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AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY

# Quarterly



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Cover Illustration

General view within Mount Eden's crater showing distribution of players in Philip Dadson's *Parabola* (page 17)

## Cornelius Johnson

### Portrait of a Lady

For twenty years Cornelius Johnson was a fashionable painter of royalty and aristocracy and apart from Dobson and perhaps the amateur Sir Nathaniel Bacon, was the best known English-born painter of the Stuart era. Lely and Kneller were foreigners.

Up to as late as 1903\* it was commonly believed that Johnson was Dutch born. Records show however that he was baptized at the Dutch church, Austin Friars, London in October 1593, and almost certainly he was born there too. The family, thought to have come to England "for relygyon" during the Duke of Alva's persecution of 1568, appears in the records in the full original form: Janssen van Ceulen, which suggests origins in Cologne. They came to England however directly from Antwerp. The same church records show that Johnson married an Elizabeth Beke of Colchester in 1622. His early life was spent among the closely connected Dutch families of artists and craftsmen then living at Austin Friars. When Johnson's father registered the family name, geneology and coat-of-arms at the Herald's College, London, he used the English form which suggests he was most "desirous of being recognized as an English armigerous gentleman"; and it was a measure which could have proved useful to Johnson in later life when the Painter-Stainers' Company, becoming prejudiced against "strangers and Englishmen who neglected the company's ordinances", tried unsuccessfully to prosecute the foreign group of artists, with Mytens, one of Johnson's closest associates, heading the list. There is a record of a Cornelius Johnson, probably the father,

receiving a grant of denization as late as 1637 when the artist would have been 44. But without knowledge of contemporary immigration laws it is difficult to draw any conclusions; and there is the added complication of patronymic surnames. Johnson's citizenship could well have been in the balance until his middle age.

The few known facts about Johnson's life as told by Walpole came from George Vertue (1684-1756) who got them directly from Johnson's great nephew Anthony Russel. But there is nothing said about his training. Just about all the painters working in England at the time were foreign: de Critz, Gheeraerts, van Somer, Mytens etc., all of whom were influenced one way or another by Miereveld of Delft and Ravesteyn of The Hague. Mytens, who was about the same age as Johnson and with whose work Johnson's was, at one stage, indistinguishable, had studied in The Hague and established himself in London sometime between 1614-18. Conceivably Johnson could have crossed the Channel too for training; it was not unusual for young up-and-coming artists to do so. If Vertue can be relied on, Johnson had in fact "resided long" in Amsterdam. *Bryan's Dictionary* (1904) is alone in asserting that "he had already reached considerable celebrity in his own country when he visited England in 1618". But Finberg (1922) is convinced Johnson was trained in England either with Robert Peake or Gheeraerts, the former being the more likely to his mind. The *Thieme-Becker* dictionary, however assumes it was the latter. But whatever the case may have been, it was Mytens in the long run who is considered to have had the greatest influence — an influence that was complete by 1631. There is however another school of thought which considers the miniaturist Isaac Oliver to have been the most likely teacher, though Johnson's own miniatures date from six years after the first mature full portraits.

Charles I's court was as dazzling as any in Europe; sufficiently so to surprise even Rubens. For eleven years he ruled without Parliament.

He indulged himself and his art collections were sumptuous and huge. He bought up the entire collections from collapsing Italian families; the Dukes of Mantua in particular. Above all he loved the Venetians, Titian especially. And perhaps if it had not been for the dual onslaughts of Puritanism and the vigorously dull tastes of 18th and 19th century businessmen from which British aesthetics has never quite recovered, London might well have been another Venice or Florence with respect to its public collections. During the Stuart period there were few if any native born English painters with sufficient flair and resilience to match the demands of Royal patronage. Rubens came as a diplomat trying to arrange Anglo-Spanish peace; he stayed nine months. And when van Dyck, Rubens' first assistant arrived, Mytens, court painter since 1624, was completely put out. Van Dyck was something new to English art with his international reputation, great erudition and charm, influence and social ease, let alone the grandeur of his work. Charles I employed him at three times the salary paid to Mytens. Mytens resigned in spite of the King's plea that he stay, and returned to Holland. Van Dyck returned to England in 1632, the same year that Johnson was sworn in as "his majesty's servant in ye quality of picture drawer", probably to replace the vanished Mytens, but never to be as popular. *Portrait of a Lady* was painted the following year. But eventually the noise and brilliance of van Dyck's baroque proved too much for Johnson's quiet vision of things and he too got out. He left Blackfriars and retired to the country; but it has been suggested that the Laudian persecutions, which apparently Charles I's supported, could have had something to do with this. Johnson's soft and delicate approach with its subtle probing of the peculiarly English retiring character was in its way just as new to English portraiture as van Dyck's opposite approach. Thus the respective styles of Johnson and van Dyck were perfectly suited to express the life styles of the small country houses and the court; and between them they supplied the modes which later either separately or fused were to characterize English portraiture ever since. All our visual knowledge of the Stuart court comes to us through van Dyck, and his sitters, men of action arrogantly at ease within their painted contexts, exude the Zeitgeist. Whether or not Johnson and van Dyck influenced each other is controversial. Cust takes the view that "it is usually stated that Janssens was influenced by van Dyck, but his paintings show no evidence of this. It may even be argued that van Dyck assimilated something from Janssens . . ." Waterhouse on the other hand claims that Johnson "in his rare full-lengths which . . . are scarcely ever signed, . . . imitated the patterns of van Dyck's portraits closely . . . It seems possible that a number of pictures which now pass under the name of van Dyck . . . may be from Johnson's hand." If in fact Johnson was influenced, then we may safely say that he took from van Dyck only as much as his domestic view of things could absorb.

