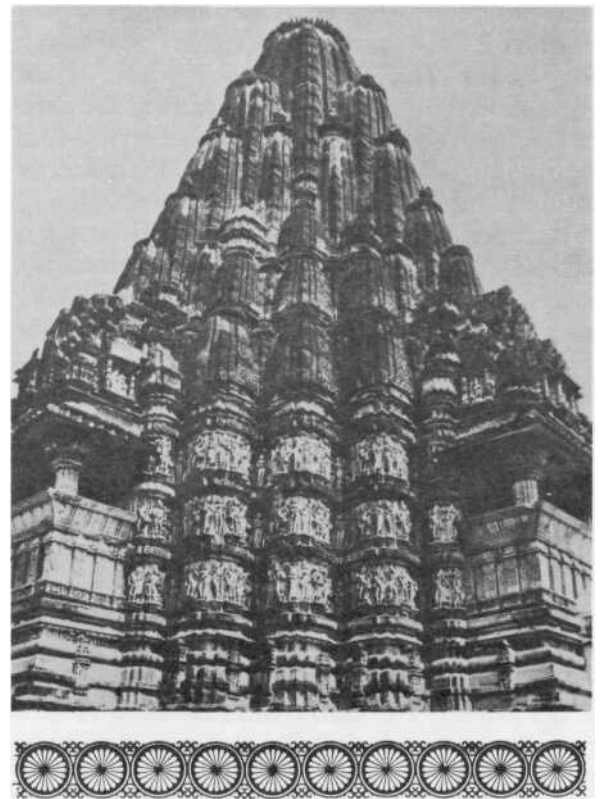
Portraits of Rajasthani rulers exist in large numbers, pictures of the great heroes based on early models being continually repeated over the years.⁷ Raja Man Singh (1486-1518) was the embodiment of Rajput chivalry and his palace at Gwalior the finest of its type.

Sandstone figure of an apsara

The other newly acquired Indian piece, a figure of an apsara, or heavenly dancer, carved in pink sandstone, probably comes from a wall or pillar of one of the remaining twenty-five Hindu or Jain temples of Khajuraho in Central India. These Indo-Aryan-style temples were built between 950 and 1050 AD by the Chandellas, and were practically covered both inside and outside with figures sculptured virtually in the round. To the Indian devotee the temple was at once the house and body of the deity, and the sculptured tiers aspiring towards heaven assisted the ascent of the soul to celestial bliss.

The smooth fullness of the dancer's body represents spiritual well-being rather than bodily characteristics as in Hellenic art. The figure, with its jewellery and diaphanous drapery - all organically one - is infused with a surge of pleasure in the principle of fecundity which she, as a woman, symbolizes. She is not made of gross matter but is ethereal: her charm and seductiveness - suggested by the characteristic three-fold affection of the body (tribhanga) - assists the devotee to attain the most elevated spiritual experience.⁸

Kandariya Temple. Sanctuary from South-East.
 Khajuraho, Vindhya Pradesh. Early 11th century



¹R. Mukerjee, *The Flowering of Indian Art*. London, 1964, p25i.

²Mukerjee, p23i.

³H. Goetz, *India*. London, 1959, p228.

