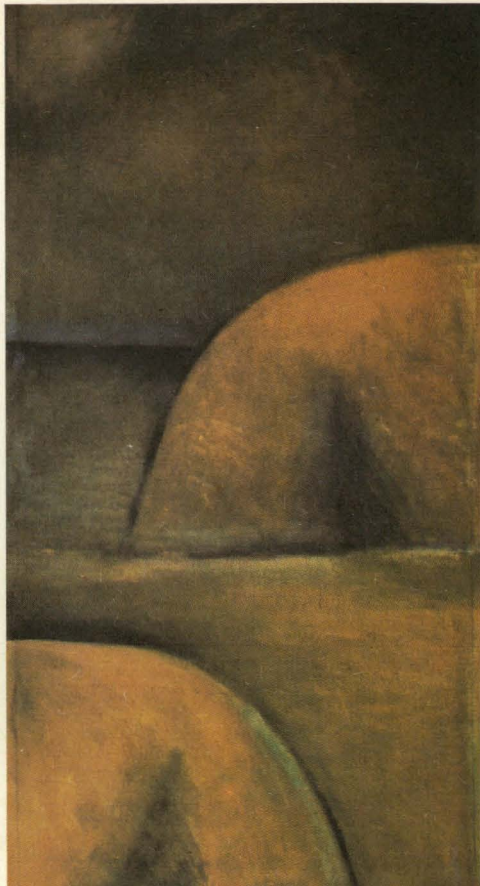
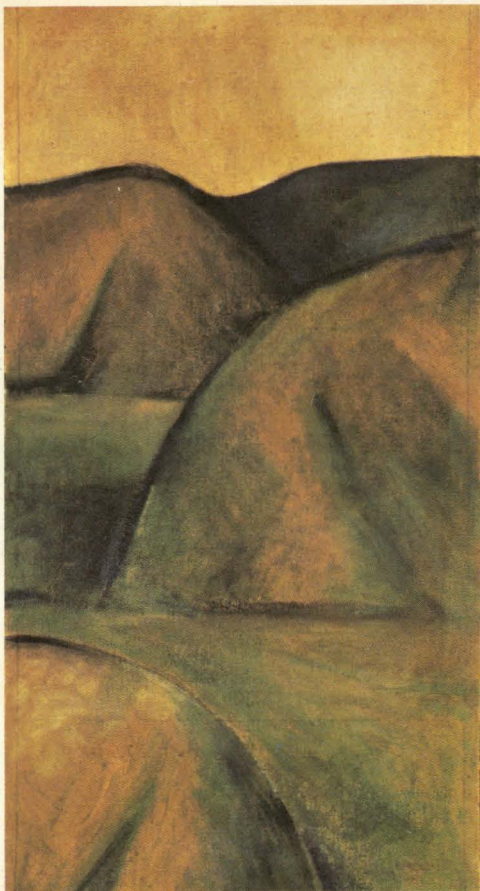
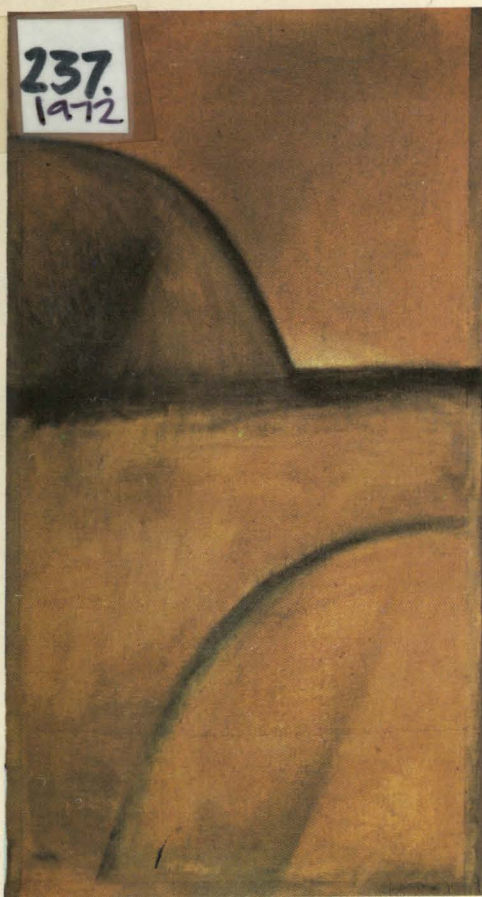


237.
1972



Colin McCahon

Landscape theme and variations (Series A) 1963 (47)

Colin McCahon

REFERENCE
LIBRARY



AUCKLAND



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Colin McCahon
a survey exhibition

AUCKLAND CITY
ART GALLERY

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Colin McCahon / a survey exhibition

This exhibition has been arranged by the Auckland City Art Gallery, and toured throughout New Zealand by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council.

The itinerary is as follows:

Auckland: March/April

Christchurch: June/July

Dunedin: July/August

Palmerston North: September

New Plymouth: November

Colin McCahon
a survey
exhibition

The Auckland City Art Gallery March/April 1972

AUCKLAND CITY
ART GALLERY

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PREFACE This is the first in a series of survey exhibitions of New Zealand artists who have been working over a considerable period, and who have a sufficiently important and substantial body of work to enable us to take a long view. There is still a marked shortage of published monographs on individual New Zealand artists; and the gallery has undertaken the present series in the hope that it can help toward filling this gap.

This first exhibition is devoted to the work of Colin McCahon. It concentrates mainly on works since the early 'fifties (McCahon came to live in Auckland in 1953), although some representative paintings have been included to give an idea of McCahon's earlier development. The exhibition comes up to the present. Many of the works are from the artist's own collection – some of them exhibited here for the first time.

The somewhat individual format of the catalogue was dictated by a desire to include the artist's own notes on his works of various periods. Entries for particular works are embedded in Colin McCahon's own chronological narrative: so that his commentary may be read together with the details of the painting.

The introduction has been written by R. N. O'Reilly – a friend of the artist and collector of his paintings since the 'forties. R. N. O'Reilly, at present director of the New Zealand Library School, was from 1951 to 1968, Christchurch City Librarian. In addition to arranging many exhibitions of Colin McCahon's work, Mr O'Reilly has made a close study of it over a long period. We are grateful to him for this illuminating essay, which incorporates a biographical memoir with remarks on works and series in the exhibition. We must also express our gratitude to those who have kindly lent works: above all to the artist himself, without whose unstinting and sympathetic collaboration this project could not have been realised.

Gil Docking *Director*
February 1972

INTRODUCTION

R. N. O'Reilly

When Colin McCahon returned to Dunedin from seasonal work in the Motueka district in 1940, I met him in a crowded bus late one wet night and this soon led to my visiting him on a fine Saturday afternoon at his parents' home in Maori Hill. His mother fondly told me of his prowess as a child and how, at the age of eight, he could do two drawings simultaneously, one with each hand. Since I already had evidence of his gift, I believed her implicitly. That was what made the meeting, from which I date our friendship, so pleasurable.

I had encountered him earlier, in 1938 when Rodney Kennedy and he were given the job of designing a play in which I had a part, *The Insects*. The directness and fresh unconventionality with which they went about it, contriving powerful and beautiful effects from meagre materials, impressed me. In 1939, immediately before the outbreak of the war, our outfit did an anti-Nazi (anti-Anti-Semetic) play, *Professor Mamlock*, and Colin again did things with the sets and even painted a 'Bauhaus' still-life for one of them – my first sight of a modern painting only a few years after I had first seen reproductions in books, and framed ones at the Dunedin Public Library. It was a little like CAT NO 1 in the present catalogue, but rather more austere.

Colin, I remember as dark, slim and neat, quiet and self-effacing, courteous and diffident, but alert and responsive. In 1962 John Summers remembered him about this time as bearing the marks of 'a refined upper-middle class home' and as 'imperturbable, detached', and 'elegant' – John found it hard to reconcile those characteristics with the 'shattering' paintings Colin did. Not noticing the light on the skyline, John took them to depict hell without redemption. We agree that Colin was single-minded about art. All Colin and I talked of that afternoon in Maori Hill, as later when he visited us in Wakari across the golf course (beyond was bare, brown Flagstaff Hill), was art and the world we could look at around us. He showed me a Woollaston drawing he warmly admired but I could make nothing of, and his early Otago Peninsula works, which then I found strange and moving but hardly beautiful.

They were done with a restricted palette: browns and pale blues – the light looks silvery. The story went round that the Army had found him to be colour-blind. The stories to explain why Colin 'cannot paint', why he 'makes nice things plain and ugly', why he includes words and does so 'in that awful writing', have gone on and on. But seeing is in any case difficult for us and particularly do we resist being shown what may make us aware how limited is our vision. I am no different, except that I somehow learned that it is rewarding to be patient in face of disturbing works of art.

In 1966 Colin was to tell us of the vision he had had as a youth on a drive with the family over the coastal hills, probably above Waihola, to the Taieri Plain.

Big hills stood in front of little hills, which rose up distantly from the flat land: there was a landscape of splendour, order and peace. . . . I saw something logical, orderly and beautiful belonging to the land and not yet to its people. Not yet understood or communicated, not yet really invented. My work has largely been to communicate this vision and invent a way to see it.

In retrospect I think I acted from 1940 as if he had told me of this vision and I believed it.

My own moves, relative to his, were as follows. During the war we corresponded, and I acquired my first McCahons. He and Anne, whom I had briefly met during *The Insects*, were married and living and working in various parts of the Nelson Province, and also in Wellington. Towards the end of the war he returned to Dunedin to do a big *Otago Peninsula* for the Fleischls – £20 plus materials, including a whole sheet of hardboard prepared with a gesso ground. He and I walked one lovely sunny day from the Anderson's Bay terminus to Portobello via the high point of Peggy's Hill, where he sketched and I photographed. Later the photographs were exhibited in 'verification' of the picture.

We moved to Wellington at the beginning of 1946 and they to the Nelson seaside suburb of Tahunanui, whence they had to move (and split up as Colin describes in his notes) in 1948: Colin to Christchurch where Anne was later able to join him in Barbour Street, Phillipstown. During our stay in Wellington, 1946–1951, we exchanged visits (he and I biked one day out from Tahunanui to Mapua so I could meet Toss Woollaston) and I helped arrange exhibitions, one each for him and for Toss at the Wellington Central Library and a joint show for them both, at Helen Hitchings' Gallery. We moved to Christchurch in 1951 and so were able to see more of the McCahons (and again to be involved in a theatrical production that he superbly designed) until they moved to Auckland (Titirangi) in 1953.

Since then we have corresponded and exchanged visits. There was one period, 1959–1963, when we saw a wealth of McCahons exhibited in Christchurch, including all the *Wake*, *Elias* and *Northland* works, all the *Gates* and the Woollaston-McCahon Retrospective show. I was abroad from 1964–1966 and moved back to Wellington in 1968. We have had excellent shows at Peter McLeavey's gallery, with heavy sales (Maori text paintings in 1969 and watercolours in 1971), and I have been at least once a year to Auckland. But it has not been possible for me to keep up with him or to see all the recent works listed in this catalogue.

From this un-Auckland perspective, and by referring to what others have written about Colin, I may be able to fill out what Hamish Keith told us in 1969. It was Keith who said that there was little in Colin McCahon's life that does not relate to his art. So – a little bit about the man as he appears to me.

In Tahunanui, in Phillipstown, in a rather different way because of the kauris in Titirangi, and now in Newton, the McCahons' place has been an oasis. Outside things have grown, blossomed and been fruitful. Inside, with the help of paint

and the simplest of furniture, there have been grace and convenience and children have flourished.

Colin is a practical man who thinks about what he is doing and considers others. He can do things with his hands. To earn a crust he has worked as agricultural labourer, jobbing carpenter and builder in Nelson, picture-framer, jewellery manufacturer and jobbing gardener (at five shillings an hour) in Christchurch. He is also an effective organiser, gifted teacher, and thorough researcher (he has always taken pains with what has been entrusted to him, even to ironing the theatre curtains), and until recently at the Gallery and then at Elam he has earned a livelihood in these roles.

He is thus no improvident bohemian. Yet in the post-war years when houses were so scarce they were deprived of the house they had in Tahunanui because they were artists. Prompt payment of rents, the best garden in the area: these meant nothing. Had he known they were artists, the landlord told them, he would not have admitted them in the first place. The only occasion on which Colin was less than a good provider was when they first came to Auckland; and this was because the job that he was relying on took longer to get authority for than Eric Westbrook expected.

Other things he is not. He is not a Catholic: though he has been attracted by Catholicism and gratified by the interest the Catholic Church has taken in his works. The grandeur of the Barbados Street cathedral from the Waltham over-bridge became part of his vision on his way to work in his Christchurch days, with the gas-works at his right hand and the foothills of the Alps in the distance. Nor is he a back-to-nature man; nor, a faddist nor a fanatic of any kind. He stands for the considered, the considerate, the direct, decided and intended act; which involves faith and courage in the presence of doubt.

Faith and doubt is a recurrent theme in the paintings. Below he writes of himself as a doubter. Certainly he is no angel but a vulnerable mortal with all our common frailties and passions, and we can sense how near he has often come to desperation. But painting, communicating, is itself an act of faith: faith that there will be a response.

Colin, in his notes, refers to Christchurch's being 'alive with friends and conversations'. I recall particularly evenings with Doris Lusk, Olivia Spencer Bower, John and Connie Summers, Anne's engineering brother Selwyn and his wife, Margaret Hamblett, the late Arthur Prior and Mary Prior, and, another philosopher, Sandy Anderson of Sydney, whose famous father's theory of aesthetics interested Colin. But Colin has always given himself to people (recently it was to students), and has been taken advantage of by them, even by his friends, including me. The wonder is that he had the stamina and found (so often in the small hours) the time to paint.

Seeing and not seeing! Exhibiting the 1947 religious paintings (CAT NOS 5-7 and

some yet stronger works) in Wellington in 1947 (and even more in Lower Hutt: right in the main lending room, on the high match-lining above the shelves, of the old municipal library where I was then working), was like tossing a stone into a swarm of bees. Later, after two years in Africa, I can diagnose it as a case of culture-shock. We had it about 1953 at the Canterbury Public Library when we first put up modern prints and paintings for hire. There is no way around this. People do in fact feel morally enraged at first exposure to certain cultural phenomena (and depression at others) because deeply underlying and barely conscious assumptions are at risk about what is real and important. It is not till there has been a process of familiarisation that discussion is possible.

Colin was involved in *The pleasure garden* furore in Christchurch just before I arrived there. The furores over the Hay's Prize *Painting* (CAT NO 29) and *Tomorrow* (CAT NO 30) – the first a loss the second a gain – were similar, as was the Hepworth acquisition dispute in Auckland.

At a more sophisticated level, reactions to McCahon's 1947 religious paintings may illustrate the difficulties of seeing. Rex Fairburn in the March 1948 *Landfall* was sarcastic ('graffiti [for] the walls of some celestial lavatory') and angry (he twice called them pretentious). He denied that they had 'virtues that could be perceived by the naked eye' and doubted that they might have 'profound religious meaning', not to be picked out by it. But in the June issue, the poet Hubert Witheford, beautifully describing the pathos in the figures depicted, and defending the appropriateness of the technique that thus depicted them, went on to testify that to him the raw details became 'part of a design which . . . was deeply satisfying and possessed of extra-ordinary gladness'.

I think that Rex, a little before his death, came to see he had been wrong. Sensing the power of the works, I knew when he wrote he was wrong. But it took me, even for those works I later acquired and now find it hard to be without, some years before I saw the glory that Hubert had so quickly seen. Many later critics, who also felt the power of Colin's works, could not see it either.

Charles Brasch in 1950 (in an article on Colin, covering approximately CAT NOS 5-14) showed how unique he was in New Zealand: in his use of the human figure in landscape; in his use of either landscape or the figure to make 'general statements about the visible world, the place of man in the world, and the nature of human life'; and in his use of the 'language of religious art'. Charles Brasch was the first to mention Colin's use of symbols. He suggested, for example, that here in New Zealand 'daily the three Maries are being turned back from the tomb (or that we are looking for the truth in the wrong place, and according to the letter and not the spirit)', and that even mountain ranges may symbolise 'certain . . . qualities of rhythm and harmony, stability, permanence . . .'. But it was the truth of the paintings ('There is a bitter and unpalatable truth . . . about ourselves') that impressed Charles, and not the supervening gladness.

On building bridges (CAT NO 16) was one work that, if I did not fully comprehend, I quickly saw. I saw both the superb country it depicted and helped me to see, and the agreement it showed between country-side and bridge structure that Peter Tomory was to discuss and relate to text painting, CAT NO 21, in a talk published in 1968. And so I exhibited the triptych after the Group Show in the Library, where Eric Westbrook saw it. I want to discuss the problem of seeing in relation to this work.

An understanding critic, I. V. Porsolt, in 1963 noted in it only 'Denuded land and cold machinery'. In 1959 Porsolt had had a sense of music from several McCahons (*The Northland panels*, CAT NO 28, he had said 'should be read together like a musical suite', and *The Wake*, CAT NO 29, had 'pictorial-poetic unity as music and verse are one in a song') which he connected with the fact that we had to take them in consecutively, so that they became a progression in time; but in 1963 he clearly failed to obtain an aural reaction from *On building bridges*. It was Gil Docking in his 1971 book that saw it as a 'time-frieze' and so made me aware of train rhythms in it. Peter Tomory, explaining that triptychs were traditionally viewed centre-first, helped prevent this awareness; though it was Tomory who sensed the sympathy between the work and a poem that has train rhythms, Charles Brasch's *Wainakarua*. Gil Docking sees an allusion, in the girders touching at the top of the right-hand panel, to the touching of fingers where God creates Adam in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling. Docking does not note the relation Tomory had dwelt on between the depicted bridge-work and the countryside, nor grasp that, since both painterly allusion and title suggest creativity, Colin is hardly inviting us to see the bridge-work as a 'barrier' to the promised land, but as a way over to it. There is another bridge exemplified in this work: the one across compositional problems that cubism, through Mary Cockburn-Mercer, had made for the painter. On the musical analogies: Hamish Keith in 1969, in discussing *Takaka: night and day* (CAT NO 8), presumably quotes Colin himself about the 'series of hills coming down for miles like great notes of music'. I recall Colin's commenting (about 1950) on the remark of a visiting Australian artist that New Zealand hills were monotonous: 'Monotonous yes, but with a cumulative grandeur, like Bach'. I associate this comment particularly with *Takaka*, with the two *Landscape* series (CAT NOS 47, 48) and with the *North Otago* paintings (CAT NOS 58-60). I also associate with these works the forces that shaped New Zealand over the millenia, which he studied in Cotton's *Geomorphology* and discussed with me about that time. There is indeed much else, including sexual imagery, in these landscapes; and you can see for yourself what Colin is able to achieve with landscape, including a sense of solemn music, in *The Stations of the Cross* (CAT NO 57). He confirmed Porsolt's idea of the 'musical-suite' when he sub-titled the *Landscape* series, *theme and variations*.

The link seen by Porsolt between poetry set to paint (as in *The Wake*) and poetry

set to music (as in song – often, I should say, a chorale), together with his understanding that the reading of the words requires that the paintings be viewed in a particular, temporal order, is one way of approaching the subject of words in Colin's painting. It can lead for example to a sense of rhythm running through the painted texts, for example, in *The lark's song*.

Words were a stumbling block for many who knew something about art, for example, *The lark's song* (CAT NO 67). Toss Woollaston in 1959 was one of the first to deal publicly with Colin's use of them, a use with which he had not sympathised when it occurred first in the mid-'forties. (In 1970, L. H. Bieringa was to study the development of both painters – in the '30s and '40s.) Writing in the *Christchurch Star* of 14 October 1959 of the big Gallery 91 showing of the fruits of Colin's United States trip in 1958 (the *Elias* paintings, *Tomorrow . . .*, the *Northland* panels and so on, including CAT NOS 28, 30, 31 and CAT NOS 33–39), Woollaston said:

The Crucifixion is implicit in every picture here, whether by words, by light piercing the darkness, by the visible strain of suffering, or by something as hard to describe as atmosphere . . . [As] tragic paintings . . . [they] rightly make no overtures to the public. . . . Other subjects are present . . . particularly, in the Northland series landscape. But it is landscape which shows how tiny is the contact which its human beings have so far been able to make with it. . . . The little white road . . . suggests the amount of this, like a ribbon of sentiment, hope, or endeavour against the enormous heaviness of the hills. . . . The written word, too, most often quoted from the Bible, is . . . without apology used as a subject for painting. No one seeing this exhibition can dismiss those pictures in which the lettering is painted without missing the unity and power of the artist's whole work. This matter . . . is . . . the one people most want to lay down rules about. But how do we lay down rules for this sort of painting? Part of a painter's work is to discover rules and . . . test them as he goes along, to see if they will work for him and for us. When a whole sky cries 'Elias' . . . who shall say lettering shall not be big in a picture? Or who object to it when a glimmering of the mystery of time is given in the darkness under a passing river?

And Woollaston gave us a warning, timely in my own case, not to fall into the temptation of letting interpretative theories carry us away, leaving behind what 'does not fit "my" theory'.

Gordon Brown in 1969 wrote a helpful article on Colin's use of words, showing the different treatments given them (for example, as three-dimensional objects in CAT NOS 19, 20), and the different functions they assume within the paintings (for example, as titles or captions, as text to be illuminated). He discusses these things against a background of the history of art (including Eastern, Medieval and Twentieth Century, and mentioning the Twentieth Century *tapu* against 'literary painting'). And he referred to the passage in Colin's 1966 statement about a

boyhood experience with signwriting. This, often quoted, I shall quote again:
The hairdresser had his window painted with HAIRDRESSER AND TOBACCONIST. Painted in gold and black on a stippled red ground, the lettering large and bold, with shadows, and a feeling of being projected right through the glass and across the pavement. I watched the work done, and fell in love with signwriting. The grace of the lettering as it arched across the window in gleaming gold, suspended on its dull red field but leaping free from its own black shadow pointed to a new and magnificent world of painting. I watched from the outside as the artist working inside separated himself from me (and light from dark) to make his new creation.