Johnson went to live at Bridge on Barham Down near Canterbury, living with a Flemish businessman Sir Arnold Braems. His painting accorded perfectly with the quiet life there, and is associated with



Cornelius Johnson (1593-1661) British  
*Portrait of a Lady* (1633)  
 Oil on panel 787 x 630mm Acc. no. 1977/1  
 Signed (LL) with initials and dated 1633

family names: Campion, Oxenclen, Peyton, Masters, Hammond, Dormer, Auger, Palmer, Bowyer and Digges. It is likely that our *Portrait of a Lady* belongs to this period of transition from town to country life.

Johnson was one of the few 17th century portraitists who consistently signed and dated work; his development therefore is

easily traceable up to and after his departure from England in 1643. His earliest dated work is from the year 1617 (Waterhouse) and was very Dutch in manner. His thoroughly English work dates from 1619 and his earliest three-quarter length portrait is dated 1623. The gradual evolution of his style within the narrow limits set by his capability and temperament from the relatively static polished gothic surface image to the later discrete freedoms of his exquisitely modulated paint surfaces with which he delineated the personality of the sitter, roughly parallels his gradual switch from the use of panel to canvas, but to infer a causal link between these two sets of variables is dubious. Frequently he set the heads of his portraits in a painted marble surround, a common device at the time. He had an exceptionally delicate touch and a very subtle colour sense. According to Pilkington (1798) "Janssen had not the freedom of hand nor the grace of van Dyck, but in other respects he was accounted his equal." Redgrave (1874) in speaking of the "calm truth" of his pictures perhaps best pin-points Johnson's essence. Another characteristic frequently commented on is the silvery hue which imbued his colours and which during the Kent sojourn turned slightly golden. He occasionally copied his portraits in miniature. Little is known of his studio assistants except that the Painter-Stainers' Company sent him a John Evoms as an apprentice in 1625. Another assistant was his nephew Theodore Russel whose father was the King's jeweller.

In 1643, prompted by his wife's fears of the Civil War, he emigrated to Holland: "Cornelius Johnson, picture drawer shall have Mi-Speaker's warrant to pass beyond the seas. . . and to carry with him pictures and colours, bedding, household stuff, pewter, brass as belongs to himself." The permit was dated 10.10.1643. In Holland he enjoyed the popularity enjoyed by most of the other English painters who had attended the Stuart court, this at a time when Hals and Rembrandt were being neglected in favour of Bol, Flinck, and van der Heist. First he went to Middleburg where he joined the St Luke's Guild. He was there again in 1652, in Amsterdam in 1646 and The Hague in 1647. In the Hague he painted a large group portrait of leading citizens. He died in Utrecht in 1661, a fact deduced from a note by his son on the back of a drawing. His son was a painter too, and is said to have died poor owing to the extravagance of a second wife.

Regarding the form of Johnson's name, it is best to quote Finberg in full: "I think I may take this opportunity to protest once again against the prevalent habit of calling this artist Janssens. In spite of Walpole's unfortunate remark that this is the correct form of the name, there is no excuse for using it. While in England he invariably spelt his name Cornelius Johnson and when he left England he changed the form to Jonson. The usual form of his signature when the name is given in full is invariably, in all the pictures painted *after* 1643 which I have seen: Cornelius Jonson van Ceulen. He appears never to have adopted the form Janson, Jansen, or Janssens. But so long as auctioneers are born with the ingrained conviction that a foreign-looking name gives

greater value to a picture than an English name, so long may we expect to find Cornelius Johnson or Jonson masquerading in catalogues as Cornelius Janssens." It should be added that while in Holland he occasionally added "Londini" after his name. The National Portrait Gallery's catalogue of 17th century portraits appears to be wrong in saying that after 1643 Johnson signed himself Cornelius Jonson van der Ceulen. Where the "der" came from is entirely a mystery. Throughout his career he often used initials only.