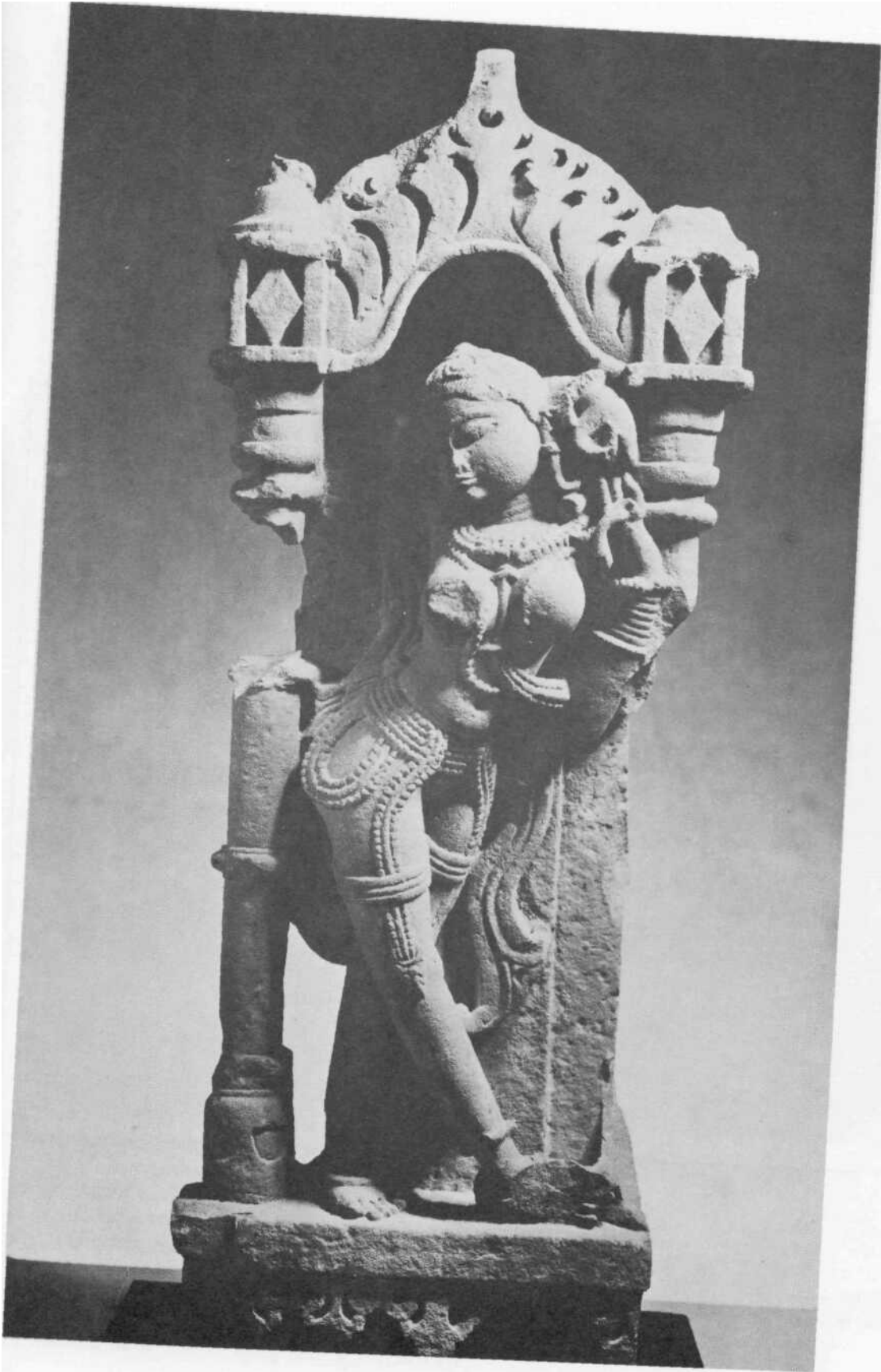
⁴L. Ashton (ed), *The Art of India and Pakistan*. London, 1950, compare pi.96.

⁵Ananda K. Coornaraswami, *The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon*. NY, 1964, p91.

⁶Arts Council of Great Britain, *Indian Miniatures and Folk Paintings*. London, 1967, below pl.18.

Indian Miniatures and Folk Paintings.

⁸Mukerjee, pi85.



Three early softground etchings
by Kathe Kollwitz.

Kathe Kollwitz was born in Königsberg, East Prussia, in 1867; and died in 1945 at Moritzburg.

She lived through a period of great ferment; her work arises from ethical as well as artistic motives, and voices the desire, shared with fellow writers and artists, to improve the existing social order. Early in 1920 she wrote in her diary: 'I feel I must not shy from the responsibility of being an advocate. I must speak of human suffering which never ends'.

Human misery conveyed itself most potently to the artist through the life of the proletariat, and it was this section of the community which provided the basis for most of her work.

The prints in our collection are connected with Kathe Kollwitz's early period.