In 1961 Wystan Curnow, reviewing an exhibition of the first *Gate* paintings (for example, CAT NOS 42-44, in which words play little part), spoke of a new element in their composition.

These pictures have no obvious horizon, without which there can be no clear sensation of orthodox perspective, of the static Renaissance ordering of the world. They lack a cohesive centre and they deny the frame: the forms leap out from the canvas, or move out of it or into it. In fact the effectiveness of these symbols rests largely on their movements. Gates that open or shut, that fly out from, that orbit around in space. Their movement . . . tends to burst the picture and surround the viewer.

This achievement I link with Colin's development of his own 'signwriting': it concerns things painted as if suspended on the surface without the perspectival tie. Such things do not need to be words. I also link this achievement with Rothko, who was an influence on the friends he made amongst the San Francisco Bay painters and whose approach seems to have helped Colin finish *Painting* (CAT NO 27). But McCahon goes well beyond Rothko in *The Gate*.

With the *Gate* paintings, particularly the second series, I was much involved. They created a stir in Christchurch. The nuclear disarmament campaigners took wondering note, as also did Colin's brother Jim, a nuclear scientist. It is essential to read the text, taking in the 'punctuation' panels as you go. (Do you see, in the ninth panel for example, an effect as of a conflagration at night reflected on billowing smoke clouds?) If you do read them, as slowly as may be, you may experience a lift and surge as the eye more quickly takes in the movement of the shapes in the last six panels. Caselberg said: 'That they encompass the holocaust and yet still express a way through - a way beyond - a beauty and an after - this I find incredible.'

There is another source for those shapes in the *Gate* paintings, besides the roofs, buildings and trees of Newton Gully, and the dunes, rock outcrops and pines of the South Kaipara heads ('Waioneke'). I refer to a painterly source: the rectangular or diamond shapes, then smaller, wholly out of which he composed his *Kauris* and *French Bays* in his cubist, Titirangi period; here they have a new function. When Colin abstracts, he leaves a sense of the things he has decided to disregard.

They make their absence felt. He is not interested in doing things with shapes, colours and textures simply for their own sakes.

Words, signs and numerals clearly mean much to Colin, and Gordon Brown hardly exhausts the subject up to his time of writing. (The later text paintings, CAT NOS 65, 66, acknowledge Sengai and the kind of calligraphy that, in mistake of his purposes, has been held up against Colin. The Maori texts such as CAT NO 67 are something else again; and so, yet again, are the great *Practical religion* compositions such as CAT NOS 68, 69.)

The *Waterfalls* (CAT NOS 50–53) are a sort of symbolic signwriting. Their connotations, reinforced by the note to CAT NO 53, include not only the light/dark one that goes back to *Takaka: night and day* but also the energy/massive-inertia one going back to the Northland roads Woollaston saw as 'ribbons of . . . endeavour'. Colin refers in the same context to the joy in his own creative energy as a painter.

He could similarly describe the painting of *Numerals* (CAT NO 55) as 'curving through the darkness a line of white'. Numerals too are a sort of congealed energy: energy congealed by our act of counting and measuring (and so abstracting from) individual things and creatures, energy released in new forms when we compute. If, as Gordon Brown says, they refer to cybernetic activities (and this possibility is open without others being thereby closed) then they also suggest guided missiles and space craft. F. G. Chalmers in 1965 thought of a count-down. I am still wrestling with this (and later) series, which like *The Gate*, make allusions taking us beyond the usual confines of art.

Within the confines of art, Porsolt in 1963 referred to Colin's stylistic allusions to such old and modern masters as Michelangelo, Titian, Cézanne, Picasso and Mondrian. Porsolt regarded these allusions as 'deliberate tests of the painter's own ability to digest influences. He wins the test.'

I go back to about 1952 when Colin contributed to a radio series on virtuosity. I recall that he contrasted Leonardo and Michelangelo: both virtuosos, but only the latter consistently extending himself as if he were not; and also Cézanne (no virtuoso but a painter who succeeded only through struggle with his every brush stroke) and Picasso (virtuoso who has only occasionally struggled). 'Will there be a modern Michelangelo?' he asked. He is talking about the burden of the gift that is also his joy, and about the struggle to communicate his vision.

Through these allusions McCahon is asking, diffidently, bravely and properly, as we can now see, to be compared with the masters; not that he claims to be better than them but that we should take into consideration what they were doing when we view him.

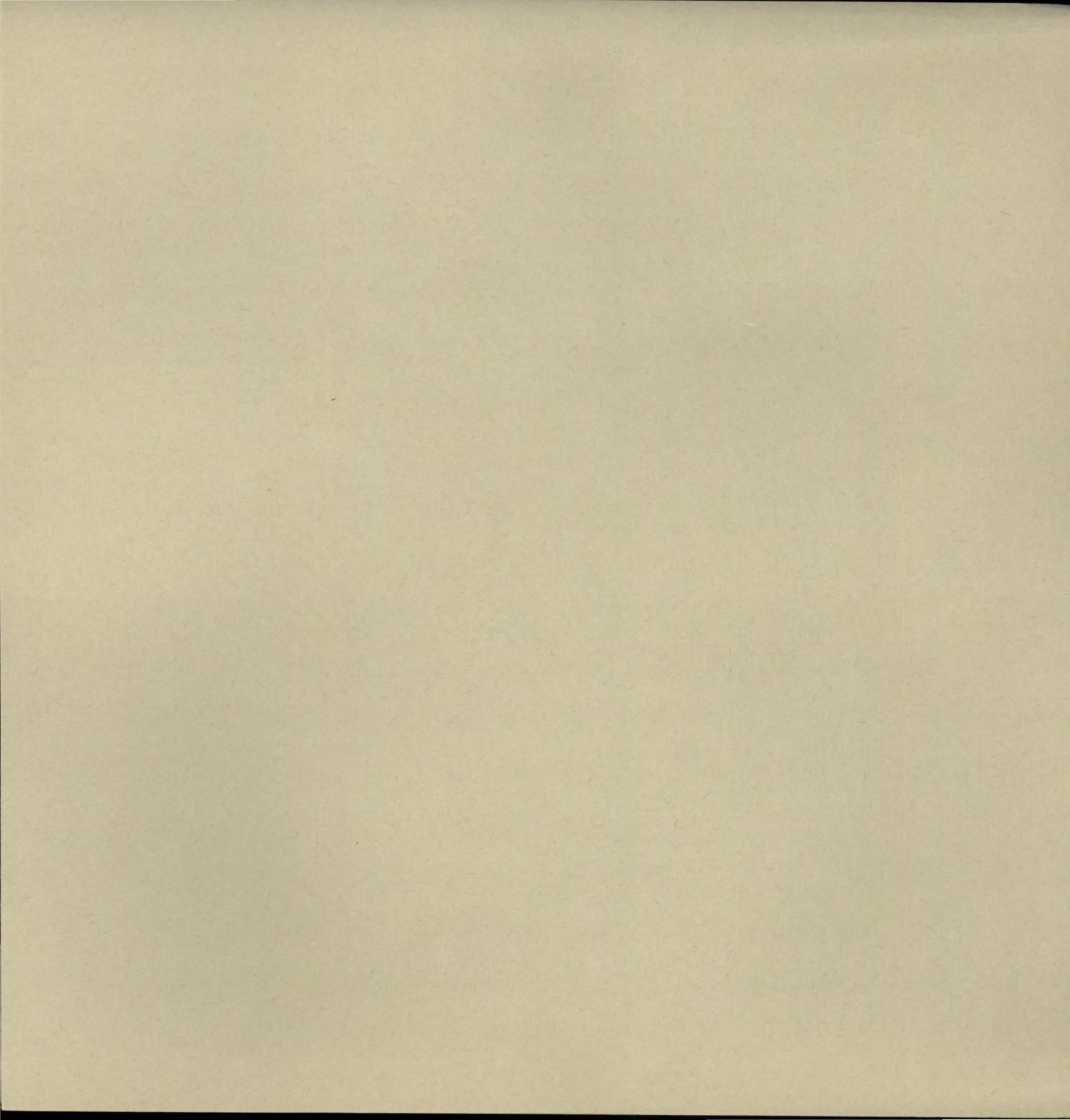
One of the painters to whom he alludes through his style, including the style of his calligraphy, in the *Northland* and the *Elias* series, is the Japanese master, Tomioka Tessai (1836–1924). In a catalogue I recently found on Colin's shelves of a Tessai

exhibition, toured in 1957/8 in America by the Smithsonian, I read these words by an old man who had devoted much of his life to the collecting, caring for and showing, at the temple of which he was bishop, of Tessai's paintings:

He was always saying, 'I want people to read and understand the inscriptions on my pictures'. His inscriptions are aimed at the enlightenment and education of the people of the world, and are filled with a spirit of rich humanism. That one never tires of them, loving them the more the more one sees of them, is because they are, like his painting and calligraphy, direct expression of his character and beliefs.

This, I would have you apply to Colin McCahon.

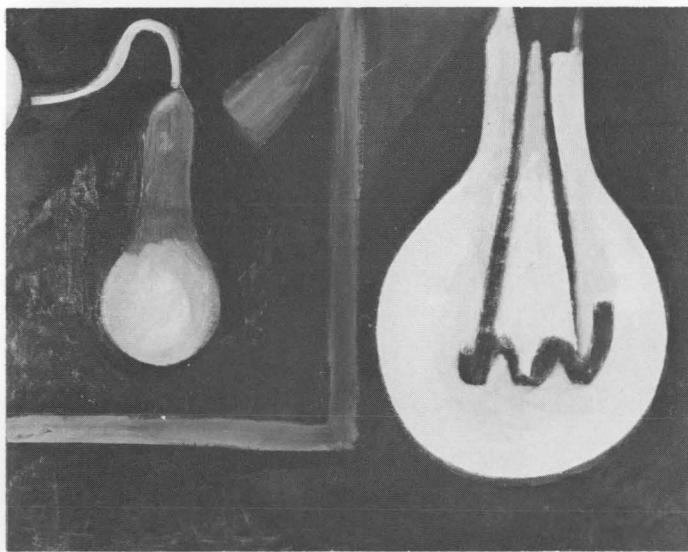
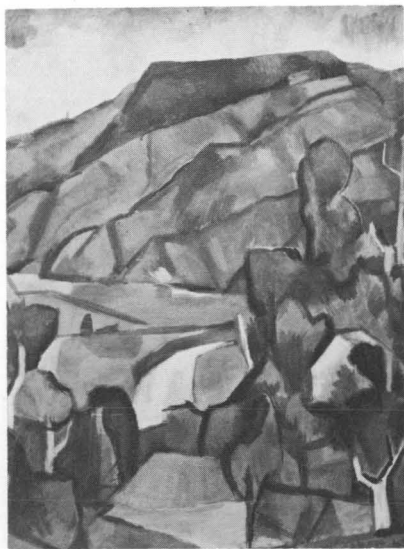
*Wellington
January 1972*



Art school still life c1938-39 (1)

Pangatotara landscape no 2 1943 (2)

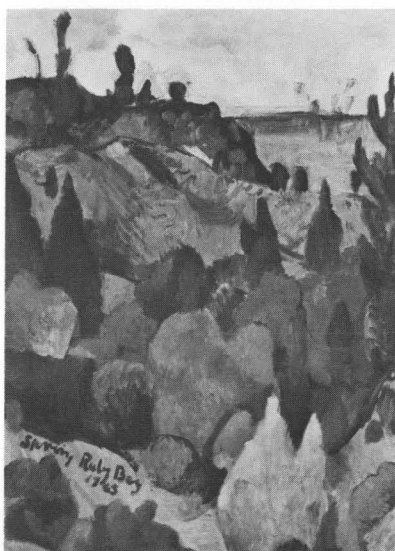
The lamp in my studio c1945 (3)





The entombment (after Titian) 1947 (5)

Christ taken from the cross 1947 (6)

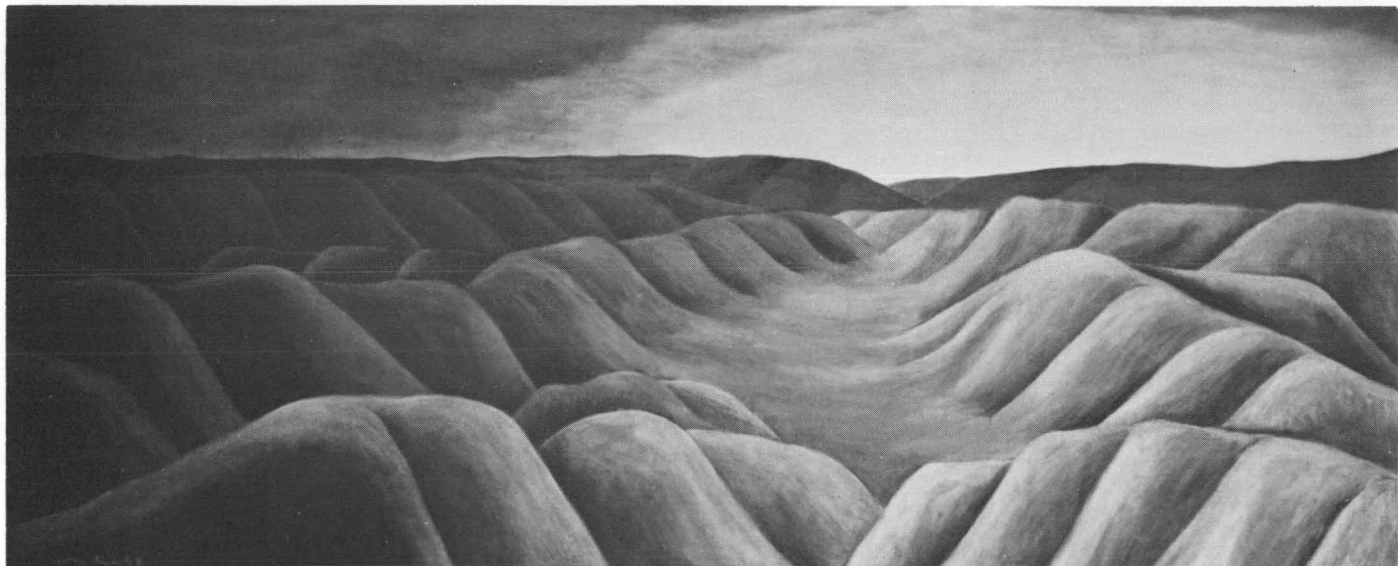


Spring, Ruby Bay 1945 (4)



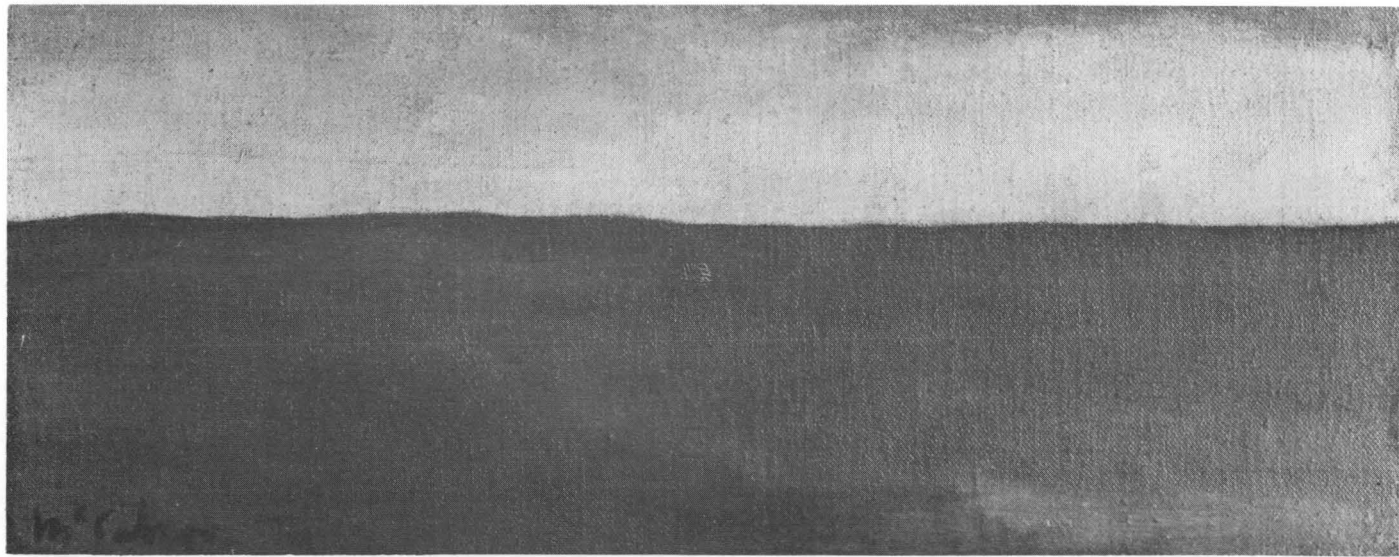


The Angel of the Annunciation 1947 (7)

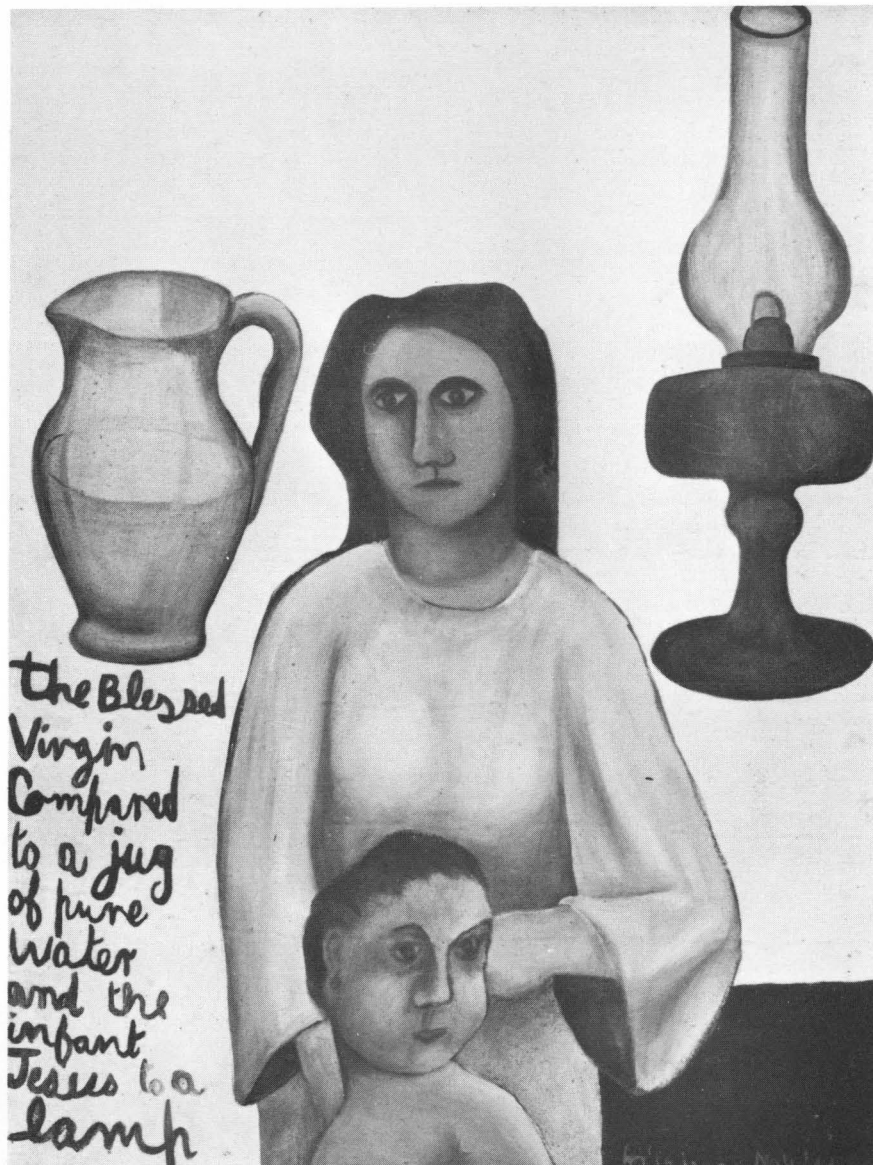


Takaka: night and day 1948 (8)

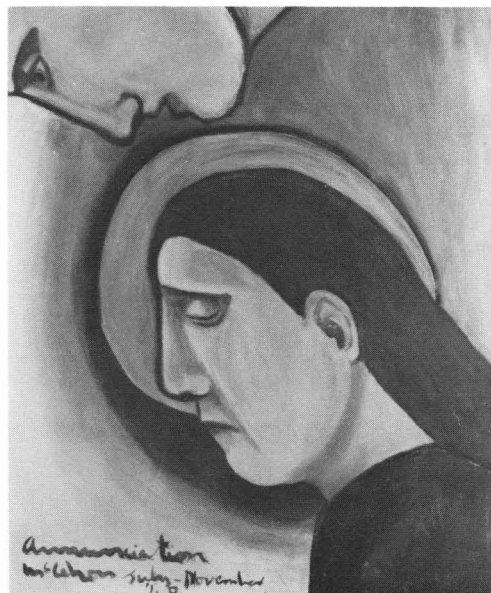
The green plain 1948 (9)