The PORTRAIT OF A LADY, a particularly fine example of Johnson's work, was bought for the ACAG by the Margaret A. Serra Trust. Unfortunately Agnew & Sons declined to reveal the previous owner, saying only that it had come from an English private collection and agreeing that it probably had not been published before. Possibly it has up to now remained within the family for whom it was originally painted; possibly, and here one's conjectures run a bit wild, one of those families already mentioned in connection with Johnson's Kent sojourn — the title PORTRAIT OF A LADY being of recent invention to conceal the name.

T. Garrity

\*Even as late as 1975 no less a person than the Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures (Oliver Millar) claimed Johnson and Gheeraens "were foreigners by birth". Yet (his same writer writing in 197<sup>^</sup>) (The Age of Charles I/Tale Gallery) claimed Johnson "had been born in London".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: We wish to thank Dr & Mrs Walter Auburn for translating certain references from the German.

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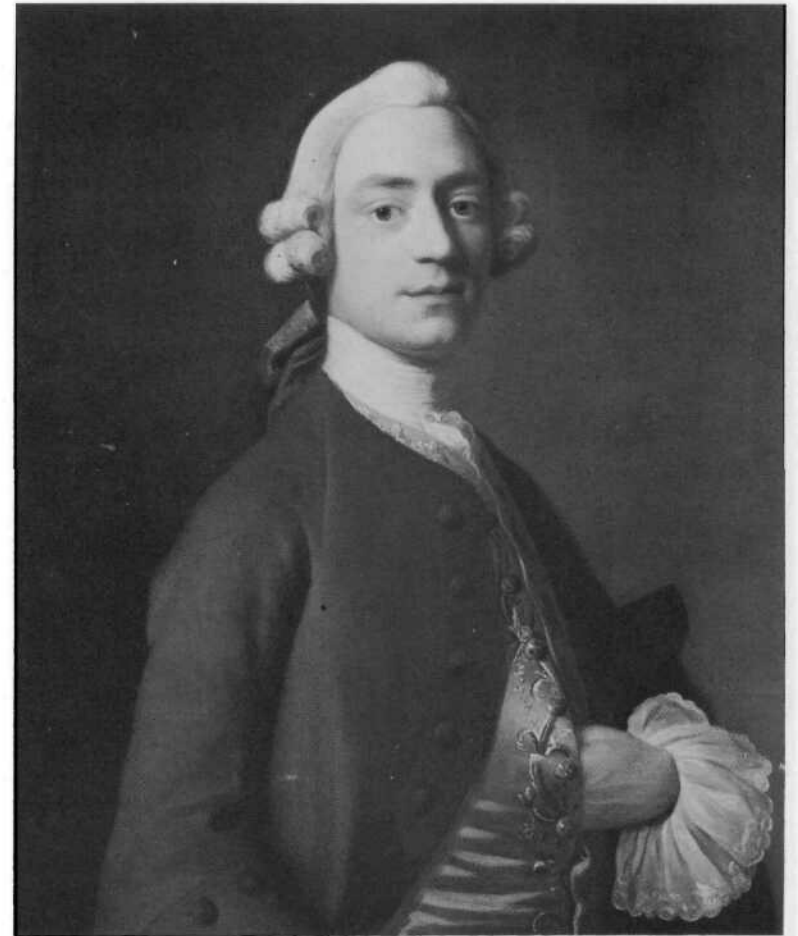
# Allan Ramsay

## PORTRAIT OF A MAN (c. 1750)

"Before 1754, Ramsay expressed, as no other painter quite expressed, all the conscious elegance of the *beau monde*, the imposing masquerade of the fashionable life of the reign of George II."<sup>1</sup>

If the 18th century, by repute, was a period in which man was to indulge in learned discussion, the whims of flattery, eloquence of language — spoken and written and paraphrased by gesture, one of its most vital visual communicators must surely be the Scottish portraitist Allan Ramsay, who as an artist, scholar and colourful personality, lived a life style in unison with European baroque and rococo attitudes which reflected the aspirations of 18th century men of arts and letters. He was an acquaintance of Rousseau, Hume, and Voltaire and perhaps it was affiliation with this aspect of the Enlightenment that enabled him later in life to avoid contact with the newly formed Royal Academy and refuse a knighthood. Of Ramsay Dr Johnson (according to Boswell) said: "you will not find a man in whose conversation there is more instruction, more information or more eloquence than in Ramsay's."