Abandoning painting in 1893 the artist confined her images to black and white, adopting the graphic processes as her chief means of expression. At first she preferred etching as a graphic technique. While studying in Berlin at the Women's Art College (1885-86) Kollwitz became acquainted with the etchings of Max Klinger, and these probably inspired her to use this process. The technique also appealed to her as a suitable means of naturalistic expression. Later it was lithography, and for a short time the art of wood-cutting which best suited the artist's intentions.

The early works are of a narrative nature. Active people are shown in their environment - as with *Young couple* and *Hamburger dive*.

Young couple 1904 is the resolved version of an earlier etching of the same theme produced in 1893. It is characteristic of this artist that she produced many preliminary drawings and prints before the final work. Pain and anguish - expressed in a non-pathetic and quiet way - reveal themselves in this print. There is an attitude of



The prisoners 1908
Softground etching 12 x 16 inches (pl.s.) Inscribed in
pencil below plate image lower right *Kathe Kollwitz.*
(K1 98)
Presented anonymously.

acceptance, rather than rebellion.

Genuinely gay and lively pictures are rare in Kollwitz's work. The etching *Hamburger dive* is one such exception. A portrayal of the working populace at leisure, the print may owe its origin thematically to one of the artist's many excursions through the harbour district of Königsberg. A drawing, *Mrs Lachende*,¹ is clearly a precedent for the female figure in this work.

The Prisoners, completed in 1908, is undoubtedly the most important of our three etchings. It belongs to Kollwitz's second great cycle of prints, *Peasant War* (1902-08). The first series, *Weavers' Revolt*, which the artist began in 1893 and finished in 1897, established her fame as a graphic artist when it was shown at the Great Berlin Art Exhibition in 1898.

Consisting of seven sheets in etching with passages of softground and aquatint, the *Peasant War* series was commissioned by the Association for Historic Art. This set earned her the Villa Romana Prize, which carried the endowment of a stay in Florence (1907).

Hamburger dive 1901

Softground etching, y|x p| inches (pl.s.) Inscribed in pencil in the artist's hand, on plate image lower right *Kathe Kollwitz 1901*. One of the rare early proofs. (K1 58) Purchased 1956.

The *Peasant War* cycle was based on the peasants' revolt against the nobility and the church in Southern Germany during the sixteenth century: but one can also see a parallel with contemporary tensions. As in *The Weavers* series the rebels are defeated. With *Peasant War* Kollwitz begins to move away from naturalism toward a more monumental and generalised format. The series culminate in the *War* cycle of 1924.