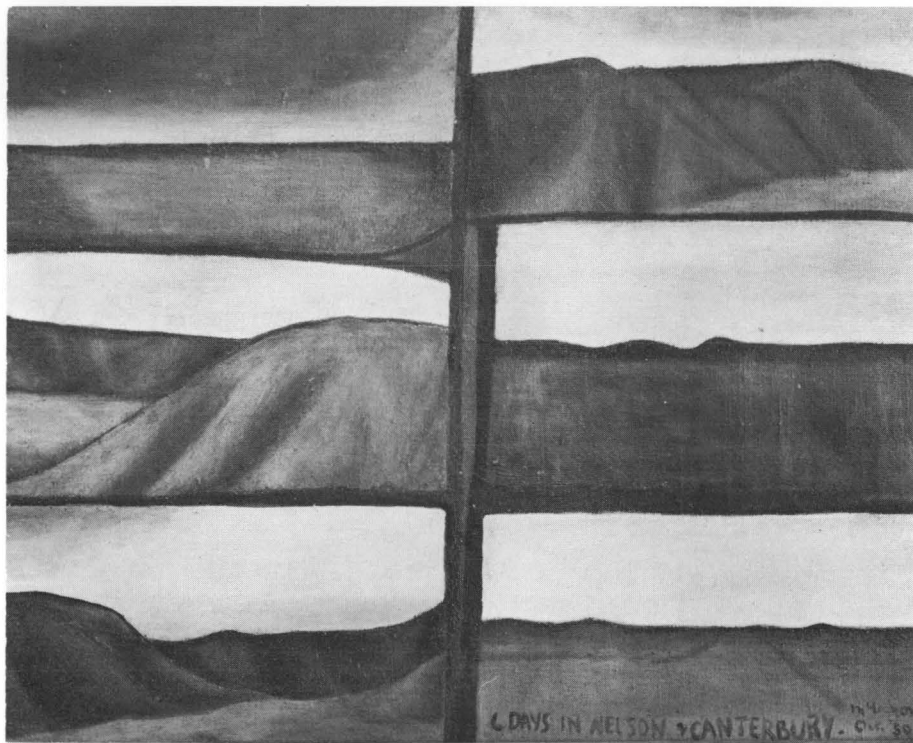


The Virgin and Child compared 1948 (10)



Annunciation 1949 (11)

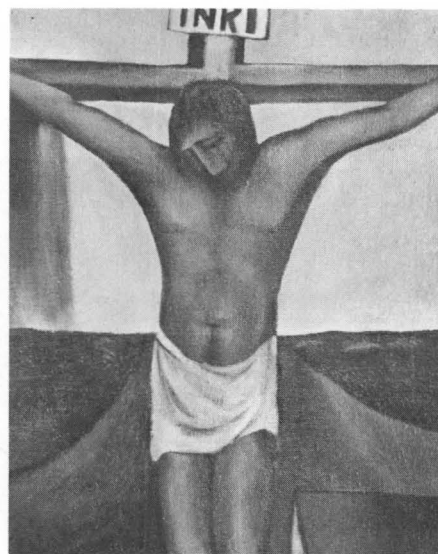
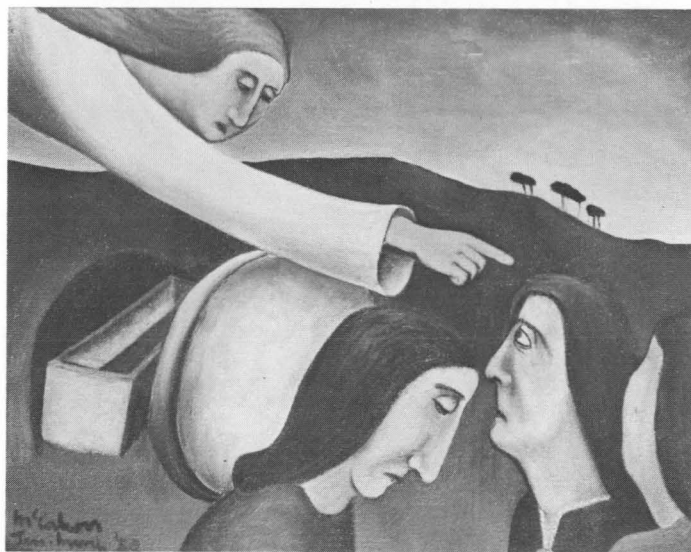




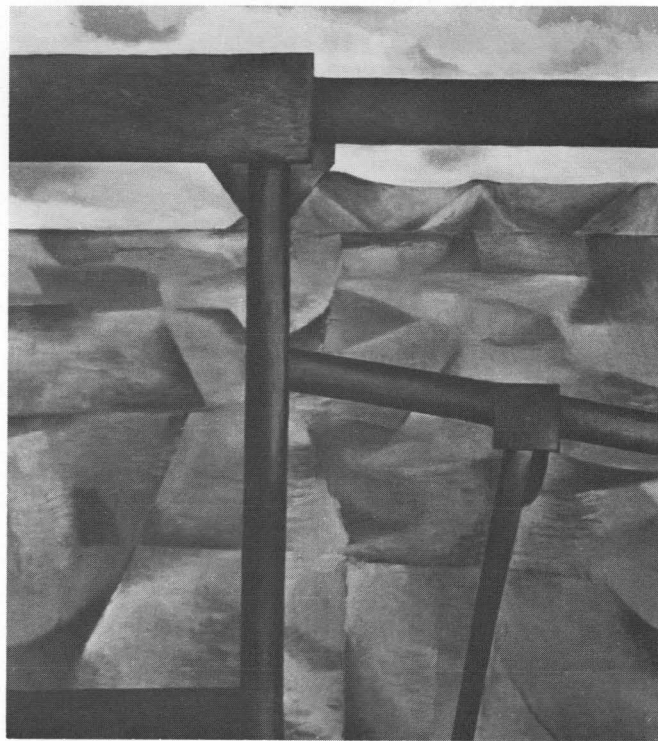
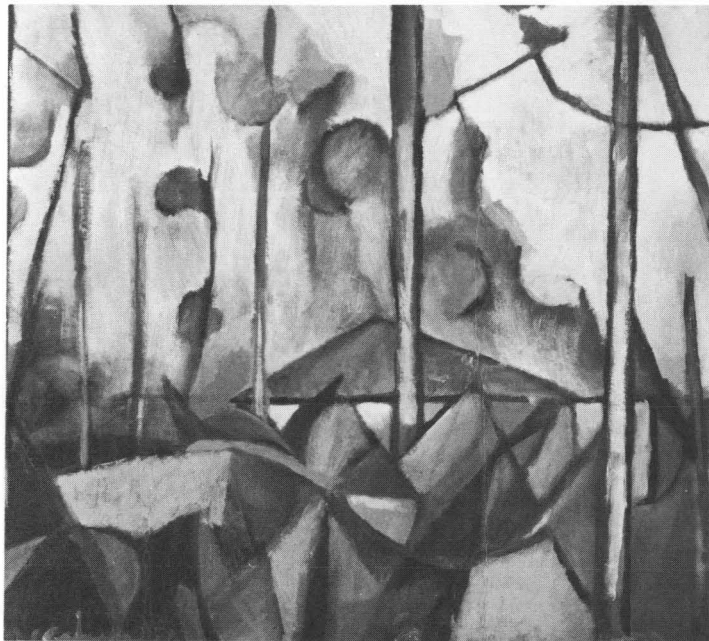
Six days in Nelson and Canterbury 1950 (14)

The Maries at the Tomb 1950 (13)

Crucifixion c1950 (12)



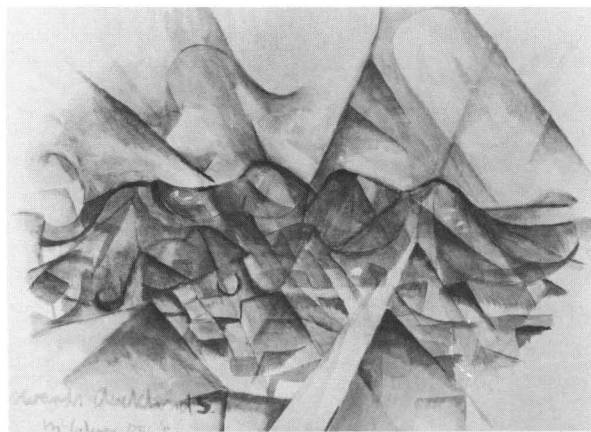
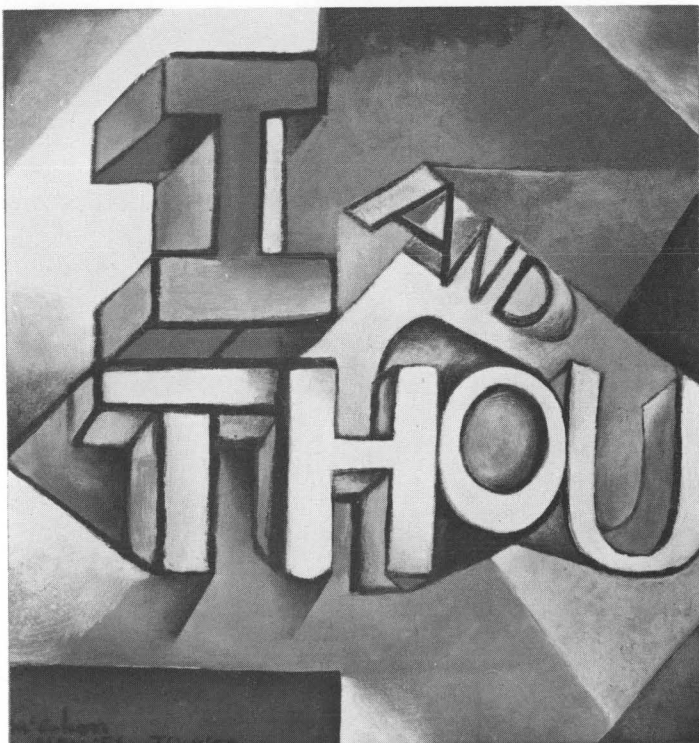
House in trees, Titirangi 1953 (17)



On building bridges (left-hand panel of a triptych) 1952 (16)



North Canterbury landscape 1951 (15)

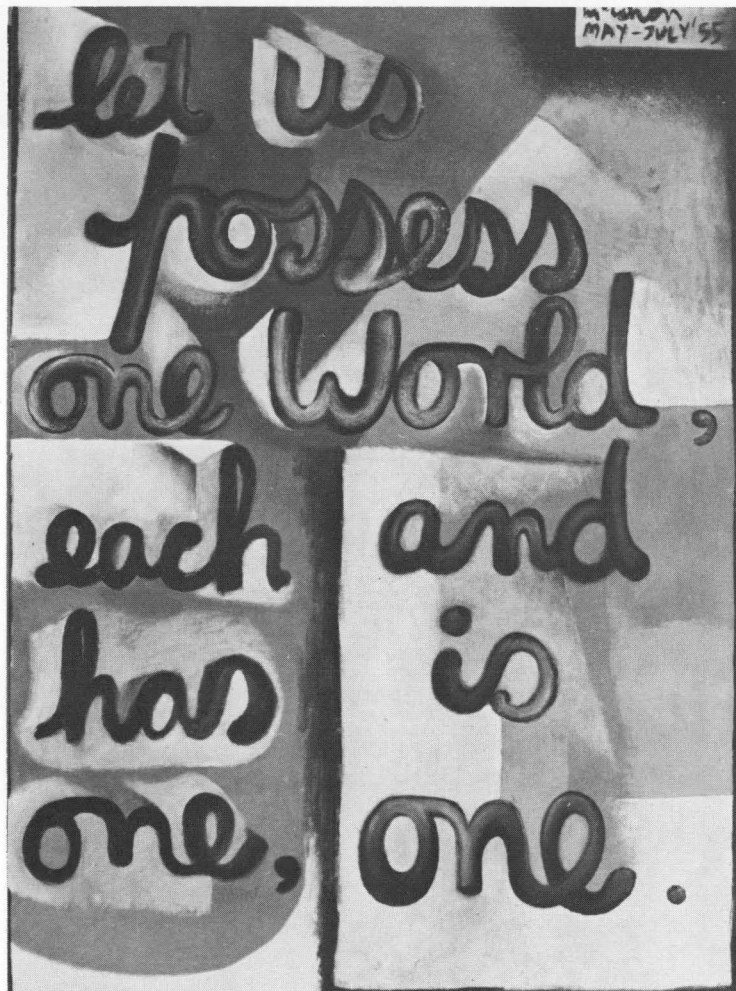
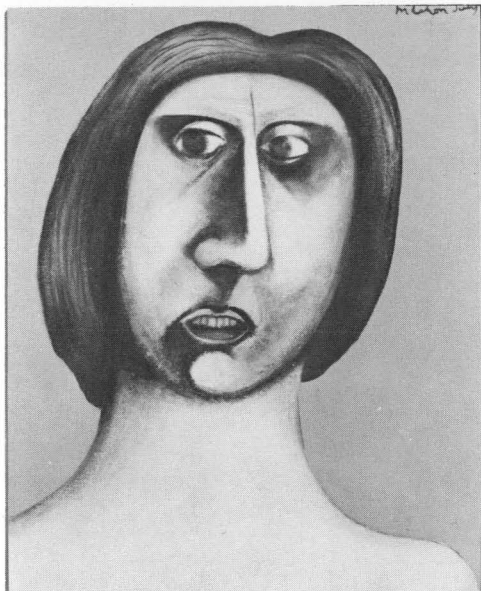


Towards Auckland 5 1953 (18)



I and thou 1954 (19)

Sacred to the memory of Death 1955 (20)



Let us possess one world 1955 (21)



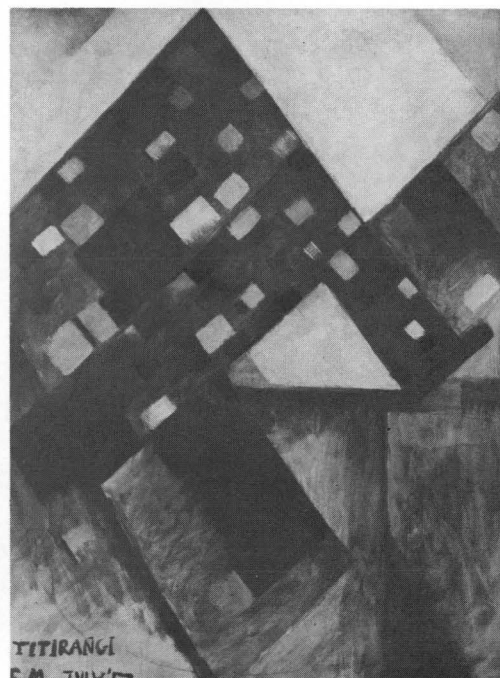
Singing woman on pink ground 1955 (22)

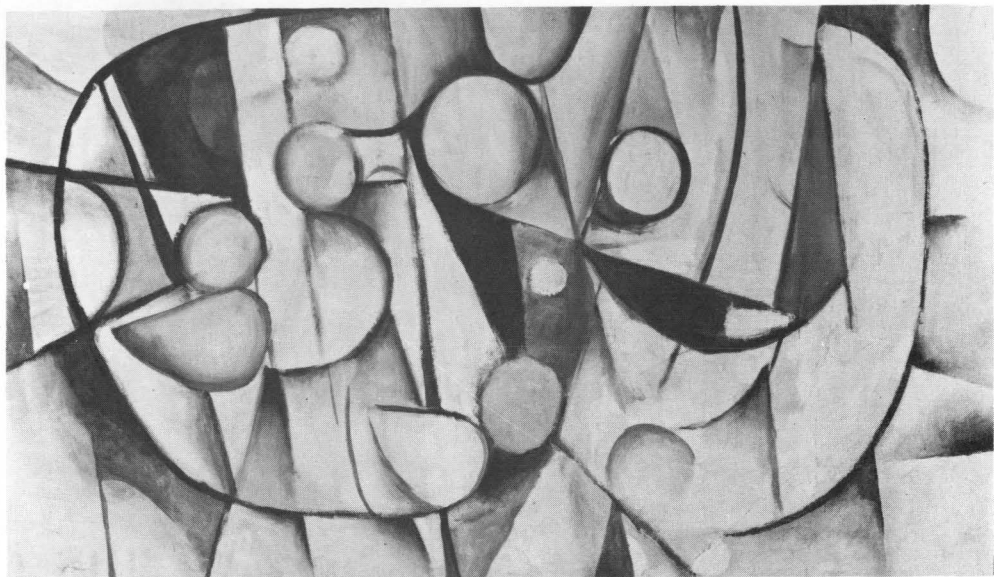
Portrait of Victoria 1957 (23)



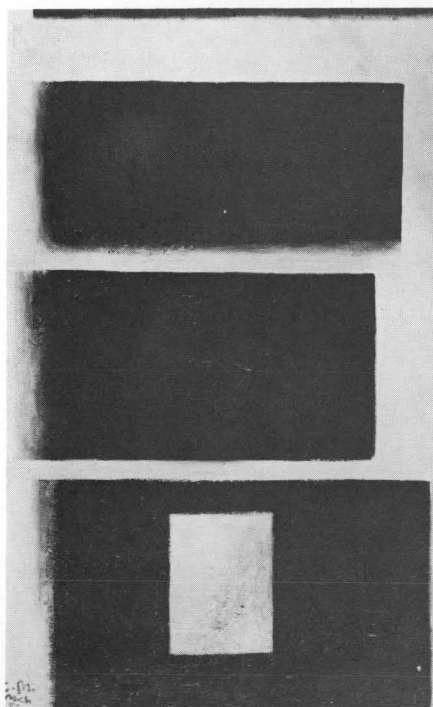
House in the trees 1955-57 (24)

Red Titirangi 1957 (25)

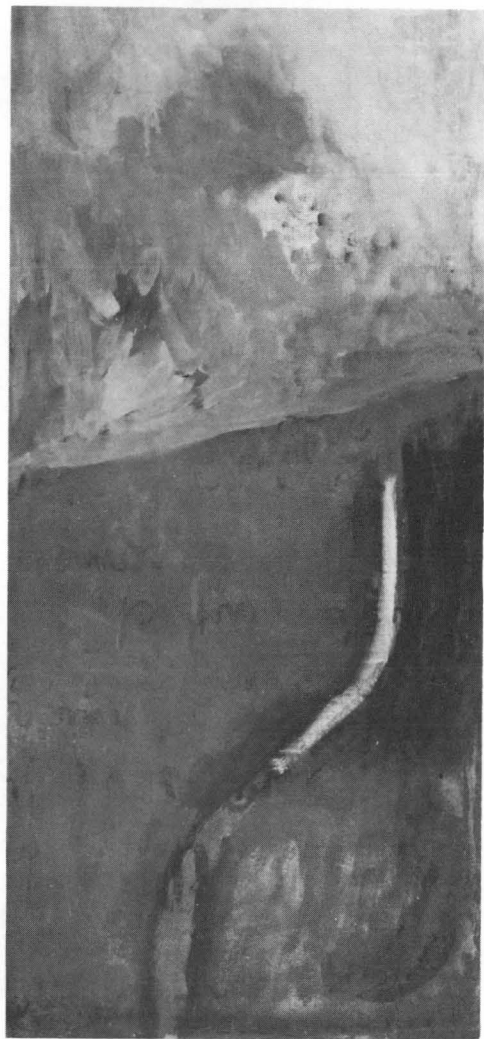




Kauri 1957 (26)



Painting 1958 (27)



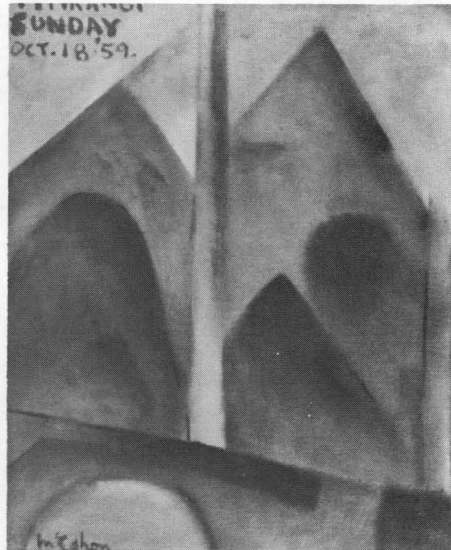
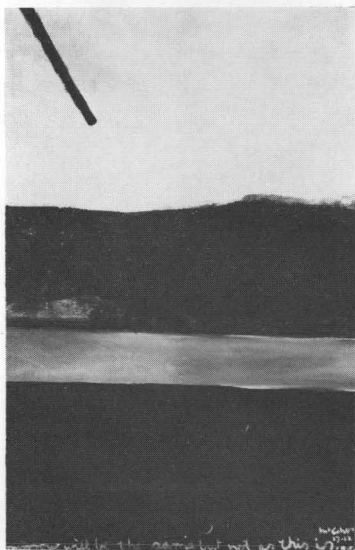
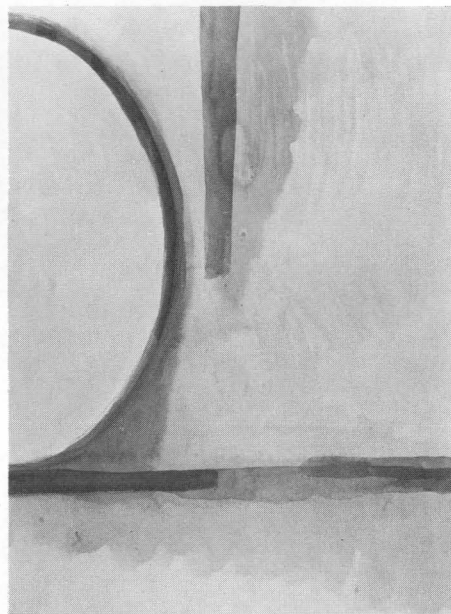
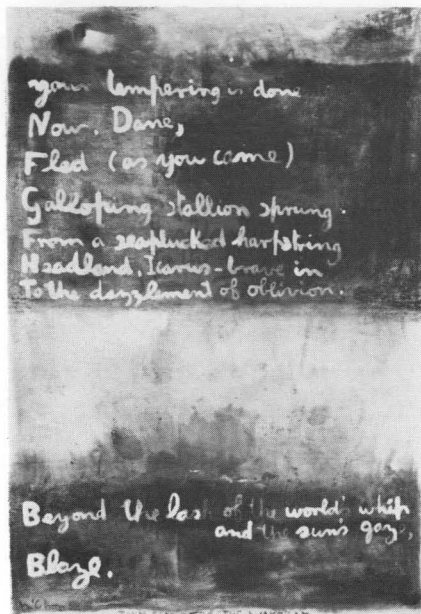
Three panels from *The Northland Panels* 1958 (28)