Allan Ramsay was born in Edinburgh in 1713, the son of a Scottish poet and bookseller of the same name, author of *The Gentle Shepherd*. Ramsay, a writer of considerable ability himself, appears to have come, quite naturally, under his father's influence; in fact, in later life, the artist established himself as a writer of repute as well as a gentleman scholar who possessed a strong feeling for the grace and dignity which became the hallmarks of his career as principal portrait painter during the reigns of George II and III. From an early age the artist seems to have drawn with suggestions of his future station, and was reputed to have become a student at the St Martin's Lane Academy, London, then under the directorship of William Hogarth. In 1736 Ramsay toured the Continent, with Rome his ultimate destination. There he worked with Francesco Ferdinandi, called Imperiali, who worked in the style of Maratta and whose Italian pupil Pompeo Batoni painted portraits of British visitors. In the Summer of 1737 he worked in Naples with the elderly Solimena. In 1738, back in England, Ramsay was seen to establish himself as a portrait painter of distinction fresh with the tasteful mannerisms of the European Baroque. It is interesting to note Hogarth's reactions to Ramsay: "on (his) first appearance in London, Hogarth had not taken to him very kindly. It was apparently the new technique which Ramsay had derived from Luti, together with his employment of van Aken, that Hogarth had in mind when he sneered at the prestige acquired by a portrait painter by



Allan Ramsay (1713-1784) British  
*Portrait of a Man*  
Oil on canvas 743 x 609mm Acc. No. 1976/24

foreign travel and at the possibility that if an artist should persuade the public that he has brought a new discovered method of colouring, 'and should paint his faces all red, all blue, or all purple', he need only 'hire one of those painted tailors for an assistant' in order to be assured of success.<sup>3</sup>

In 1753 Reynolds' return from Italy with what must have seemed at the time a dazzlingly fresh approach to portrait painting, caused Ramsay to rethink a lot of things and perhaps feel the need to refresh his own vision; accordingly he went to Italy again from 1755-57 and drew at the French Academy. During this period he painted a portrait

of his second wife which has been described as "perhaps the most exquisitely tender and unaffected portrayal of the century" (Webster, 1975). On returning to Britain Ramsay executed a number of portraits which proved extremely popular, especially the 1757 portrait of George III. Later, Ramsay in his so called studio period, a time of declining sight, made a fortune producing via his assistants, numerous copies of the original version in three-quarter length rather than in the original full length version. The portrait of George III (illus.) in the ACAG Collection is undergoing examination to ascertain whether it was in fact done during Ramsay's studio period or later by Romney.

In 1770, with fourteen years of life remaining he gave up painting in favour of writing, mainly on politics. One of the reasons given for this was that he never really recovered from a damaged arm which he sustained while demonstrating the correct procedure for getting out of a building in the event of fire. He died at Dover having just returned from his fourth visit to Rome in 1784.

At no time did Ramsay exhibit in public.

The recently acquired PORTRAIT OF A MAN is typical of the male subjects executed by Ramsay during the 1750's. Other portraits (illus.), too, of the same period are interesting in their handling of light: the PORTRAIT OF GEORGE BRISTOW (National Galleries of Scotland) and the PORTRAIT OF SIR EDWARD KYNASTON OF HARDWICK (Dunedin Public Art Gallery). Probably it was this light quality which prompted Wilenski (1933) to remark that Ramsay was really a "still-life portrait painter" and Vertue to claim his pictures were "rather licked than pencilled". Another important characteristic is the use of Benedetto Luti's method of using vermilion underpainting of the face which Ramsay used from the 1750's until 1763, after which date his tones became more silvery. Vertue describes the technique as follows: "Ramsay still accustoms himself to draw the faces in red lines, shades, etc., finishing the likeness in one red colour or mask before he puts on the flesh-colour; which he proposes as a method to make the flesh clear and transparent — and such a method was used in Italy by Cavaliere Luti and others, and so did Titian, he says . . . However, when the faces are painted four, five or six times over little or nothing of that first red is to be seen".<sup>4</sup>

In the PORTRAIT OF A MAN there is another characteristic in common with other portraits of the same period: the positioning of the hat, a mannerism which also appears in George Hudson's portraits. This is not surprising since they, along with several other artists, shared the same costume painter. The face of PORTRAIT OF A MAN is undoubtedly by Ramsay, but the wig, ribbon, waistcoat and the half hidden hand are probably not by him. According to enquiries of late, the thought of more than one hand working on the subject is disputed. It is interesting to note that Ramsay's costume painter, van Aken, died in 1749 and may have had no part in the PORTRAIT OF A MAN. But Alistair Smart's estimated date of 1750 for this portrait is a bit too close to van Aken's death of 1749 to exclude the possibility that van Aken was in fact still alive and working.