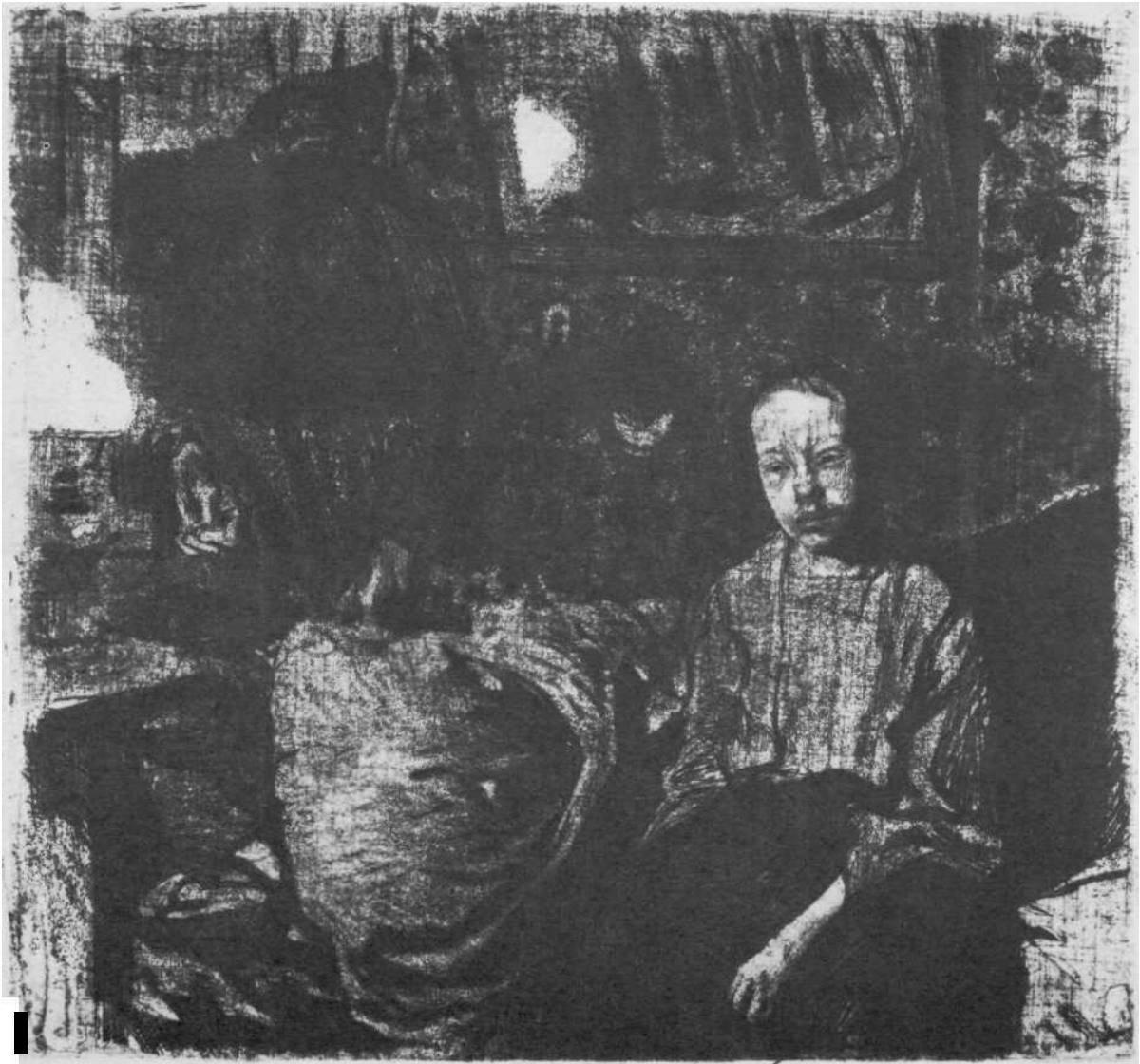
Our etching was the last print to be completed in this cycle, which is considered to be the high-point in her technique as an etcher.

The artist's powers of intense expression are well shown in *The Prisoners*. This work has immediate impact through its dramatization, its strong delineation of form, lights, halftones, and shadows. The interblending and coalescing treatment of the figures - a recurrent feature in her work - has culminated in a powerful sense of mass. *The Prisoners* is the work of an artist imbued with a compulsive sympathy for the downtrodden, the work of a social realist who expressed her motives in the following words: 'I wish to work in this age, an age in which people are so perplexed and so in need of help'.

A.K.

¹ Otto Nagel, *Kathe Kollwitz*. Dresden, pl.45-





Young couple 1904
Softground etching, 11 x 12 inches (pl.s.) Stamped
below plate image lower right *Kollwitz*. (K1 73)
Purchased 1956.

ERRATUM IN THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE

We regret that the caption to the illustration on page 9 of the September *Quarterly* was omitted. This should have read as follows:

ROSS RITCHIE b. 1941 *Three* Screen print, 17 inches diameter.
Purchased 1970

Librarians and those preserving a full set of the *Quarterly* may wish to make a note accordingly.

Contemporary Chinese Painting

DECEMBER 8 TO JANUARY 10

TEN BIG PAINTINGS

FROM FEBRUARY 9

*Auckland City
Art Gallery*

AUCKLAND CITY COUNCIL PARKS AND LIBRARY COMMITTEE: His Worship the Mayor Sir Dove-Myer Robinson, JP; *Chairman*, Councillor H. E. Watts, JP; p. N. Ambler, QBE, JP; W. J. H. Clark; J. A. Alcorn; A. J. R. Dreaver, JP; Dr R. H. L. Ferguson; A. O. Glasse, OBE, MC, JP; Mrs W. M. Holland.

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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 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 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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