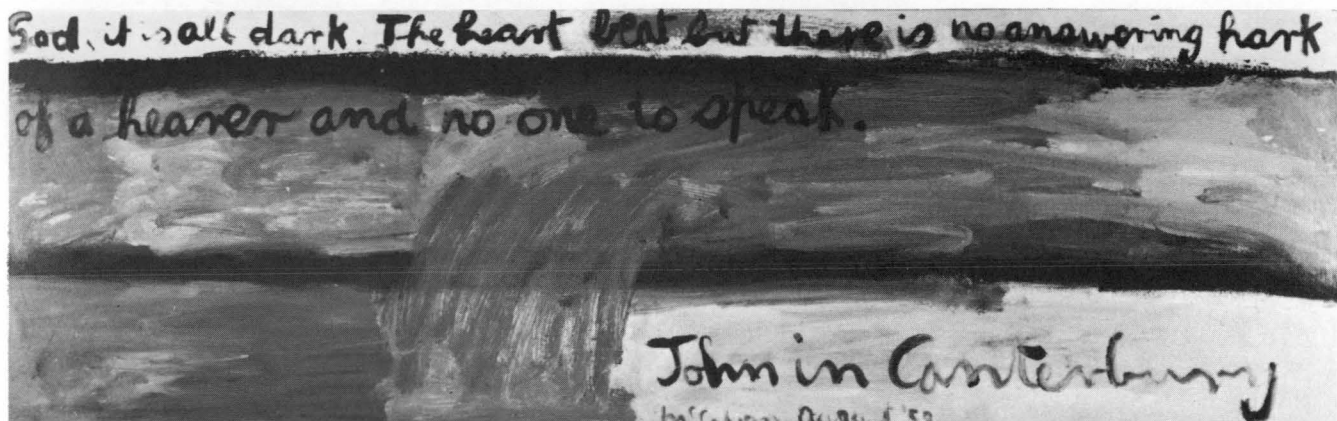
Panel from *The Wake* 1958 (29)

Tomorrow will be the same but not as this is 1958 (30)

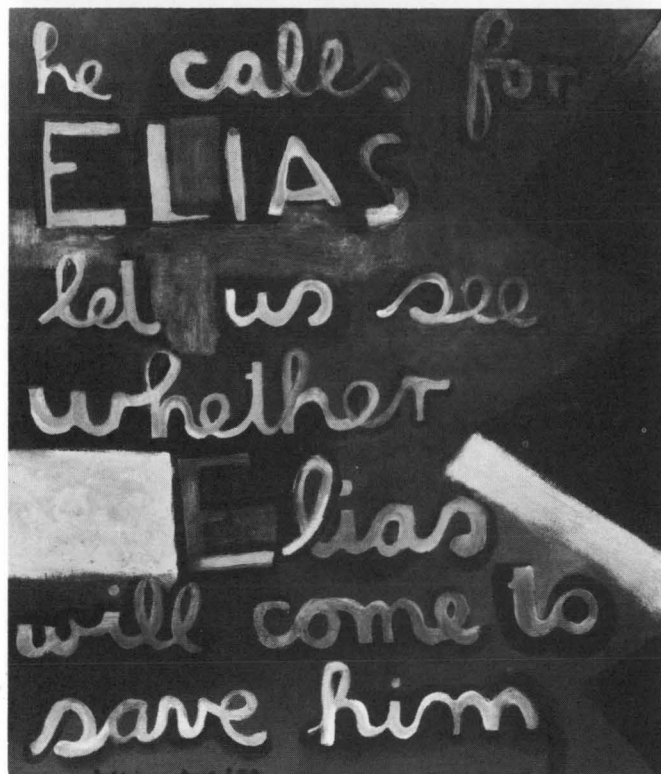
2, from *Numerals: first series* 1958 (31)

The last Titirangi landscape 1959 (32)



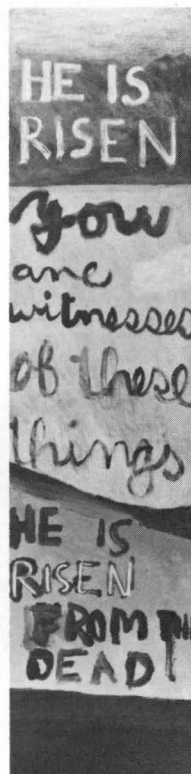


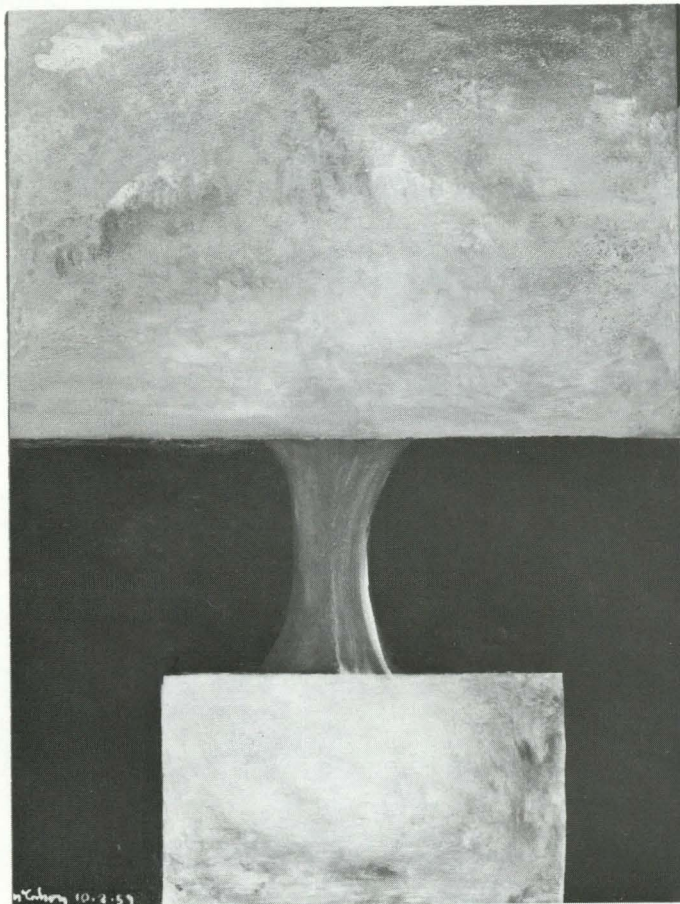
John in Canterbury 1959 (33)



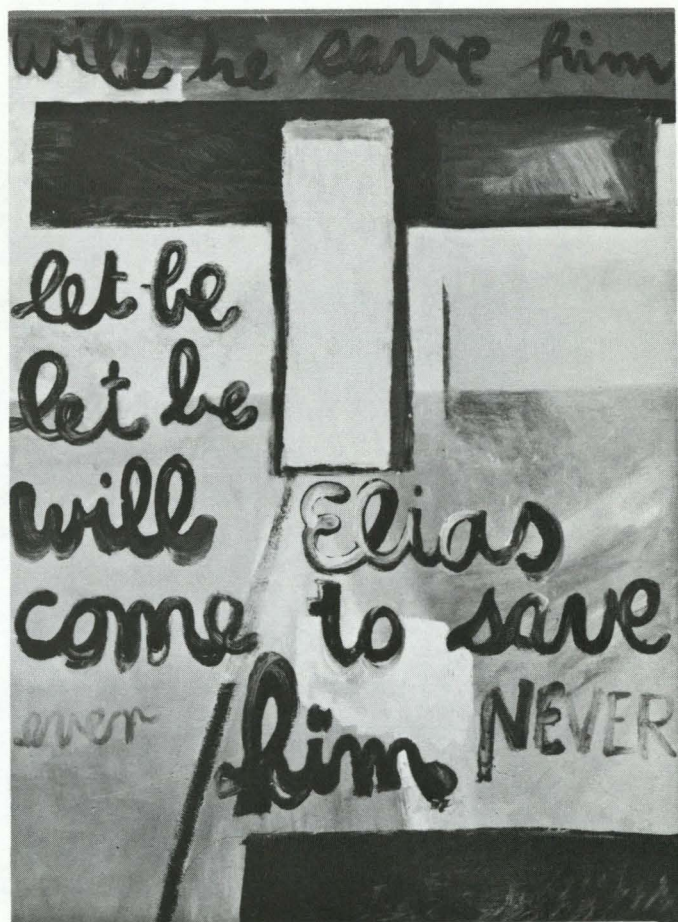
You are witnesses 1959 (34)

He calls for Elias 1959 (35)

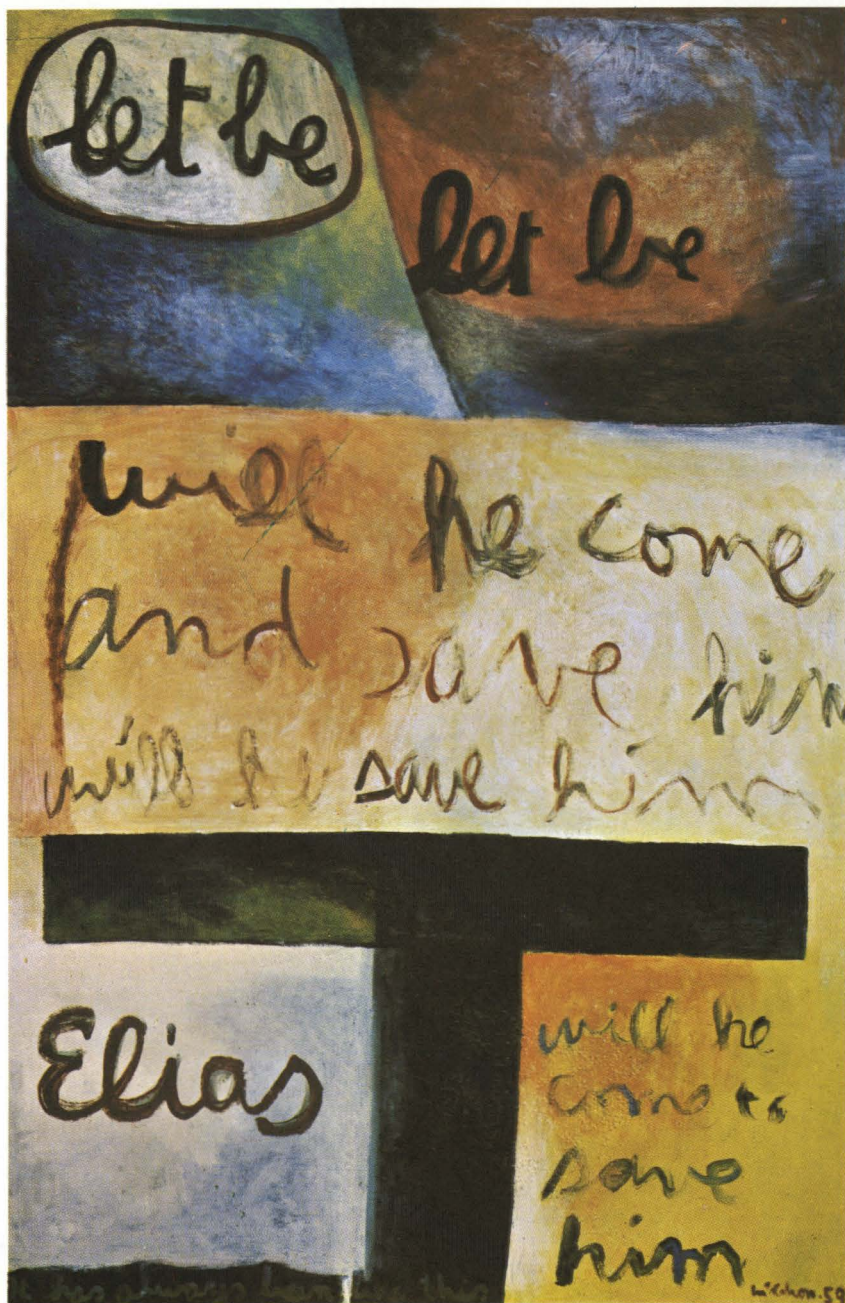




Panel from the *Elias triptych* 1959 (36)

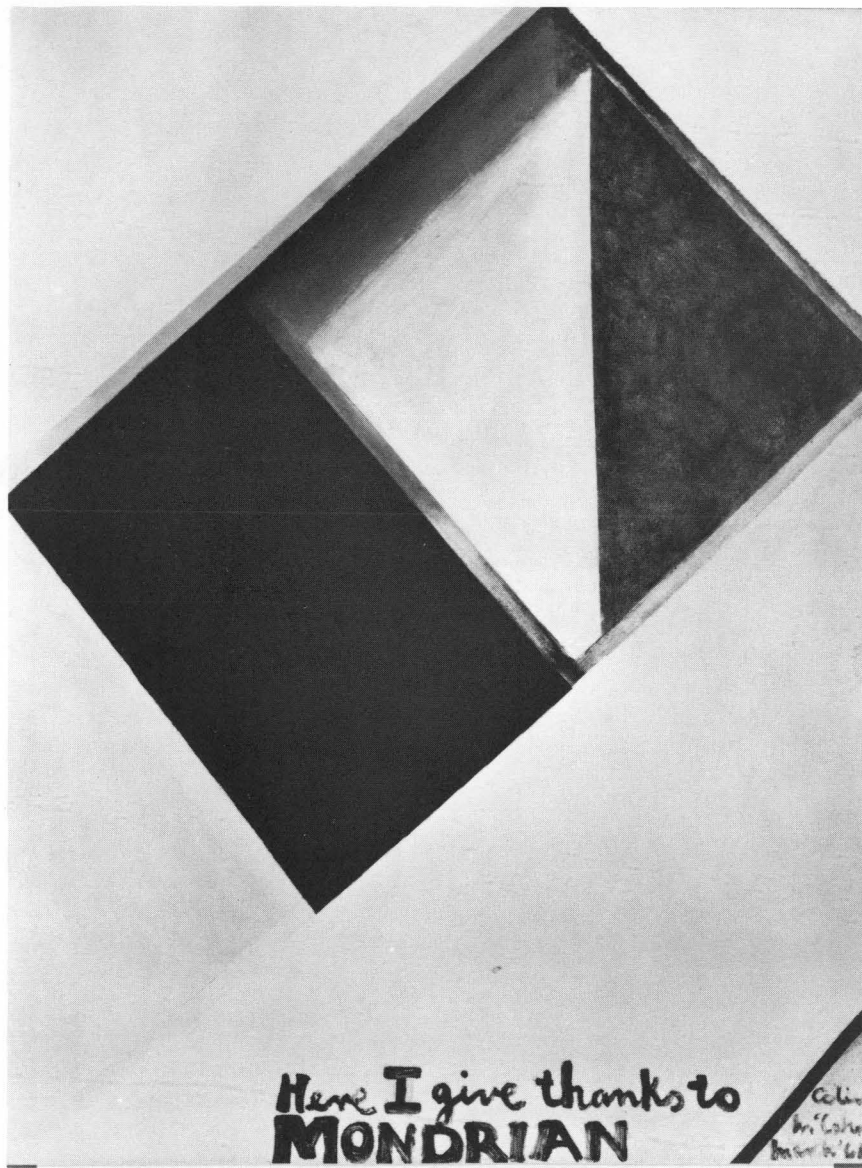
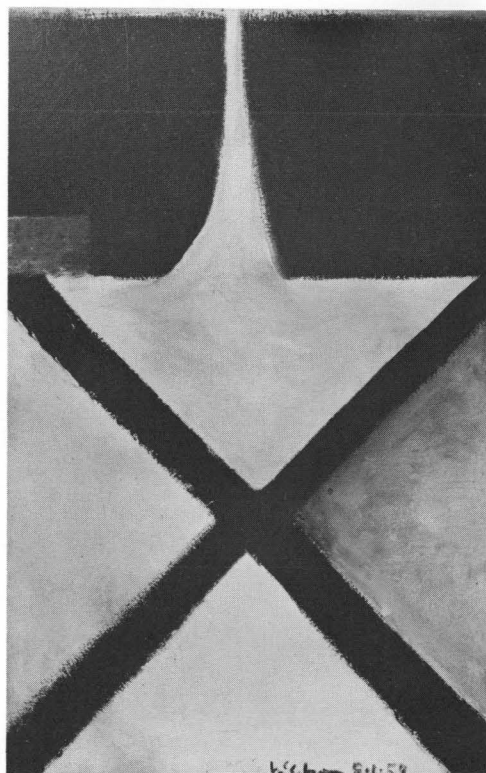


Will He save Him? 1959 (37)



Here I give thanks to Mondrian 1961 (40)

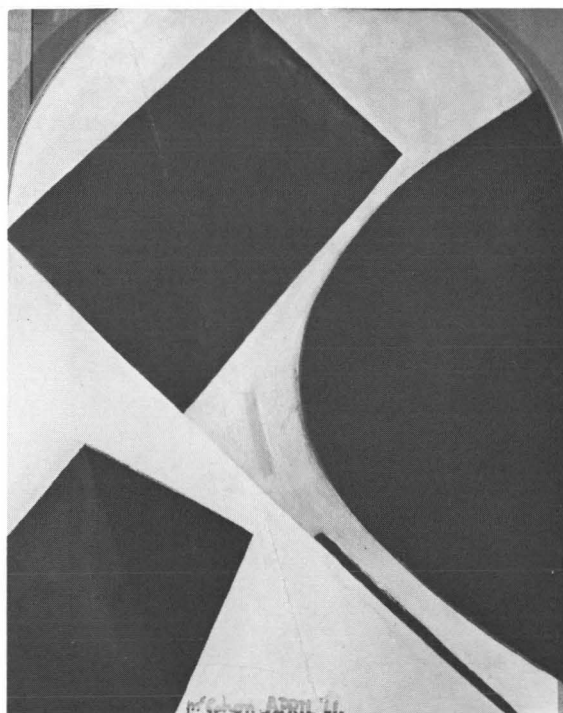
Cross 1959 (39)





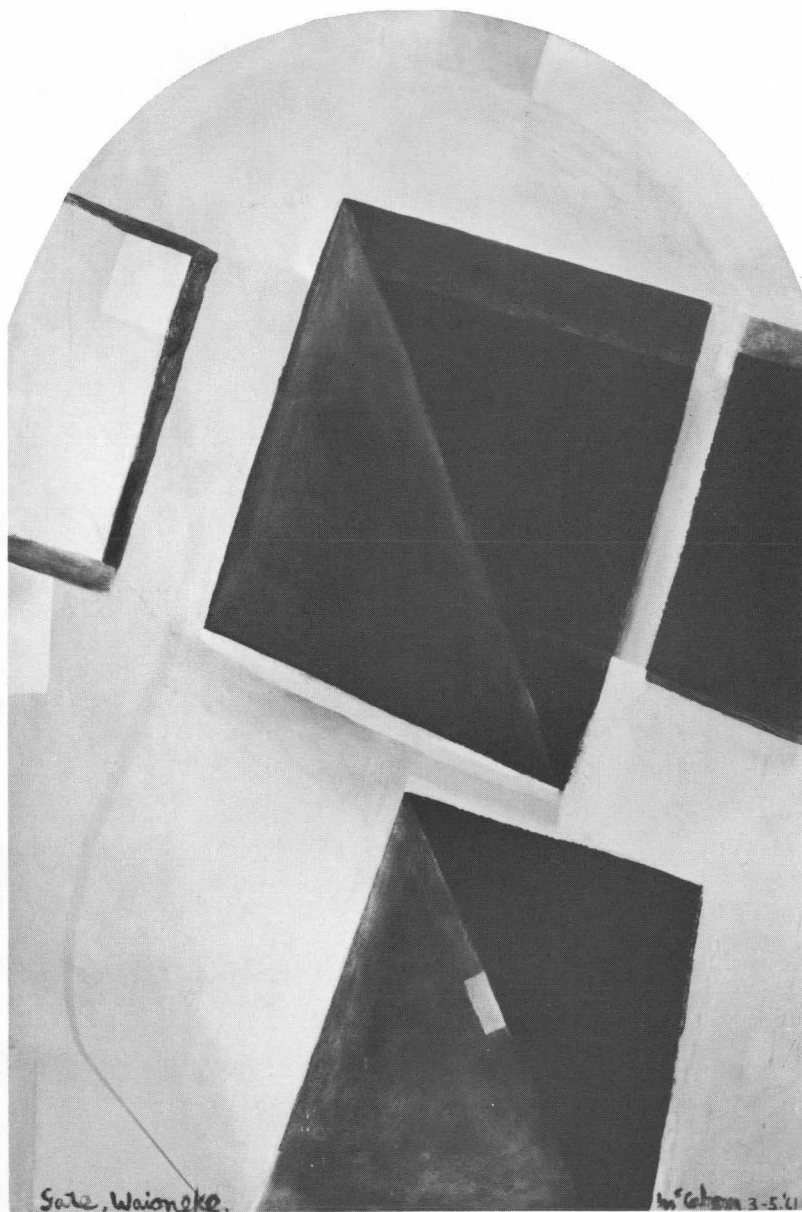
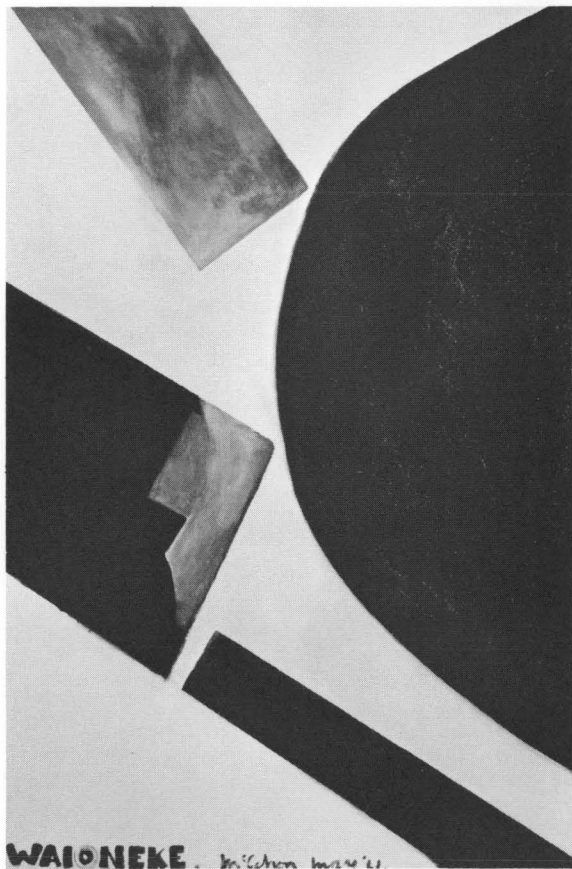
How is the hammer broken 1961 (41)

Gate 1961 (42)



Gate: Waioneke 1961 (43)

Waioneke 1961 (44)



CRY

WHAT SHALL I CRY

HOWL, O GATE, CRY,
O CITY

HOWL YE INHABITANTS
OF THE COASTLAND.