**Allan Ramsay**  
*Sir Edward Kynaston of Hardwich*  
Dunedin Public Art Gallery

During his career van Aken reached a high degree of perfection in the articulation of drapery and his nickname "The Tailor" derives from one of the services he offered artists whereby he received small pieces of canvas on which artists had painted only the heads, and sewed them into full sized canvases on which he would complete the full portrait under the terms of the contract. But Ramsay was unique among artists in that he prepared accurate drawings of the portraits he intended doing. The face was usually left blank but written instructions for the costume painter were often included in the drawing describing in full the type of costume required. Hudson and Ramsay were executors of van Aken's will and Ramsay once painted van Aken's portrait; all of which indicates that Ramsay was close to van Aken. Hogarth is said to have drawn a caricature of a mock funeral of van Aken showing the distress of painters at the loss of their indispensable assistant. Van Aken's practice was carried on by his younger brother and Hudson is known to have used him, but there is no record of Ramsay having done so; though this does not preclude



**Allan Ramsay (?)**  
*King George III*  
 Oil on canvas 1245 x 991mm Acc. No. 1957/12/2

the possibility that he did. Anyway, the iconographical pattern was probably sufficiently set by this time to appear automatically with or without van Aken.

Ramsay's superb power in revealing the physical if not the emotional aspects of the sitter, as seen in the *Portrait of a Man*, gives him a commanding position in the history of 18th century British portraiture. "Here in this portrait of an unknown man, one can see how Ramsay contributed to the new 'natural' tradition of English portraiture. The general arrangement of the portrait is still quite conventional, but the patron is at ease within the convention. Sitters at the time demanded not simply a likeness but a good piece of painting and the charm of Ramsay's painting of clothes — probably the sitter's own to add to the expression of individuality — can be seen in the embroidered waistcoat and ruff."<sup>2</sup>

Much enquiry has been made as to the identity of the sitter but without success. The portrait was recently acquired from Thomas Agnew & Sons, London and recently underwent restoration. This



**Allan Ramsay**  
*Portrait of George Bristow*  
 National Galleries of Scotland

acquisition is not only the work of an important British portraitist, it is also important as a transitional work in the output of an artist and as such adds to the strength of our teaching collection of British portraits in the Auckland City Art Gallery.

Ernest Smith

References: 1, S, 4: Alislairst Smart/Life and art of Allan Ramsay/1952.2: **Letter from** Thomas Agnew & Sons/IH76/ACAG file

A WATERCOLOUR BY

## *Anthony Devis*

The Auckland City Art Gallery collection is, with the notable exceptions of Rowlandson and Fuseli, very weak in British eighteenth and early nineteenth century watercolours and drawings. This is particularly true of landscape subjects in watercolour. The opportunity last year to see the Spooner and Witt collections from the Courtauld Institute in London was thus most welcome and this exhibition has had the happy result of encouraging a gift to Auckland. Mr and Mrs E.A. Page of Kaikohe visited the exhibition and later sought me out to say that they had a small wash drawing by Anthony Devis, one of the artists represented in the Witt collection, to ask did we have one and if not would we like one. Thus there passed into our collection the wash drawing *Roche Rocks, near Bodmin, Cornwall*.

Anthony Devis was from a well known artist family. His older brother Arthur (1708-1787) was a portrait painter of some repute; his nephew Arthur William Devis (1763-1822) served as draughtsman to the East India Company and painted Indian scenes, portraits and historical pictures; his other nephew Thomas Anthony Drevis (active 1777-1807) was a portraitist and genre painter; his niece's husband Robert Marris was a landscape watercolourist who closely imitated Anthony's style but without his effortless control and grace. The family came from Preston in Lancashire, where Anthony was born on March 18, 1729, but they removed individually to London to exercise their talents, for provincial towns offered small scope for professional indulgence in the gentle arts before the Industrial Revolution.

Arthur specialised in portraits of the middle class bourgeoisie from which his family sprang. Being a student of Pieter Tillemans (1684-1734), the Flemish born painter of sporting scenes, he often set his portraits against a landscape background and thus belonged to the peculiarly English tradition of the 'conversation piece' later taken up so brilliantly by Gainsborough and Zoffany. He exhibited with the Society of Artists from 1761 and with the Free Society from 1762-1780, becoming its President in 1768. In his later years he was overshadowed by Zoffany and turned his talents to experimenting with painting on glass and to picture restoring.

Anthony restricted himself to landscape, his only known portrait being of himself, and to the teaching of drawing in London. He must have been a precocious young man for he is said to have been already working in London as a painter in 1742 when only thirteen. Nothing is known of his training so it is probable that he learned from his brother. He returned to Preston for a while but by 1761 was back in

London, exhibiting with the Free Society (1761 and 1763) and later with the Royal Academy (1772 and 1781). These were his only exhibitions, however, and he cannot have been well known in his own day, although in 1763 he had gained a premium for landscape painting for *A Cool Morning* exhibited at the Free Society.

In 1770 Josiah Wedgwood was commissioned by the Empress Catherine II of Russia to prepare a great creamware dinner service decorated with view of 'the ruins, country-houses, parks, gardens and picturesque landscapes of Great Britain'. The 952 pieces were decorated with 1,282 scenes for which Wedgwood ransacked the printsellers of their stocks and commissioned artists to tour the countryside. Among these artists were John 'Warwick' Smith (1749-1831) and Anthony Devis. The finished service was exhibited in London in 1774 and has been described as 'an epoch in the history of British topographic art'. Despite these small successes Anthony Devis did not prosper in his chosen field of landscape painting in oil. Indeed his oils are characterised by a certain crudeness of technique which is apparent at close examination, admirable though they may seem at a distance. He was apparently prolific and must have satisfied his patrons, but these, like those of his brother, were of the middle classes and such patronage did not necessarily lead to financial success. Only one of his oils was ever engraved, *Ma/ham Water* which was engraved by William Skelton (1763-1848), but a number of his watercolours and drawings achieved this distinction. It is upon these, which he himself no doubt considered minor works, that his reputation now survives.

Devis used all media in his drawings: pen, pencil, crayon, Indian ink, monochrome wash and full watercolour, sometimes with body colour. He was a watercolourist in the old style, drawing his scene in outline with a reed pen and a grey, much watered ink and then laying in thin washes of ink and colour.

In early and middle life his drawing was stronger, more imaginative and showing a strong Italianate influence superimposed on his basically Dutch landscape style. His trees and foreground details are carefully studied; his skies luminous and the light well distributed throughout the scenes. In later life, after he had quit London, his sketches became 'pretty' with soft tints of grey-blue, yellowish green and pinky brown, his drawing became looser with cloud forms suggested with pencil work and his mannerisms more pronounced. His best known mannerism, commented on in all the histories, is his trick of drawing foliage by a series of triple or quadruple loops, "like bunches of bananas", a distinctive quirk that is rarely absent from his drawings. He was fond of including sheep in his composition, drawn with long stick-like legs, or small human figures rather clumsily draughted. One figure will usually be holding a staff diagonally across his body or a short stick held out in front of him.

When finished he often drew a black ink line around his design and hinged it on a sheet of white paper stained buff on the face side. He would sometimes sign his full name or his initials inconspicuously in a monogram, but most of his drawings remained unsigned and undated



and it is difficult to arrange them in any historical sequence. Despite the often strong Italian influence in his earlier work, there is no evidence that he ever went to Italy and the influence seems to have come from viewing the work of the 17th century Italian landscapists Salvator Rosa, Claude Lorrain and Nicolas and Caspar Poussin. These artists were well known in 18th century Britain through their paintings, through copies and imitations and above all through engravings of their work.

Judging by the titles of his works, Devis toured widely in England, Scotland and Wales, particularly in the wilder picturesque areas such as the Lake District, but his life seems otherwise to have been uneventful.

He quit London in 1780 and lived out the remaining years of his life at Albury House, near Guildford in Surrey, where he died unmarried in 1816 at the age of 87, pleased, it is reported, that Napoleon had finally met his Waterloo. His house and its contents, which included a large number of his drawings, he left to his niece Ellen Devis, wife of Robert Marris, from whom it passed eventually to Martin Farquhar Tupper, author of *Proverbial Philosophy* a collection of commonplace observations put in rhyming form which was published in 1838, had a tremendous vogue, a million copies in the United States alone, and has been long and deservedly forgotten. Later members of the family, amateur watercolourists, delved happily among Anthony's drawings for inspiration and example for several generations.

Our drawing was done during this last period of his life, reportedly in 1786 though on what evidence is unclear since it is neither signed nor dated.<sup>2</sup> The scene is described in ink along the right hand margin as *Roach Rocks, about 6 miles from Bodmin*. This is an error of spelling for 'Roche Rocks', some pinnacles of rock about 100 feet high near the little village of Roche six miles southwest of Bodmin in Cornwall. The ruins of a small 14th century chapel surmount the rocks and are shown in the drawing. This chapel is connected with the legend of one John Tregeagle, an unjust steward, condemned to drain the Dozmare Pool, a tarn on Bodmin Moor, "with a limpet shell with a hole in it and if he lets up for a single instant he is prodded by devils with red hot toasting forks".<sup>3</sup> When the gale was blowing from the southwest you could hear his bloodcurdling cries, but if he could escape over the moor to the Roche Rock chapel he would be given temporary respite.