FEAR AND THE PIT AND
THE SNARE ARE UPON
THEE, O INHABITANT OF
THE EARTH

WE HAVE MADE A
COVENANT WITH
DEATH, AND
WITH HELL ARE
AT AGREEMENT

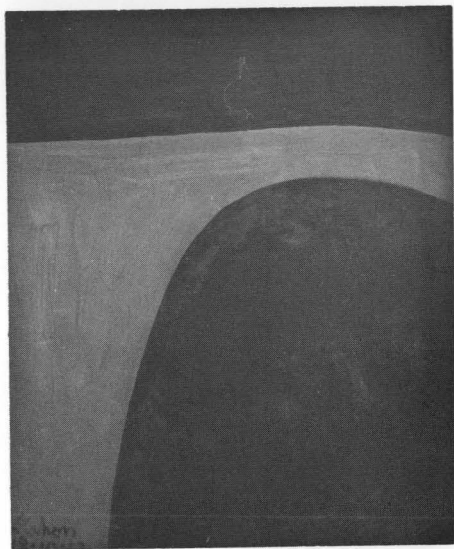
YEA, IT SHALL BE AT AN
INSTANT SUDDENLY. THERE
SHALL BE A VISITATION WITH
THUNDER, AND WITH EARTHQUAKE,
AND GREAT NOISE, WITH
WHIRLWIND AND TEMPEST,
AND THE FLAME OF A
DEVOURING FIRE.

THE FLAME OF A
DEVOURING FIRE

HOW IS THE HAMMER OF THE WHOLE EARTH
CUT ASUNDER AND BROKEN?

THE EARTH SHALL STAGGER
LIKE A DRUNKEN MAN.
THEN THE MOON SHALL
BE CONFOUNDED AND THE
SUN ASHAMED

HOW IS THE HAMMER BROKEN?

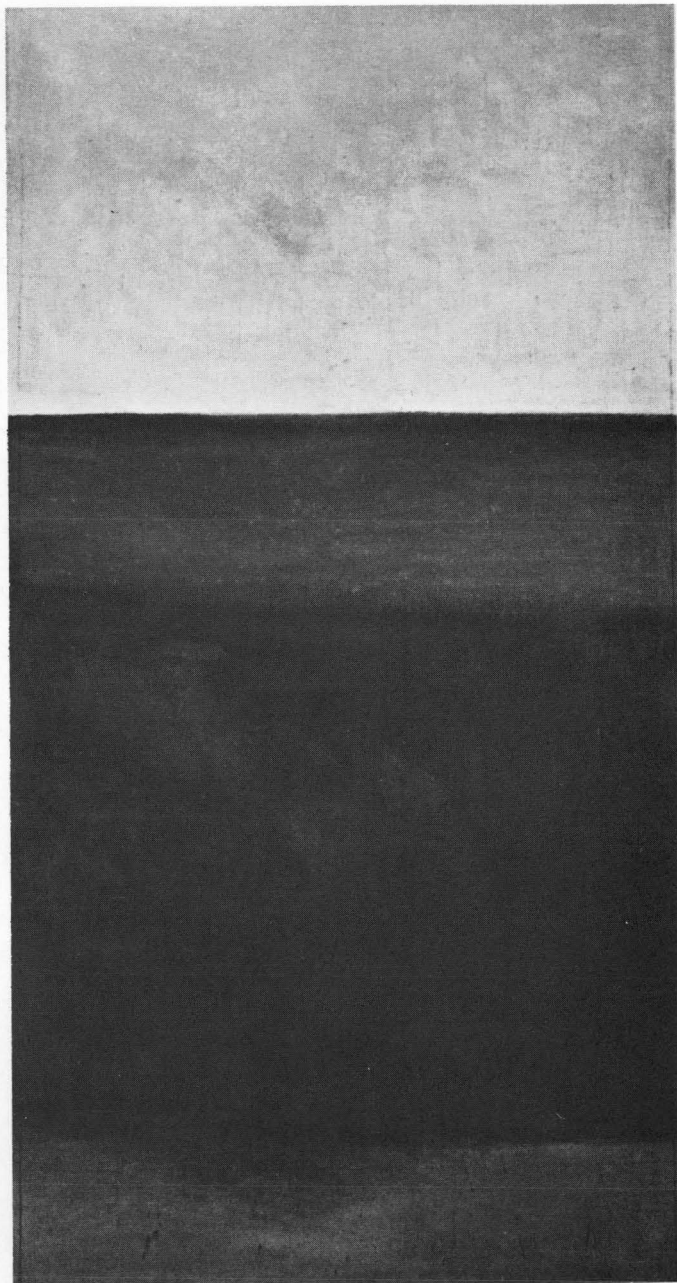


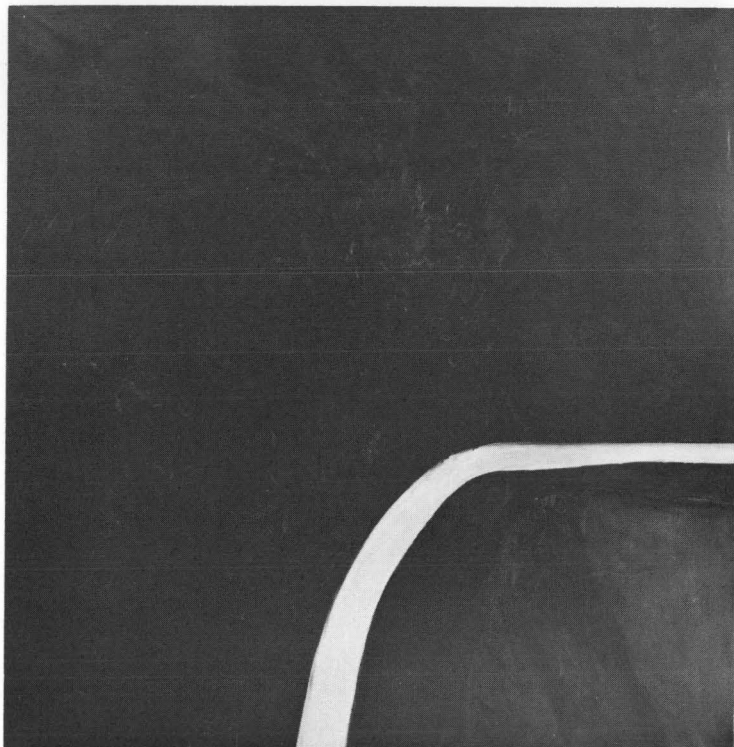
Yellow and black landscape 1962 (46)

*Landscape theme and variations (Series B)
1963 (48)*



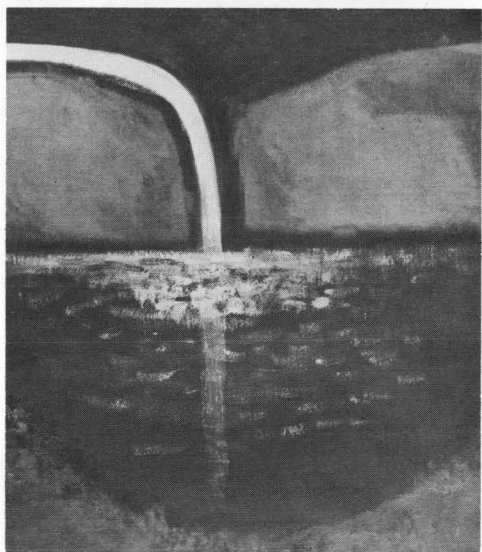
Pink blue and white Painting 1963 (49)



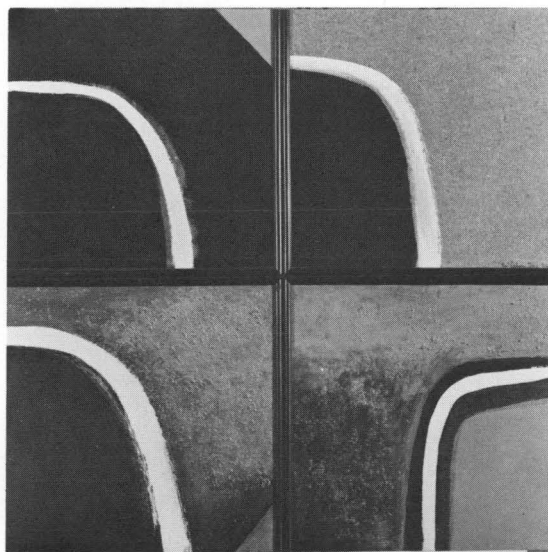


Large waterfall 1964 (52)

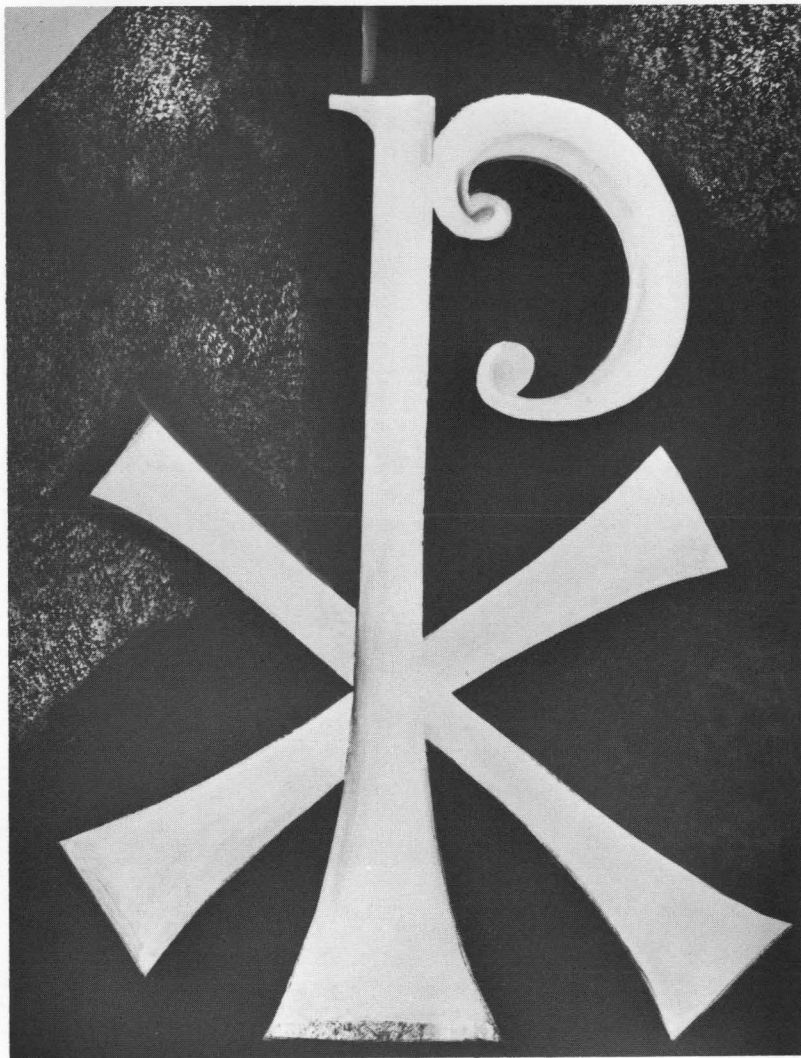
The first waterfall 1964 (50)



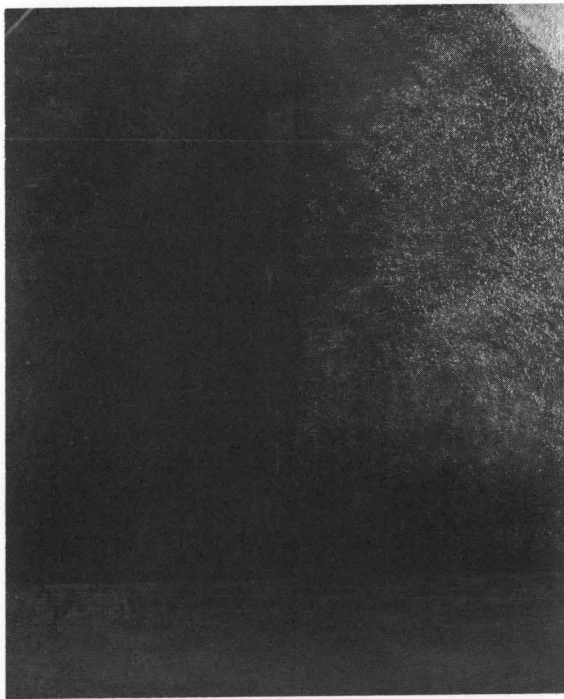
Four waterfalls 1964 (51)

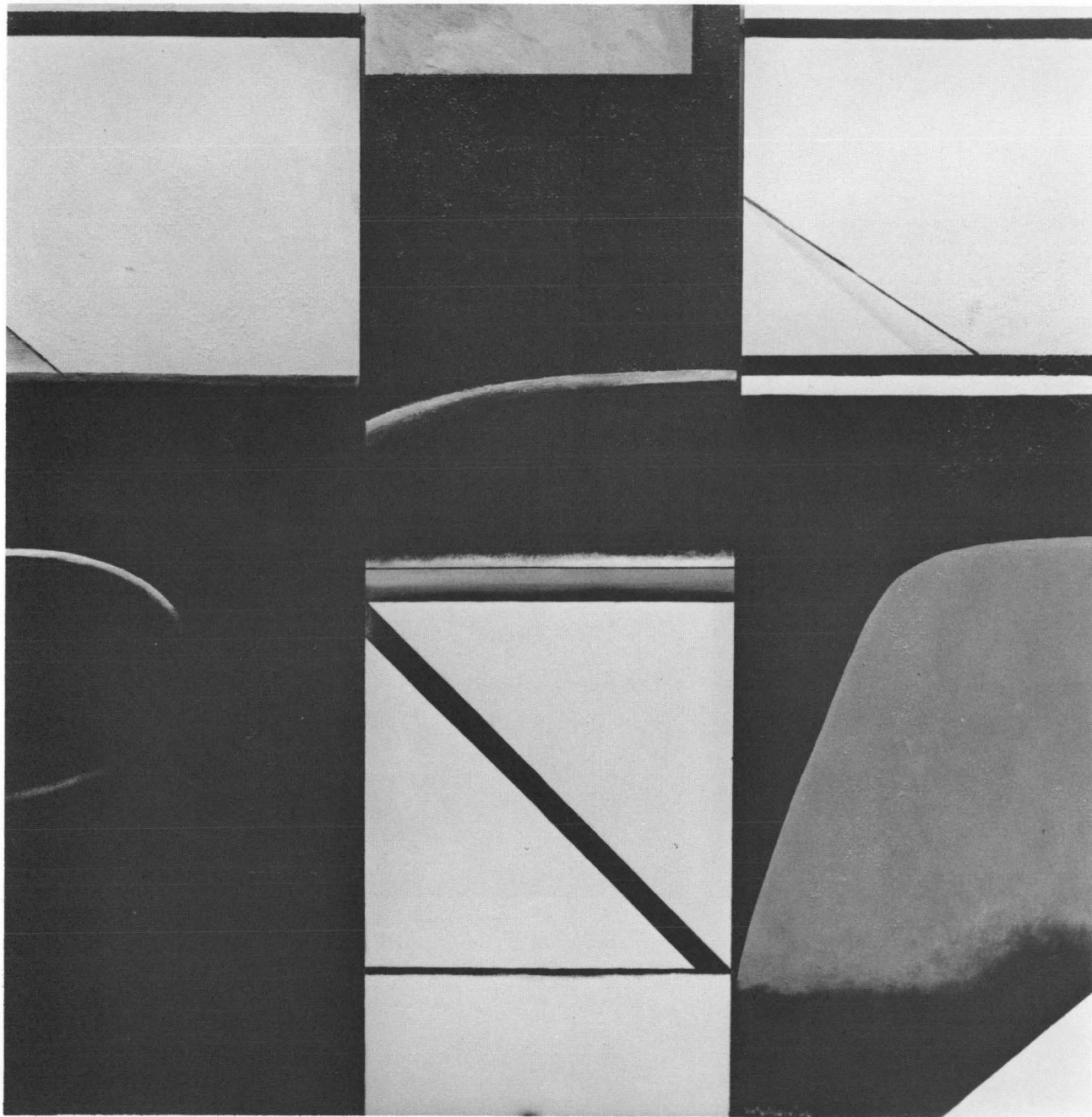


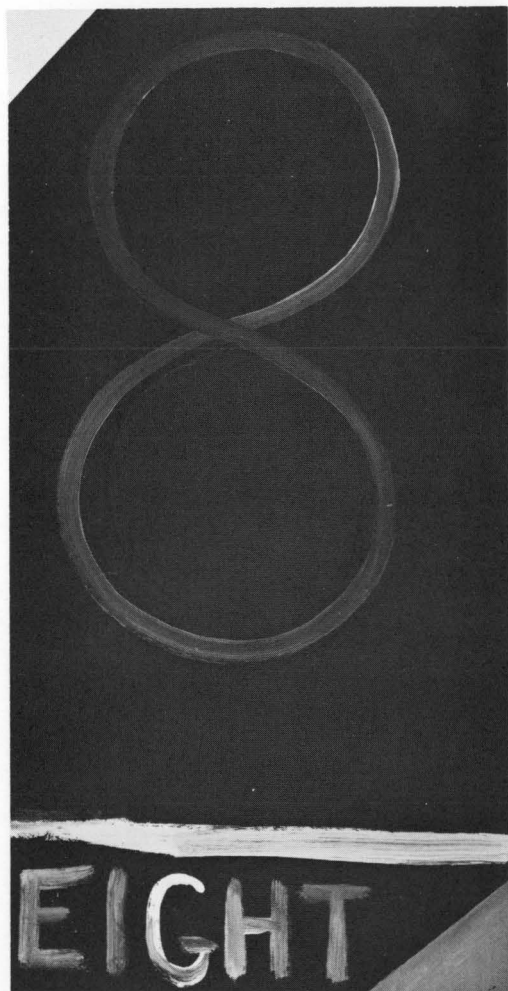
XP 1965 (54)



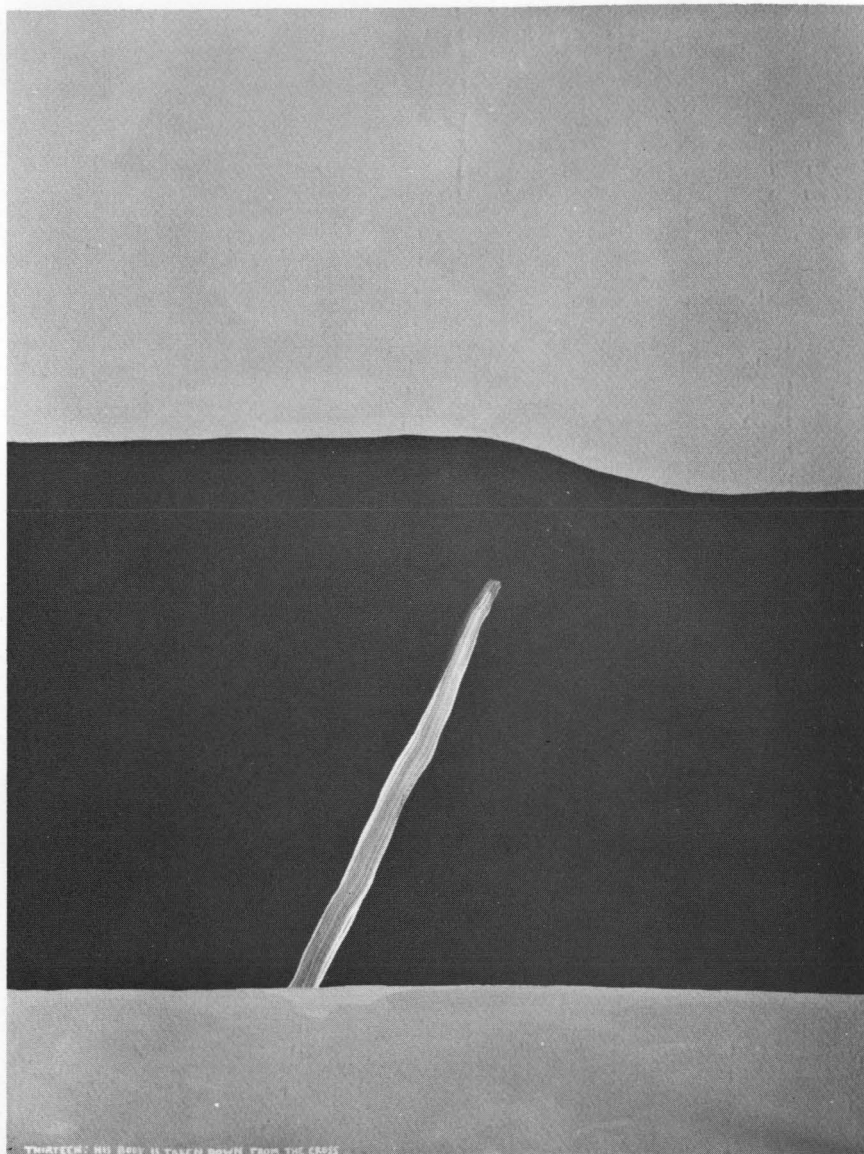
Panel from the *Waterfall triptych* 1964 (53)