Devis has drawn in the scene in pale grey ink with nervous lines that become stronger and darker towards the foreground. The clouds are loosely pencilled in and thin washes of grey are then laid in to indicate form and shadow. Much of the sky and light areas of rock and ground are left unpainted, whilst darker shadows are indicated with quick hatching with the pen. There is little foliage to be seen, unlike in his more usual wooded scenes, but what there is, on the top of rocks, is drawn with his characteristic "bunches of bananas". Two small figures of men, one standing and one seated, are at the lower right and the standing figure points with a stick towards some unseen vista on the right, thus conforming to another of the Devis mannerisms. Finally,

the scene is bounded with a ruled ink line and title is written on, probably in Devis' own hand, in an ink of the same colour.

This is a modest, yet typical, drawing of a man who was contemporary with Paul Sandby (1725-1809) and Alexander Cozens (1717P-1786). Devis must have known the work of these two greater artists, but he worked quite independently of them, drawing from the same artistic sources and achieving similar, though more modest results.

To show its position in our collections and how important a contribution it makes to our thin ranks of British landscape drawings of the period, I have appended a list of artists represented here. It will take many more such acquisitions before we can adequately document one of the most significant contributions made by Britain to visual arts, the art of landscape watercolour.

Eric Young

APPENDIX: British 18th and early 19th century landscape drawings in the ACAG.  
(artists born before 1770)

Paul Sandby (1725-1809)

*The Ruined Farmhouse* w/c 168 x 247mm.

Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788)

*Landscape* black and white chalk 235 x 311mm.

Anthony Devis (1729-1816)

*Roche Rocks, near Bodmin, Cornwall* 1786 pen and wash 159 x 235mm.

Philip de Louthembourg (1740-1812)

*Shepherd and Shepherdess with Donkey and Sheep* 1766 pencil and white 149 x 219mm.

*Shepherd and Shepherdess with a Calf, Sheep and Cow beyond* 1766 pencil and white 174 x 213mm.

Ozias Humphrey (1742-1810)

*From the Duke of Buccleuch's Garden* 1781 pencil, pen and w/c 225 x 355mm.

*View of Penshurst from the Grounds* 1788 pen and wash 203 x 501mm.

John Soane (1753-1837)

*Classical Buildings by Moonlight* 1800 pen and w/c 311 x 197mm.

*A View of Rome* pen and w/c 247 x 352mm.

Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827)

*A Village Street* pen and w/c 133 x 226mm.

*To Greenwich, Descent from Croombs (Coombes) Hill, Blackheath* pen and w/c 89 x 152mm.

*View of the High Street, Brussels* pen and w/c 349 x 533mm.

Henry Edridge (1768-1821)