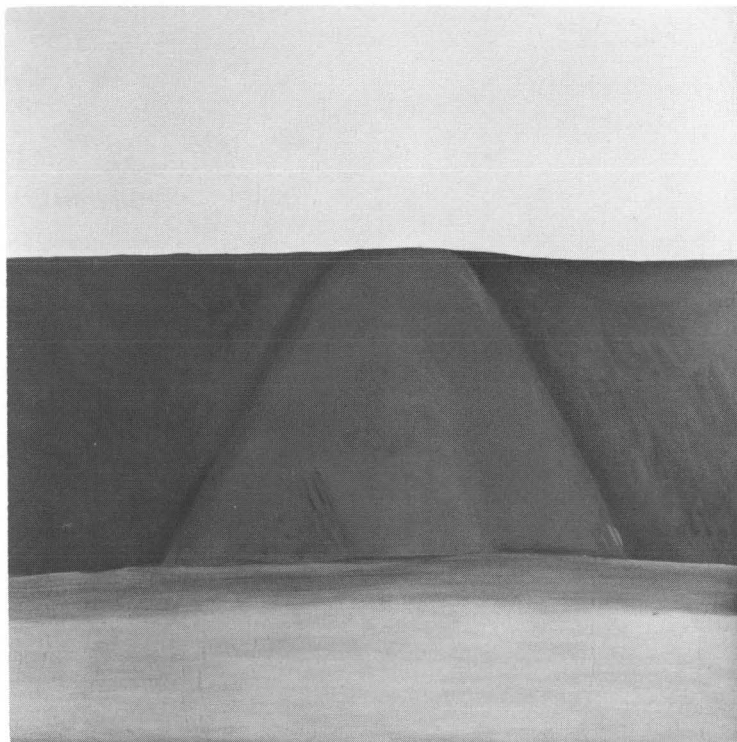




8 from *Numerals* series (Thirteen panels) 1965 (55)

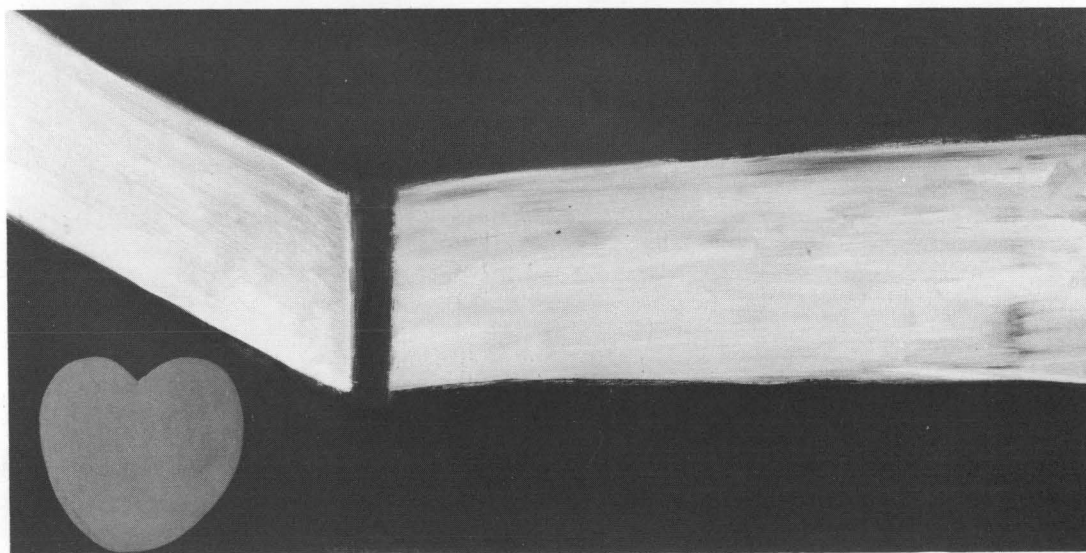


From *The fourteen Stations of the Cross* (No 13) 1966 (57)



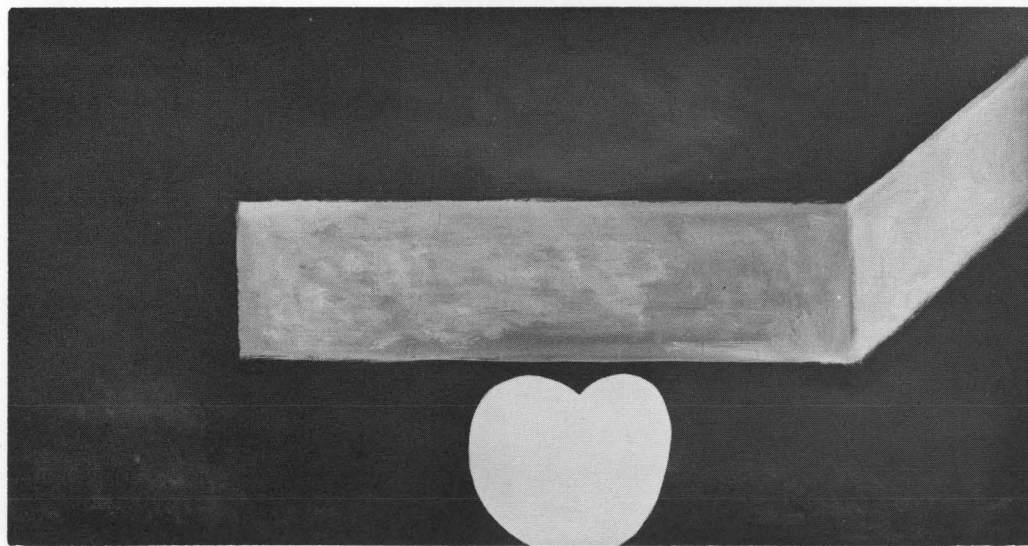
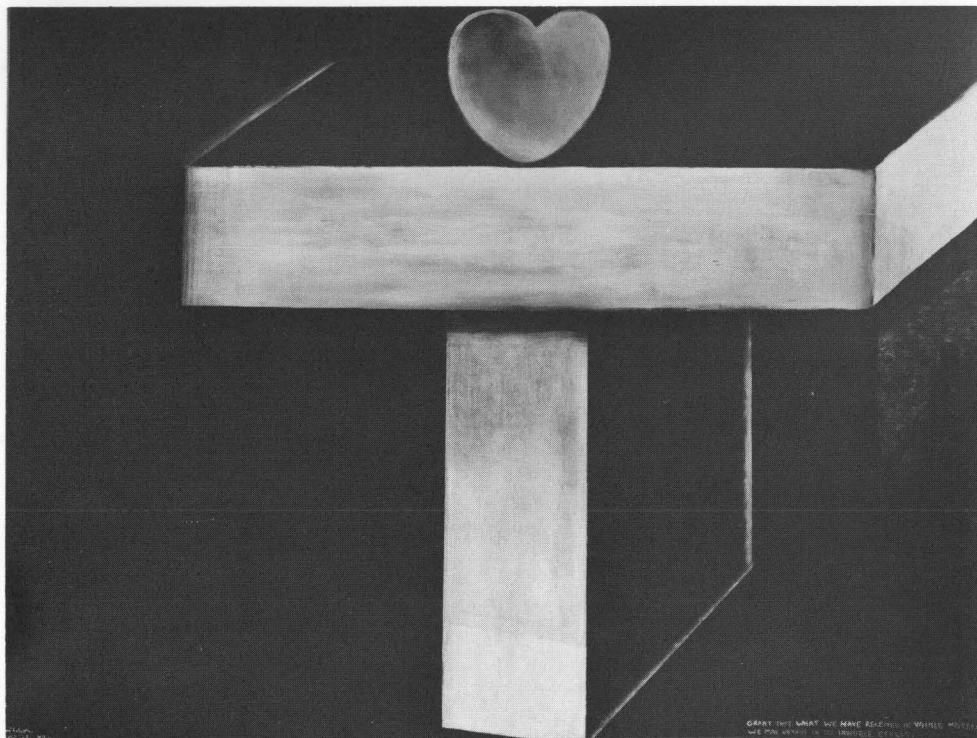
North Otago landscape 4 1967 (59)

Still life with altar I 1967 (61)



Visible Mysteries I 1968 (63)

Still life with altar III 1967 (62)





Portrait of Gordon H. Brown 1968 (64)

When the earth drinks in the rain that falls 1969 (65)

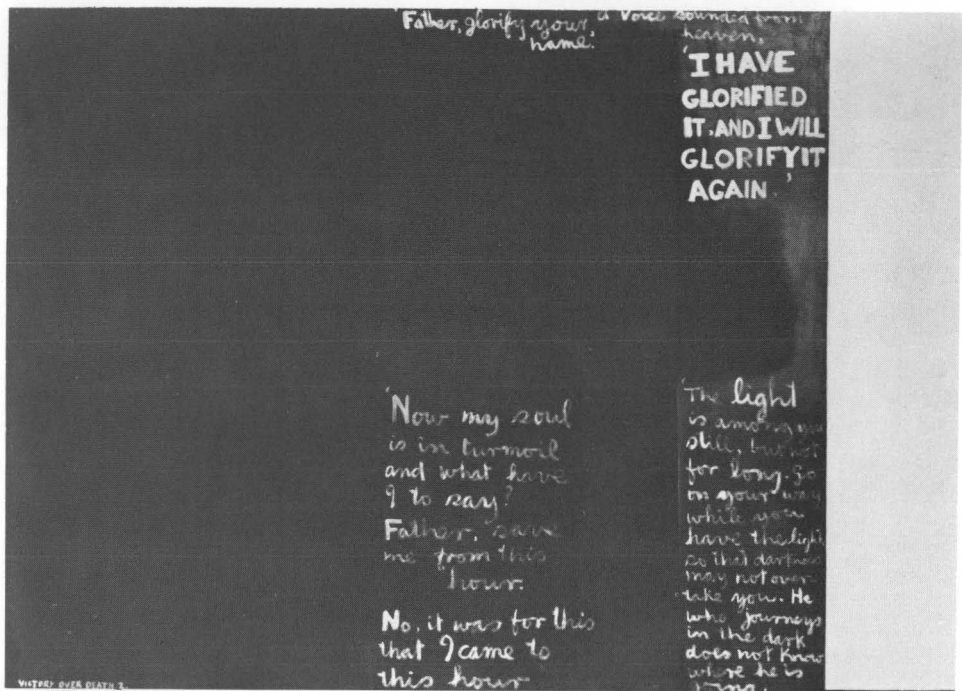
When the earth
drinks in the
rain that falls
upon it from
time to time,
and yields a useful
crop to those for
whom it is cultivated
it is receiving its
share of blessing
from God; but if it bears
thorns & thistles, it is worthless
and God's curse hangs over it
the end of that is burning.

But although we speak as we do,
we are convinced that you, my
friends, are in the better case,
and this makes for your salvation.

For God would not be so unjust as
to forget all that you did for
love of his name - But we long
for every one of you to show the
same eager concern until your hate
is finally realized. We want you
not to become lazy, but to imitate
those who, through faith and
patience, are inheriting the promises.

Cybernetics

We are the hull of a great canoe (66)



Victory over Death 2 1970 (69)

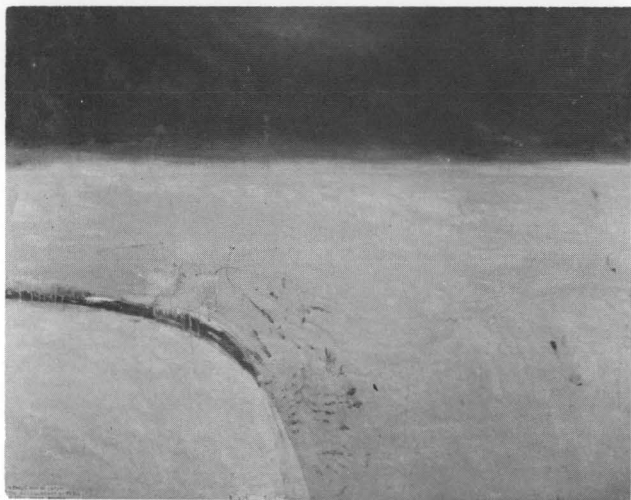
Practical religion: the resurrection of Lazarus showing Mount Martha 1970 (68)



*my war is known to you

LET HIM GO

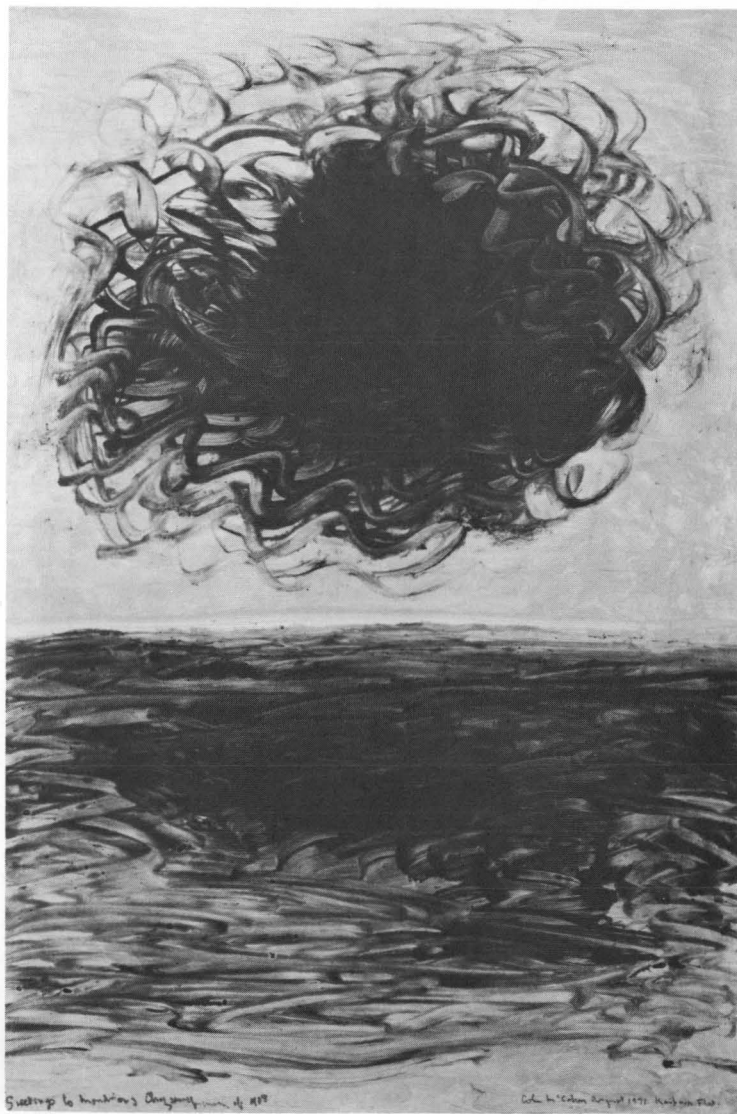
'The people is how I
 thinking for you is my
 coming the place
 There was O'Brien
 some action for a
 There is one
 Talk about the place
 But I feel more than
 Have talk you will
 EVER N. J. G. CO



Venus and re-entry: the bleeding heart of Jesus is seen above Ahipara 1970-71 (70)

The days and nights in the wilderness 1971 (71)

Mondrian's Chrysanthemum of 1908 1971 (72)



I WILL NEED WORDS . . . WORDS CAN BE TERRIBLE BUT A
SOLUTION CAN BE GIVEN. IN SPITE OF A MESSAGE WHICH
CAN BURN I INTEND A PAINTING IN NO WAY EXPRESSIONISTIC
BUT WITH A SLOWLY EMERGING ORDER . . . - CM to JC

THE CATALOGUE Unless otherwise stated, all paintings are from the artist's collection.
Measurements are given in inches, height before width.

I WAS VERY LUCKY and grew up knowing I would be a painter. I never had any doubts about this. I knew it as a very small boy and I knew it later. I know it now when it is too late to turn back and I only wish I were a better painter. Painting to me is like lambs born in the spring, rain, wind, sun. Like chopping down trees in the wilderness and living with the slaughtered stumps, of not seeing the beauty I look for, and also seeing the beauty of another world - of words. I talk all my paintings to myself. . . . Tirralirra by the river, sang bold Sir Launcelot . . .

1

Art school still life c1938-39
Oil on cardboard, $15\frac{1}{2} \times 19\frac{1}{8}$
Signed *Colin McCahon*
Collection of R. N. O'Reilly

I went to the Dunedin School of Art for some parts and to Nelson to work for other parts of these few years. I spent six months of one year on the road with a revue company (advance publicity and dirty comedian).

Met Woollaston, Rodney Kennedy, R. N. O'Reilly and Charles Brasch, Eve and Fred Page, Hilda and Mario Fleischl, all my early supporters - and my wife, painter Anne Hamblett and our friend Doris Lusk.

John Summers was another Dunedin friend. Bob (R. N.) Field was teaching in Dunedin at this time. He was a kind and good teacher.

Anne and I went to Nelson in 1943 to work tobacco in Pangatotara. Doris came up for the summer. Her painting of the Crusader and tobacco fields, now in the Auckland City Art Gallery, dates from that time. My painting looks down the valley: Doris's looks upstream.

2

Pangatotara landscape no 2 1943

Oil on cardboard, $20 \times 15\frac{1}{2}$

Signed *McCahon '43*

Lent by Miss Catherine McCahon

First exhibited at the 'French Maid' coffee shop, Lambton Quay, Wellington, in 1943 or 1944

The next painting is just as it says, but this studio was in Dunedin and I was visiting – a first baby had been born. The dating of this is very tentative.

3

The lamp in my studio c1945

Oil on cardboard, $20\frac{1}{2} \times 25\frac{1}{2}$

First exhibited, Moller's Gallery, Auckland, 1969.

Back in Nelson and spring happened in Ruby Bay and we were there! Pear trees and chickens and gorse out in bloom and never again felt happiness. The small child painted the explosion in the sky. I wickedly kicked him down the bank towards the pear tree.

4

Spring, Ruby Bay 1945

Oil on cardboard, 24×18

Dated 1945 and title inscribed

First exhibited Woollaston McCahon Retrospective, A C A G, 1963

Trips to Dunedin and Wellington. The wonderful gift of the Phaidon Press in revealing Titian. Lots of painting. We were at Tahunanui and I was in the building trade. We had a Christmas in a very small house full of people painting and talking: the (Lusk) Hollands, Betty O'Reilly, Pat Hayman; children – most of us had them then. The painting went on, the conversation was endless. I have some drawings of the conversations. The next three paintings are from this time. They were shown later in Wellington and I went with them wearing a lovely black-and-white jacket made for me by Edith Woollaston. John Beaglehole opened the exhibition in the Wellington Public Library. Really my first big exhibition.

5

The entombment (after Titian) 1947

Oil on cardboard, $20\frac{1}{2} \times 25\frac{1}{2}$

Signed and dated *McCahon May '47*

6

Christ taken from the Cross 1947

Oil on cardboard, $25\frac{1}{2} \times 20\frac{1}{2}$

Signed and dated *McCahon '47*

7

The Angel of the Annunciation 1947

Oil on cardboard, $25\frac{1}{2} \times 20\frac{1}{2}$

Signed *McCahon April '47* and title inscribed.

All three were first exhibited in 1947.

Some time between the painting of these last works and the next three we moved to Christchurch – at least I was in Christchurch and Anne and the children were in Dunedin. A lot of painting dates from the Christchurch years. The next two were painted in my bedroom-studio at the Holland's place. The *Takaka* painting was painted round a corner of the room, no one wall being itself long enough. Once more it states my interest in landscape as a symbol of place and also of the human condition. It is not so much a portrait of a place as such but is a memory of a time and an experience of a particular place.

8

Takaka: night and day 1948

Oil on canvas, 35×83

Signed *McCahon July 1948*

Collection of the Auckland City Art Gallery.

First exhibited, The Group, Christchurch, in 1948.

Three large landscapes of the Otago Peninsula pre-date this painting and are in a way close relations of it. It has not been possible to include them in this exhibition. The first dates from 1939, the second from about 1944 and the third was painted from 1944 to 1946.

The next painting begins the task of coming to grips with the Canterbury landscape.

9

The green plain 1948

Oil on canvas, $14\frac{3}{4} \times 36\frac{1}{8}$

Signed *McCahon July '48*

Lent by Mr Peter Webb, Auckland.

First exhibited, The Group, Christchurch, 1948.

10

The Virgin and Child compared 1948

Oil on canvas, $41\frac{1}{2} \times 33$

Signed *Colin McCahon* Nov. '48 and full title inscribed.

Collection of the Hocken Library, Dunedin.

First exhibited, The Group, Christchurch, 1948.

This owes its being both to the painter Grünewald and to that cruel and beautiful film *Open City*.

About now we got a house to live in in Christchurch. It was in Barbour Street, by the Linwood railway station. A place almost without night and day as the super floodlights of the railway goods-yards kept us always in perpetual light. The trunks of the trees were black with soot. We eventually had a small but lovely garden. To the right a pickle factory; behind, a grinding icing-sugar plant. Twenty-two rail-tracks to the left. A lovely view of the Port Hills and industry from the front room and across the road an embryo female bagpipe-player learning hard. We lived in Barbour Street until we moved to Auckland.

11

Annunciation 1949

Oil on cardboard, $25\frac{3}{4} \times 20\frac{1}{2}$

Signed *McCahon* July-November '49 and title inscribed.

First exhibited, The Group, Christchurch, 1949.

12

Crucifixion c1950

Oil on canvas, $35\frac{1}{2} \times 28\frac{1}{2}$

Collection of Mr and Mrs John Caselberg, Dunedin.

First exhibited, The Group, Christchurch, 1950.

13

The Maries at the Tomb 1950

Oil on canvas, $31\frac{3}{4} \times 41\frac{1}{2}$

Signed *McCahon*, Jan-March '50

Collection of the Auckland City Art Gallery.

I painted this in Christchurch but the landscape comes from Dunedin, behind Ross Creek. I visited it about a year ago – still windswept, eroded and austere. The painting was first shown at the 1950 Group exhibition in Christchurch.

14

Six days in Nelson and Canterbury 1950

Oil on canvas, 35 × 46

Signed *McCahon Oct 50* and title inscribed.

First exhibited, The Group, Christchurch, 1950.

This painting I never explain but am often asked to. To me it explains itself. It was, I suppose, reconciling gains and losses, stating differences, hills and horizons. Simple. A bit of blood shed in the middle.

15

North Canterbury landscape 1951

Oil on canvas, 36 × 42 $\frac{1}{4}$

Signed *McCahon May 51*

Collection of the Auckland City Art Gallery.

First exhibited, The Group, Christchurch, 1951.

In 1951 I visited Australia and became a pupil of Mary Cockburn-Mercer in Melbourne. Mary was old, she had attended the banquet for Rousseau in Paris in 1908. She had a broken leg and no money. She charged me three shillings an hour for 'tuition' for two hours in the afternoons – painting – and nothing at all for all the mornings of looking – at the National Gallery – and nothing for the extra hours of conversation in the late afternoons. I was taught how to be a painter, and all the implications, the solitary confinement which makes a painter's life. I remember her with great affection and gratitude.

Back in Christchurch I started work on a painting initially called *Paddocks for sheep*. This was to be a large work based on some wonderful aerial photographs of North Canterbury where the plain is slowly devoured by the hills and where the paddocks with their safety give way to wilder hill country. I gave up, and sheep country became the North Canterbury I had known much earlier when the railway was going through and places like Parnassus, Conway and Clarence were familiar. We lost the sheep and gained a bridge. This was in 1952. This was first hung in the 1952 Group exhibition. I finished painting it there.

16

On building bridges (triptych) 1952

Oil on three panels, each 42 × 36

Signed *McCahon July-Sept '52*, and *McCahon Aug-Sept '52*

Collection of the Auckland City Art Gallery.

This painting to me was just something. I had made a very formal statement; I had put down something of what I had found in Australia. Some very similar paintings and lots of drawings in a like manner had happened before this but the

'Bridges', after Australia and Mary, taught me the need for precision and the freedom that only exists in relation to a strictly formal structure.

The Christchurch period had been alive with friends and conversations . . . work and fun. Taking the train to Lyttelton and going out on boats with the children. Drawing on the Port Hills in the snow – the ink smudging delicately in the melting snowflakes. I think often of Ursula Bethell gardening there – looking up and seeing the lilies flowering on the mountain, miles away over the plains. She wrote fine words.

I designed a production of *Peer Gynt* in Christchurch and two days after the closing night we moved to Auckland.

We came to Auckland in 1953 and lived in Titirangi in a tiny house at French Bay. It rained almost solidly during May, June, July and August. For the first month we lived almost entirely on a diet of potatoes, parsley, and bags of rock-cakes given by a kind and ancient aunt. Some paintings from this period are included – they are all domestic, or at least of local scenes. There were finally dozens of them but I don't know where most are now. Una Platts has one.

17

House in trees, Titirangi 1953

Oil on paper, $23 \times 25\frac{1}{2}$

Signed McCahon '53.

Lent by Miss Una Platts, Auckland.

First exhibited Woollaston McCahon Retrospective, ACAG, 1963.

This is painted on wrapping paper of a fine quality that came to Auckland with us. At this time the bush and the harbour were of prime importance as subjects – so was the whole magnificent spread of Auckland seen from Titirangi Road on the endless journeys into town every morning. The November light for that first year was a miracle. It remains an obsession and still a miracle. After the south, the drenching rain and brilliant sun, the shattered clouds after thunder and the rainbows that looped over the city and harbour through the Auckland light produced a series of watercolours called *Towards Auckland*. I tried to keep this series together but they eventually were broken up and sold – all over the country. This I regret, but we had to pay for house alterations and so on just to cope with the sizes the children were becoming.

18

Towards Auckland 5 1953

Watercolour and gouache, 22×30

Signed McCahon Dec '53 and title inscribed.

Collection of the Auckland City Art Gallery.

First exhibition, not known.

In 1954 quite a number of 'written' paintings happened.

19

I and Thou 1954

Oil on board, 22 × 21

Signed *McCahon*.

Collection of Miss D. Gilmour, Auckland.

20

Sacred to the memory of Death 1955

Oil on canvas, 25 × 30

The words come from an inscription on a Turner drawing in the Auckland City Art Gallery.

This is probably the first time either painting has been exhibited.

21

Let us possess one world! 1955

Enamel and oil on board, 30 × 22

Signed *McCahon* May-July '55

Collection of the University of Auckland Students' Association.

A lot of other things appeared then – a portrait called *Singing woman*: it is a direct relation to the *Singing women* of 1945–6 in the R. N. O'Reilly collection.

22

Singing woman on pink ground 1955

Oil on canvas, 24 × 20

Signed *McCahon* July '55

Lent by Mr Dick Lucas, Christchurch.

First exhibited, The Group, Christchurch, 1955.

1956 seems to be a blank. It could be the year I painted my boat and we all went sailing, landing on distant shores around the Manukau. It may be the year I spent drawing or just working so bloody hard at the gallery by day and teaching at night.

23

Portrait of Victoria 1957

Oil on canvas, $23\frac{1}{2} \times 16\frac{3}{4}$

Inscribed *Victoria* Sept. 14. 1957

Lent by Mr and Mrs K. Carr, Auckland.

First exhibited, Woollaston McCahon Retrospective, A C A G, 1963.

The next painting is one I am very fond of. It was begun in 1955 and finished in 1957. The house was next to ours. There are a large number of paintings of this subject. This is one of the best and is also one of the last.

24

House in the trees 1955-57

Oil on board, $25\frac{5}{8} \times 20\frac{5}{8}$

Signed *McCahon '55-'57*

Lent by Mrs Brenda Gamble, Auckland.

This is the first time it has been exhibited.

In 1957 too, a great change in attitude to the Titirangi landscape. I see I was right now in thinking about the previous year as one of little painting and lots of drawing. I came to grips with the kauri and turned him in all his splendour into a symbol. There were lots of these – very uneven in quality.

25

Red Titirangi 1957

Oil on cardboard, 31×21

Signed and dated *C.M. July '57*

Collection of Graham Ecroyd and Judy Wood.

First exhibited, Ikon Gallery, Auckland, 1957.

26

Kauri 1957

Gouache, $27\frac{3}{4} \times 46$

Signed *Kauri McCahon '57*.

First exhibited, Mollers Gallery, Auckland, 1969.

The increasing abstraction seen in these two paintings leads into some very odd directions. Firstly the following painting – really the opening of the first *Gate* series:

27

Painting 1958

Oil on board, $47\frac{3}{4} \times 30$

Signed *C.M. March '58*.

Collection of Haywrights, Christchurch.

First exhibited, Hay's Art Prize, Christchurch, 1960.

I submitted this for the Hay's Art Prize, in Christchurch, and it was a joint prize-winner. There were letters to the papers in Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin on 'Modern Art'. This was the most publicly disliked painting in New Zealand since my 1947 work was shown in Wellington and until *Tomorrow will be the same* was accepted by the Christchurch City Council in 1952.

1958 was also the year of a trip to the States to visit art museums. (The family were all parked out, one to Kaitia, one to Christchurch and two to Dunedin. On our return nobody was terribly keen to come home.)

Now this was quite an experience (not about the family but about going to the States). We saw a lot and learnt a lot and came back to a first-light sight of North Head, and the despoiled landscape of Auckland. We were met by friends and drank wine all day to forget the aesthetic horror of Karangahape Road.

We went home to the bush of Titirangi. It was cold and dripping and shut in – and I had seen deserts and tumbleweed in fences and the Salt Lake Flats, and the Faulkner country with magnolias in bloom, cities – taller by far than kauri trees. My lovely kauris became too much for me. I fled north in memory and painted the *Northland panels*.

28

The Northland panels 1958

Eight panels: monocoat on canvas

1. 70×32

2. 70×32

3. 70×24

4. $70 \times 21\frac{1}{2}$ inscribed *Rain*

5. $70 \times 31\frac{1}{2}$ inscribed: *A landscape with too few lovers.*

6. 70×24

7. 70×31

8. 70×23 signed McCahon Nov. 58 and inscribed *O yes it can be dark here and manuka in bloom may breed despair.*

The panels were first exhibited in a small group exhibition at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1958.

These were painted on the sun deck at Titirangi all on one Sunday afternoon and corrected for weeks afterwards. I was just bursting for the wide open spaces. The family had all come back eventually; we all settled down again. (Incidentally the Northland drawings – about 150 of them – all follow the panels – none precede.)

29

Four panels from *The Wake* (numbers 12 to 15) 1958

Ink and monocoat on canvas

Kauri $69\frac{1}{2} \times 24$

Signed McCahon.

The Eighth Poem $69\frac{1}{2} \times 44\frac{1}{2}$

Signed McCahon '58 and inscribed John Caselberg 'The Wake' VIII.

The Ninth Poem $69\frac{1}{2} \times 46$

Signed McCahon '58 and inscribed John Caselberg, 'The Wake' IX.

Kauri $69\frac{1}{2} \times 31$

In all there are sixteen panels in this series: nine are poems, one is a title, six smaller panels punctuate the word panels, five of these are kauri trunks – the other a dark landscape. Only four panels are included in this exhibition. The words come from a series of poems by John Caselberg. He is talking about a personal tragedy. *The Wake* was first exhibited at the Ikon Gallery, Auckland, as an environment for a poetry reading by Caselberg; subsequently they were shown in Christchurch, Greymouth and Nelson, recently in Hamilton.

My painting is almost entirely autobiographical – it tells you where I am at any given time, where I am living and the direction I am pointing in. In this present time it is very difficult to paint for other people – to paint beyond your own ends and point directions as painters once did. Once the painter was making signs and symbols for people to live by: now he makes things to hang on walls at exhibitions.

1958 was a good year. I built an extra bedroom under the quite extraordinary garage, my studio, we had on the top of our domestic cliff – the boys were moved into that. It had bunks and a clay floor and lovely sliding windows, sliding on coloured glass marbles. The floorboards upstairs were rather far apart and Molly Ryburn supplied a carpet (which I still have in my present studio) to make it more comfortable – the boys had clay and I had carpet.

The next painting was painted up there; so were dozens of others.

30

Tomorrow will be the same but not as this is 1958

Dulux on board, 72 × 48

Signed McCahon 17.12.58 and title inscribed.

Collection of The Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

First exhibited, Gallery 91, Christchurch, 1959.

This was unfortunate in that it wouldn't go right, and I got madder and madder (which shows the childish mentality of painters). I hurled a whole lovely quart tin of black Dulux at the board and reconstructed the painting out of the mess, forgetting that Molly's carpet wasn't big enough to really cover the floor. We didn't lose the boys, but we lost a lot of clothing.

All manner of things happened that year. Ideas came up . . . the first of what became a truly vast series on paintings of numerals. The very first were intended as endpieces made for *Landfall* and were worked out so that any page could end at any page number with a combination of these symbols, both to fill the gap and to state the page. The ideas were never used.

31

2 and 3, from *Numerals: first series* 1958

Watercolour, $14\frac{3}{4} \times 11$

Both signed *McCahon '58*.

Collection of the Auckland City Art Gallery.

These were the beginning of something and the end of something else; the next painting is the very last of the Titirangi landscapes. This theme was finished, and let me go. This is the first time this painting has been exhibited.

32

The last Titirangi landscape 1959

Oil on canvas on hardboard, $22\frac{7}{8} \times 22\frac{1}{4}$

Signed *McCahon* and inscribed *Titirangi Sunday Oct. 18 '59*.

We come now to something presaged already and arising out of the conversation, painting and living of 1959, and out of attempted directions from the past. Some succeed and a lot fail and I start with a painting for John Caselberg based on the Canterbury experience of the great plain.

33

John in Canterbury 1959

Butex on board, $20\frac{1}{2} \times 67$

Signed *McCahon August '59* and title inscribed.

This is about the black crows over the cornfield. The crows here are words from a series of Caselberg poems on Van Gogh.

The 1959 *Elias* series were all painted at Titirangi and all come out of the story of the Crucifixion (which should now be read in the *New Oxford* translation) and I became interested in men's doubts. (This theme appears here and appears later – I could never call myself a Christian, therefore these same doubts constantly assail me too.) The whole series numbers about 100 – I don't know where they all are. One, I am told, was propping up a lavatory window in a Christchurch dealer gallery. It has ended up in a Northland collection as far as I know.

34

You are witnesses 1959

Enamel on board, $63 \times 16\frac{1}{2}$

Signed *August '59 McCahon*.

35

He calls for Elias 1959

Oil on board, $30\frac{1}{2} \times 26\frac{1}{2}$

Signed *McCahon Aug. '59*

36

Elias triptych 1959

Solpah with sand on board

Left *Seal the stone*, 48 × 33; inscribed *McCahon August 59*

Centre *Landscape*, 48 × 36; inscribed *McCahon 10-2-59*

Right *Thus it is written*, 48 × 33; inscribed *McCahon Aug. 28 '59*.

37

Will He save Him? 1959

Butex on board, 48 × 35

No signature or date recto; dated *June-August '59* verso.

Collection of the Auckland City Art Gallery.

38

Let be, let be 1959

Solpah and sand on board, 72 × 48

Inscribed *McCahon '59: Jan-Aug '59* verso.

39

Cross 1959

Enamel on board, 48 × 30

Signed *McCahon 8.1.59*

All of these paintings were first exhibited at Gallery 91 in Christchurch in 1959. I don't know what happened to 1960, but it must have been in 1961 that we shifted into town. Here I painted firstly in a little shed in the back yard – and a hell of a lot of work was produced there (the worse the conditions the better the work). I experimented firstly with compositions based on paintings by Giovanni Bellini; these were followed by the ones shown here. Mondrian, it seemed to me, came up in this century as a great barrier – the painting to END all painting. As a painter, how do you get around either a Michelangelo or a Mondrian. It seems that the only way is not more 'masking-tape' but more involvement in the human situation.

40

Here I give thanks to Mondrian 1961

Enamel on board, 47 × 71½

Signed *Colin McCahon March '61* and title inscribed.

Collection of the Auckland City Art Gallery.

First exhibited, Durham Street Art Gallery, Christchurch, 1962.

41

How is the hammer broken 1961

Dulux on board, $48 \times 35\frac{1}{2}$

Signed C.M. Oct Nov 61 and title inscribed.

First exhibited, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1961.

This last painting belongs very closely with the Mondrian one. But here the images that were, or became the 'gate', fused together. Actual dates on paintings are forever misleading. I incline to date a work at the moment the image takes positive shape. It does not mean that the painting is finished. I often rework for months. It implies that the idea is there – has been stated.

Drawings for most of my paintings *follow* rather than predate the paintings. I'm just solving the problems I didn't solve at first in the paintings: but it doesn't always happen this way.

The *Gate* series became a collaboration between myself and John Caselberg. The early ones belong to the beginnings of the thoughts that appeared later. Caselberg compiled the script for the major series (CAT NO 45).

In the next three paintings I touched on a usable image based on the South Kaipara Head landscape. The compositions all come from a tree outside our bedroom window, and inner city roofs. The shaped panels come from thinking how good it would be to paint the walls of the Auckland Town Hall. *Gates* all round.

42

Gate 1961

Solpah on board, $59\frac{1}{2} \times 48$

Signed McCahon April '61

The first *Gate* paintings were exhibited at the Ikon Gallery in Auckland in 1961.

43

Gate: Waioneke 1961

Dulux on hardboard, $70\frac{3}{4} \times 48$

Signed McCahon 3-5 '61

44

Waioneke 1961

Solpah on board, $70\frac{1}{4} \times 48$

Signed *Waioneke* McCahon May '61.

Thoughts arising from working on these paintings extended to a new series. *The Second Gate*. The words are still relevant: the paintings are to illuminate the words. They were first exhibited at the Durham Street Art Gallery in Christchurch in 1962.

Work on this series began in 1961.

45

The Second Gate Series 16 panels 1962

Monocoat on board.

No 1: $48 \times 39\frac{1}{2}$

No 2: $48 \times 17\frac{3}{4}$

Nos 4, 5, 6, 8, 10: 48×24

Nos 3, 12, 13, 15: 48×30

Nos 7, 9, 14: 48×36

Nos 11, 16: 48×48

First exhibited, Ikon Gallery, Auckland, 1962.

The next painting also dates from this year.

46

Yellow and black landscape 1962

Oil on canvas, 30×25

Signed *McCahon 18-10-62*

Not previously exhibited.

47

Landscape theme and variations (Series A) 1963

Eight panels, oil on canvas. (Nos 1, 5, 8: 70×33 ; others $70 \times 36\frac{3}{4}$)

This is the way these paintings were intended to hang. I feel that the more official treatment of the B Series was a mistake.

48

Landscape theme and variations (Series B) 1963

Eight panels, oil on canvas, all 70×36

Collection of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand.

Both series first exhibited, Ikon Gallery, Auckland, 1963.

These two series were painted to fill the Ikon Gallery, Symonds Street, Auckland, to make a true New Zealand environment.

They were painted to be hung about eight inches from floor level. I hoped to throw people into an involvement with the raw land, and also with raw painting. No mounts, no frames, a bit curly at the edges, but with, I hoped, more than the usual New Zealand landscape meaning. You can't see them now in their intended setting. I hope you can understand what I was trying to do at the time – like spitting on the clay to open the blind man's eyes.

49

Pink blue and white painting 1963

Oil on canvas, $78\frac{3}{4} \times 36$

Signed *McCahon* 19'6' 63

First exhibited, Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, 1971.

The waterfalls started flowing in 1964 and there were hundreds of them. They grew out of William Hodges' paintings on loan to the Auckland City Art Gallery from The Admiralty, London. Hodges and I eventually realised we were friends over the years and got talking about his painting. He was dead and I was about the same. We conversed, through paint (about Naples yellow to start with) – and in 1964 I painted my first waterfall. Hodges is my hero in all these paintings but the Fairy Falls in the Waitakeres and Japanese and Chinese painting are the real influences later.

50

The first waterfall 1964

Oil on canvas, $34\frac{1}{2} \times 30$

Signed *McCahon* 64

Not previously exhibited.

51

Four waterfalls 1964

Acrylic on board (four small paintings mounted on one board, $24\frac{3}{4} \times 24\frac{3}{4}$)

Signed *McCahon Dec '64*.

Collection of the Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North.

First exhibited, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1965.

52

Large waterfall 1964

Oil on canvas, 66×66

Signed and dated *McCahon May-August 1964* (within frame).

First exhibited, Ikon Fine Arts, Auckland, 1964.

53

Waterfall triptych 1964

PVA on panels, each $60\frac{1}{2} \times 48$

All signed *McCahon October '64*.

Collection of the Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland.

First exhibited, Ikon Fine Arts, Auckland, 1964.

Waterfalls fell and raged and became as still silent falls of light for a long time. I look back with joy on taking a brush of white paint and curving through the darkness with a line of white.

54

XP 1965

PVA on board, 48 × 36

Signed *McCahon 21-8-65*.

First exhibited, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1965.

Janet Frame has a poem about this painting in her book *The Pocket Mirror*. Those who are worried by the painting should read it.

55

Numerals (Thirteen panels) 1965

PVA on board. (Nos 2 and 13: 48 × 36; others 48 × 24)

All signed *McCahon April May '65*.

First exhibited, Barry Lett Galleries, 1965.

The large numerals series happened at this same time. These took months to paint and developed very slowly. They work as a painting and as an environment. They are where we are in one way; and, in another way, if we could walk on from 10 where would we get to. I worked out many new formal problems here and in the paintings following them. The work on this series had begun in 1964 and was finished in 1965.

From November 1965 to May the following year I worked on painted glass for the Convent Chapel in Upland Road for the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions. The east wall above the altar occupied me for the whole of November and December – day and night. Archbishop Liston and I had a ‘real go’ about the painting and the right order for the panels. We argued for hours. He finally left, saying, ‘Have it your way if you must’. I stayed on and repainted all night to have it his way. He was right: I just had to think harder. I have a photograph of a beautiful lily in a glass vase made for this job – I don’t know where it is – it was just too beautiful to fit into the scheme and somewhere got left behind and lost.

The side walls were painted in the long hot summer from a platform erected 25 feet above a horrifying concrete floor. The whole thing swayed; carpenters used its underpinning to saw timber on; I lived in terror of falling. The sun seemed endless that summer and the glass and I were moist and foggy. I worked a six-day week (Sunday was out); I got to know a lot of new people including the architect, Jim Hackshaw, the builder, a very large man, and the Mother Superior who regarded the whole enterprise with amazing sympathy. The young novices who came whispering in and out to look at the work in progress were very fine people. The west wall was made during the May university vacation by Rick Killeen and myself. This was good – Rick protected me on the narrow planks, always passing on the outside – we could sit and discuss the work in progress. The job was

finished and the Chapel opened, and working towards meaning, in a real situation, came to an end.

The glass is reproduced in *Landfall* 80, December 1966.

Work has been done for a chapel at Otara and for a recent church at Te Puke but neither of these allowed the freedom and the discipline of Upland Road. The Upland Road Chapel also has a long undivided landscape series of Stations painted in 1966.

In this same year the mural for the Otago University Library was painted (*Ascent* v 1, no 1). The painting was done in Auckland and shipped to Dunedin. When I arrived to oversee the installation I found one panel had been broken, and the whole thing had to be repainted on the spot. The first version was much better than the final one now *in situ*, the first, much more austere and beautiful. The broken panel was the key to the whole work: second versions never have the innocence of the first. The mural was a good try – but I would have liked to make it better.

56

Easter landscape: triptych 1966

Acrylic on panels, each 71 × 24

Signed McCahon '66.

This painting and the next were first exhibited at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1966.

I am pleased with this painting. It has toured the country in various exhibitions, has been repainted in odd places and still comes up reasonably well. It's tough. But it is the end of a line of painting, as I age and become more involved with different levels of beauty. It is perhaps too *right*, too much an aesthetic exercise – too little feeling. The next paintings are more what I wanted, more human.

57

The fourteen Stations of the Cross 1966

Acrylic on paper, each 32 × 23

Each one of the series is numbered and inscribed with its traditional caption. This series is closely related in feeling to the *Numerals* and some of the *Waterfalls* as well as to many other paintings. It follows the earlier *Stations* made for the Upland Road Convent. They are all concerned with Man's fall and his resurrection. They also relate to the *Elias* subject but treat it in a different and new way. The black crows of the Van Gogh cornfield hovered over this landscape too, but have failed to destroy it – yet. I am saying what I want to say in these paintings but I am still too abstract.

58

North Otago landscape, 5 1967

Acrylic on board, 48 × 48

Signed McCahon '67 *North Otago*

Collection of the Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland.

59

North Otago landscape, 4 1967

Acrylic on board, 48 × 48

Signed McCahon *North Otago* '67.

60

North Otago landscape, 10 1967

Acrylic on board, 36 × 48

Signed and dated verso.

Collection of the Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland.

All three were first exhibited at the Barry Lett Galleries in 1967.

These landscapes all derive from the earlier *Stations of the Cross* and from my own long association with this most beautiful landscape, both as a child and also later. Before this exhibition opens I will have been in North Otago again.

My painting year happens first in late winter and early spring. I paint with the season and paint best during the long hot summers. I prefer to paint at night or more especially in the late summer afternoons when, as the light fades, tonal relationships become terrifyingly clear.

At night I paint under a very large incandescent light bulb. I've been doing this for a long time. I am only now, and slowly, becoming able to paint in the mornings. After a lifetime of working – farming, factories, gardening, teaching, the years at the Auckland City Art Gallery – I find it hard to paint in the world's usual work-time. It can be difficult to accept that painting too is work.

Things that happened to me in 1967 resulted in the odd series of 1968 called *Visible mysteries*; these in their turn came from a previous series called *Still life with an altar*. Both these series are covered by the following paintings. It says something about where I wanted to go and what I was painting about – but not enough. I didn't reach far enough. I feel that some of this series will eventually be seen as more successful than they might now appear.

61

Still life with altar I 1967

Acrylic on board, 21 × 42½

Signed McCahon *Jan. Feb. 67* and full title inscribed.

62

Still life with altar III 1967

Acrylic on board, $20\frac{3}{4} \times 39\frac{1}{4}$

Signed *McCahon Jan Feb 67* and full title inscribed.

Both first exhibited Barry Lett Galleries, 1967.

63

Visible mysteries I 1968

Acrylic on board, $36 \times 47\frac{1}{2}$

Signed *McCahon Sept. '68 No 1* and inscribed: *Grant what we have received in visible mysteries we may obtain in its invisible effect.*

Collection of the Auckland City Art Gallery, on loan from

Mr B. Perkins, Auckland.

First exhibited Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland, 1968.

I realise now that this subject matter needed a much larger format than I allowed it at the time. I also needed much more time to really think it out in all its implications. I have not given up – I am learning how to make it better, but the new ones won't be the same. These two small series tend to stand apart a bit lonely so far. The next painting is of Gordon H. Brown, painted in 1968 for Kees Hos's exhibition *Face to Face* at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland. I feel it useful here both as an interesting painting and to break up the increasing darkness. I painted Gordon and Gordon painted me.

64

Portrait of Gordon H. Brown 1968

Acrylic on board, 23×28

Signed and dated *Colin McCahon March 1968*

Lent by Mr G. H. Brown, Dunedin.

The two watercolours come from a series of about ninety painted in 1969 and exhibited at the Barry Lett Gallery that same year. They were all in watercolour and chalk. The whole gallery-full was very happy and informal – happy colour and happy words.

65

When the earth drinks in the rain that falls 1969

Watercolour, $61\frac{1}{2} \times 21\frac{3}{4}$

Signed *Colin McCahon . . . 69* (date largely absorbed by tone).

Collection of the Auckland City Art Gallery, on loan from Mr Don Binney.

We are the hull of a great canoe 1969

Watercolour, 59 × 22

Signed Colin McCahon (date absorbed by frame).

Collection of the Auckland City Art Gallery, on loan from Mr Don Binney.

Both first exhibited Barry Lett Gallery, Auckland, in 1969.

I can't remember all I did in 1969 but before *The lark's song* I had painted a large collection based on the Muriwai and Ahipara landscapes and also, primarily, on words by Matire Kereama. These were shown at the McLeavey Gallery in Wellington. They were very beautiful and unfortunately I haven't one for myself. The words came from Matire Kereama's book *The tail of the fish* and also from the poems of Peter Hooper.

From August to October I struggled with Mrs Kereama's *Lark's song*. I loved it, I read the poem out loud while I painted and finally the little lark took off up the painting and out of sight. The words must be read for their sound, they are signs for the lark's song.

This whole series of paintings gave me great joy. Please don't give yourself the pain of worrying out a translation of the words but try for the sound of the painting. But never forget that these are the words of a poet too. Some people can read them.

The lark's song (a poem by Matire Kereama) 1969

PVA on two doors, 64 × 78

Signed Colin McCahon *August-October-'69* and title inscribed.

First exhibited, The Group, Christchurch, 1969.

After *Lark's song* I got onto reading the *New English Bible* and re-reading my favourite passages. I re-discovered good old Lazarus. Now this is one of the most beautiful and puzzling stories in the New Testament – like the Elias story this one takes you through several levels of feeling and being. It hit me, BANG! at where I was: questions and answers, faith so simple and beautiful and doubts still pushing to somewhere else. It really got me down with joy and pain. I loved painting it. To be honest it was a bit like drawing a Mickey Mouse cartoon. I grew to love the characters in the story and could see them as very real people; I felt as they felt. This took a monumental time to paint and gallons of expensive paint. It is in one way a dismal failure and in another one of my best paintings yet. At least I had fun and discovered very much more about both Christ and Lazarus as well as the sisters. I became very involved with the thoughtful sister Martha. Lazarus himself remains a rather distant figure. Mary might be a bit annoying on occasions and Christ perhaps a little too over-certain at times – but right. I spent weeks painting

my way over this story, more and more involved realising the great need for a new kind of painting to happen.

68

Practical religion: the resurrection of Lazarus showing Mount Martha 1970

Acrylic on canvas, $81\frac{1}{2} \times 340$

Signed and dated *Colin McCahon Dec 69 Feb 70*, and inscribed *Victory over death*.
Collection of the Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland.

At the same time as this last monster I was working on other related subjects. All of them were painted out at my Muriwai studio on the top of the cliff. The next also belongs to the *Practical Religion* series – a simple I AM at first. But not so simple really as doubts do come in here too. I believe, but don't believe. *Let be, let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him*.

69

Victory over Death 2 1970

Acrylic on canvas, 84×264

Inscribed *Muriwai Feb '70* and signed *McCahon*.

Collection of the Barry Lett Gallery, Auckland.

Both these paintings were first exhibited at the
Barry Lett Gallery, Auckland, 1970.

70

Venus and re-entry: the bleeding heart of Jesus is seen above Ahipara 1970–71

Oil on canvas, $57\frac{1}{2} \times 72$

Signed and dated *McCahon June 70 Feb 71*, and title inscribed.

Collection of the Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North.

First exhibited Manawatu Art Gallery, 1971.

This is based on happenings seen in our own skies and the terrifying present we live in. Moon flights and the calm beauty of Ahipara seem to go together.

71

The days and nights in the wilderness 1971

Acrylic on canvas, 93×72

Signed *McCahon April June '71* and title inscribed.

Collection of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth.

First exhibited Dawson's Gallery, Dunedin, 1971.

Three paintings with this title lead to a further series called *Necessary Protection*. None of these are included in this exhibition. But one of the 1971 *View from the top of the cliff* paintings is. This one refers back to my lasting feeling for Mondrian and his work.

Mondrian's Chrysanthemum of 1908 1971

Watercolour and gouache, $48 \times 23\frac{3}{4}$

Signed *Colin McCahon August 1971* and inscribed *Greetings to Mondrian's Chrysanthemum*.

First exhibited, Te Awamutu Festival Exhibition, 1971.

This is perhaps a chrysanthemum, perhaps a sunset: quite possibly a bomb dropped on Muriwai – all these things can be beautiful, some most deadly.

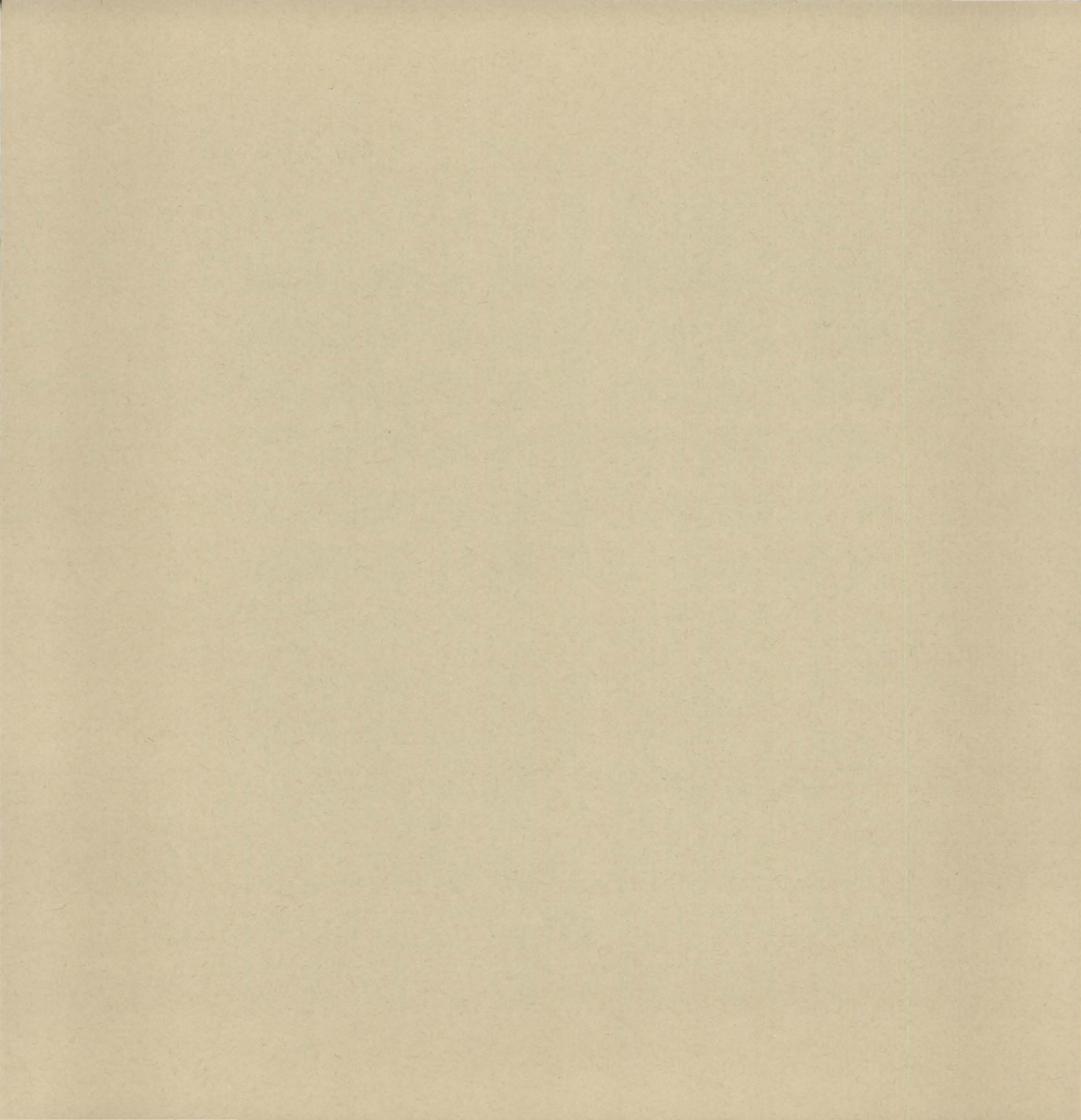
As a painter I may often be more worried about you than you are about me and if I wasn't concerned I'd not be doing my work properly as a painter. Painting can be a potent way of talking.

Do you believe in the sunrise?

C.M. October-November 1971.

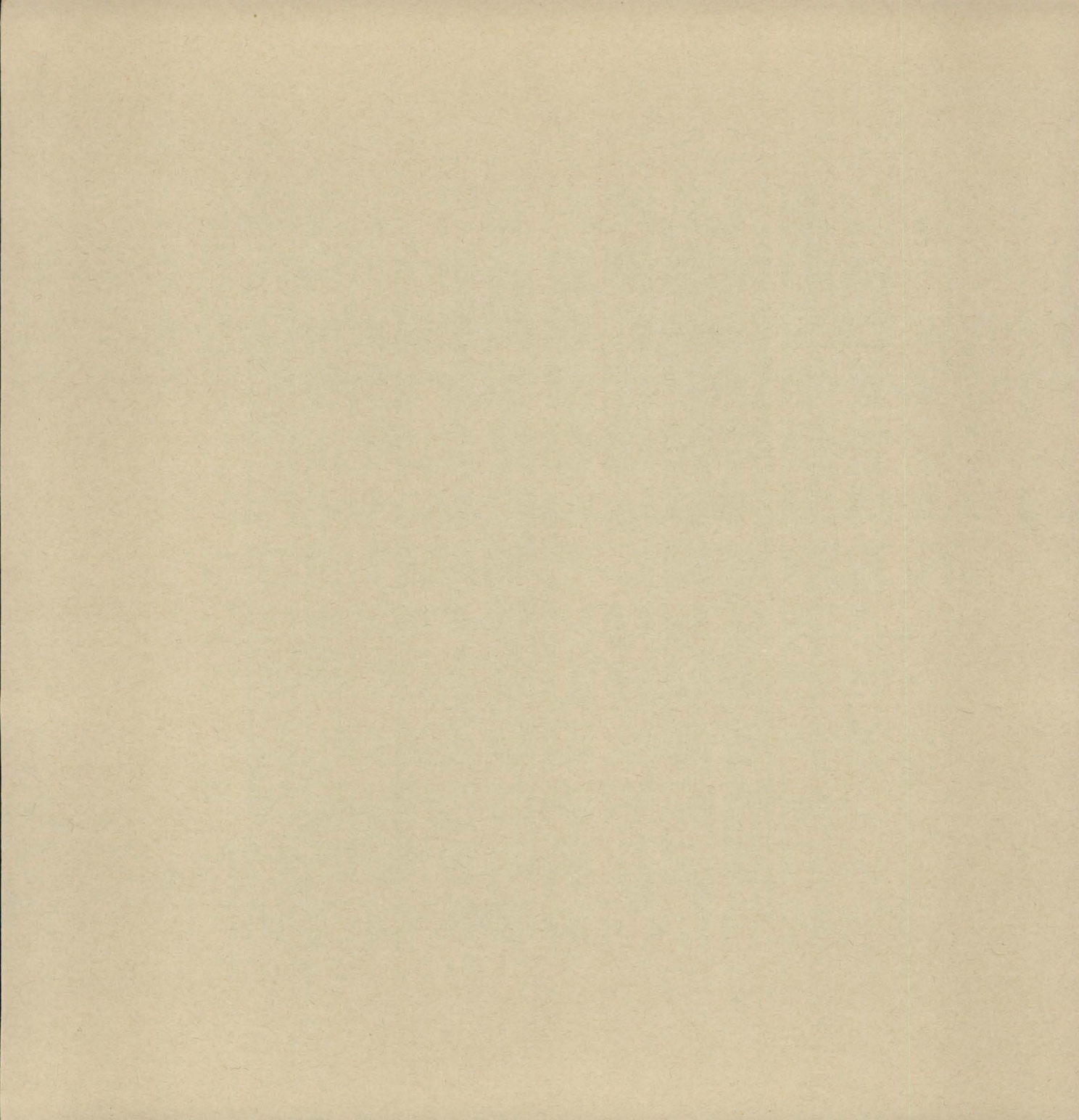
ONE MAN
EXHIBITIONS
SINCE 1958

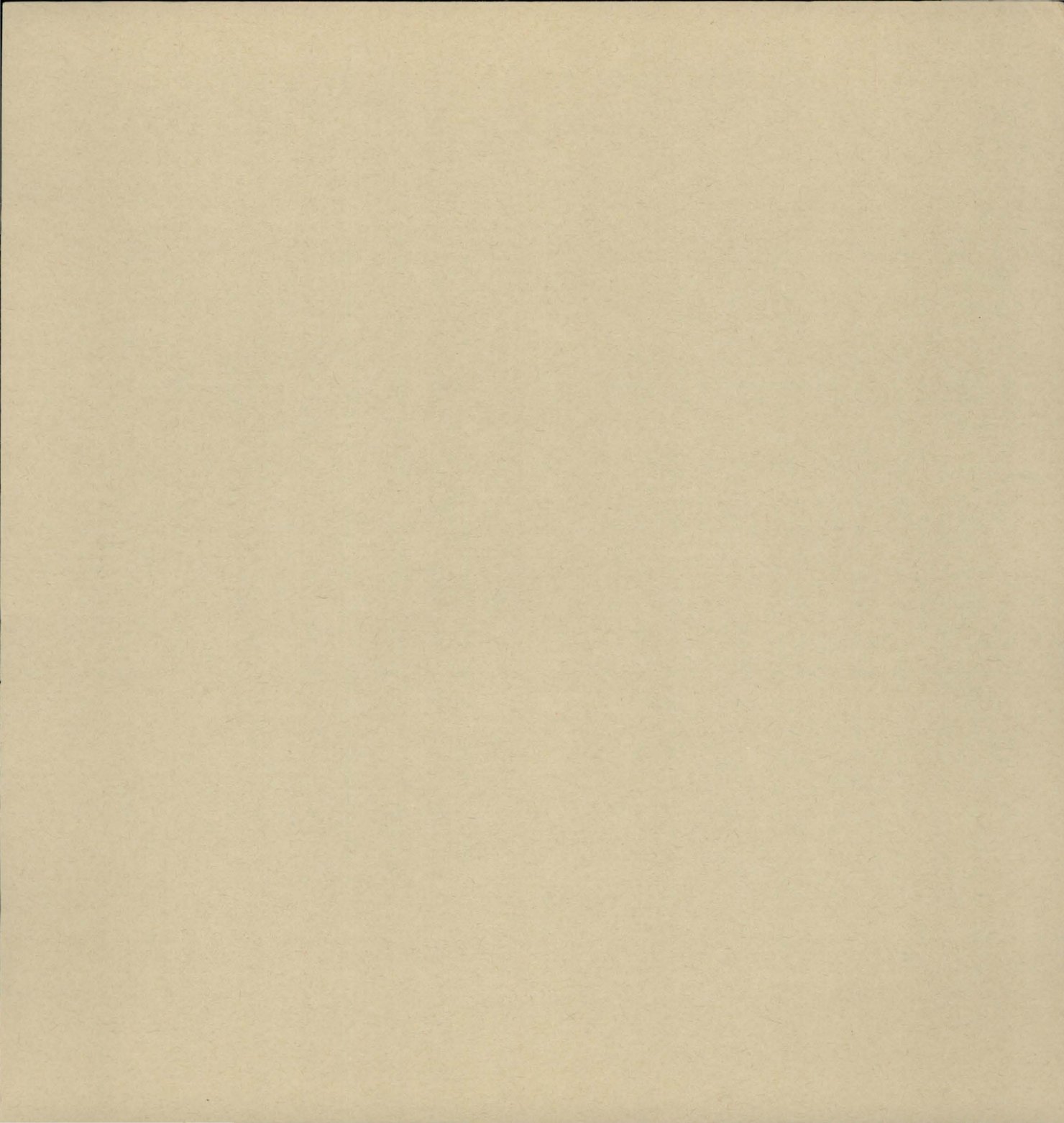
April	1958	Public Library Lecture Hall, Dunedin	Kauri trees, French Bay, Titirangi series
	1958	The Gallery, 64 Symonds Street, Auckland	The Wake series
October	1959	Gallery 91, Christchurch	Northland panels, Northland drawings, Elias
June	1959	Auckland City Art Gallery	with Kase Jackson and Louise Henderson
Aug-Sept	1961	Ikon Gallery (The Gallery), Auckland	Gate series
Sept	1962	Canterbury Society of Arts, Durham Street, Christchurch	Gate series
May	1963	Auckland City Art Gallery	retrospective, with M. T. Woollaston
May	1963	Ikon Gallery, Auckland	Landscape Theme and Variations
Sept	1964	Ikon Fine Arts, Auckland	Waterfalls
April	1965	The Globe Theatre, Dunedin	21 paintings from the Waterfall series, with Robert Sansom, Michael Eaton, Barry Brickell and Carl Vendelbosch
August	1965	Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland	Gate series 1961, Numbers (Numerals) 1965, Landscapes 1965
Feb	1966	Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland	watercolours and drawings 1937-1965
Oct-Nov	1967	Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland	North Otago landscapes
July	1968	Bonython Art Gallery, Sydney Australian Galleries, Melbourne	recent paintings 1959-1968
Oct	1968	Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland	Colin McCahon's Bargain Basement, Visible Mysteries
Oct	1968	Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington	Northland panels
	1969	Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland	watercolours
March	1969	Moller's Gallery, Auckland	McCahon's McCahons, 1943-1963
July	1969	Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington	'The Canoe Tainui' and other text paintings
August	1969	Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington	McCahons from the collection of R. N. O'Reilly
March	1970	Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland	Recent Paintings, 'Victory over Death or Practical Religion'
August	1970	Victoria University Library, Wellington	with M. T. Woollaston and Doris Lusk
April	1971	Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington	'View from the top of the cliff' and other watercolours
July-Aug	1971	Dawson's Gallery, Dunedin	'Days and nights, Helensville'
November	1971	Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland	'Necessary Protection'



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