*Castiobien* 1805 pencil 324 x 209

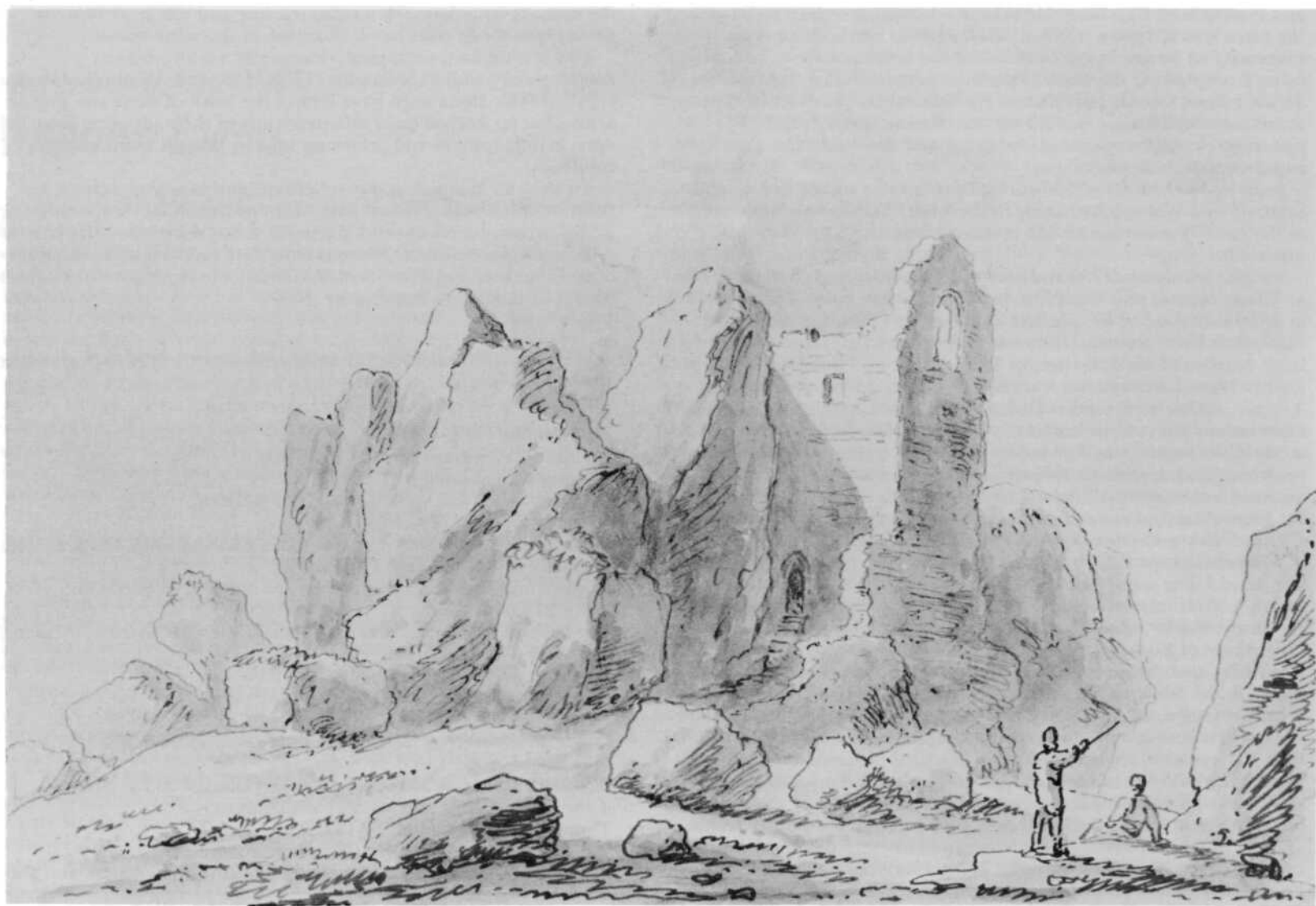
*Chateau de Vincennes* 1819 pencil 267 x 412mm.

*Hungerford Park* pencil 241 x 371mm.

*Landscape: a Pool amongst Trees* pencil 254 x 382mm.

*Talbot Tower, Chateau Falaise* pencil 451 x 292mm.

*View of Ashridge, the Seat of Lord Bridgewater* pencil 317 x 254mm.



Notes:

- 1 J.L. Roget, *A History of the 'Old Water-Colour' Society*, 1891, 133.
- 2 It may be inscribed on the reverse, but is still laid down on its backing board as received.
- 3 *The World in Colour: Great Britain*, ed. by Dore Ogrizek, 1949, p. 241.

**Anthony Devis** (1729-1816) British

*Roche Rocks, near Bodmin, Cornwall* pen, pencil and grey wash 159 x 235mm.

Inscribed: *Roach Rocks, about 6 miles from Bodmin. l'id. Maton p. 168* (along right margin); originally inscribed ditto (?) in pencil but paper trimmed.

Presented by Mr and Mrs E.A. Page, 1976. Ace. no. 1976/53. Ex collection E.G.F. Vogtherr.

FROM PROJECT PROGRAMME NO. 7\*:

## Gray Nichols

### DESCRIPTION

*A steel frame (2in. sq. section) supports a reinforced concrete block (6ft. x 3 ft. x 1 1/2 ft. weight approx. 2 tons) twelve inches above the ground. Three inches below this is stretched a rubber latex membrane with a grid pattern marked on its upper surface, a 1:1 matrix corresponding to the reinforcing mesh imbedded in the concrete. I will position myself under the membrane, insulated from the ground by an asbestos shadow, secured to the ground by steel shackles over my wrists and ankles and will remain in this position for twenty-four hours, beginning at sunrise. Cross my heart.*

### EXTRACT OF INTERVIEW BY COLIN QUAYLE

#### AFTER THE FACT

**CQ:** You said it. Isn't this bondage number a bit like a penance or an act of masochism?

**GN:** No. I think it was more interesting as a sort of passive achievement. . . doing nothing for so long.

**CQ:** I mean in public. You were almost inviting assault.

**GN:** I don't think so. It was very close to the edge though. Some people seemed to find it disturbing, almost as though I had addressed the threat to them. Some found it funny, or didn't know what to think, but no-one tried to kick me in the head.

Document drawn up by the Gallery and signed by the artist and two witnesses prior to the event.

#### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I GRAY NICHOLS do hereby absolve the Auckland City Art Gallery of all responsibility for my personal injury or death resulting from the performance in PROJECT PROGRAMMES 1975 of the art event Installation/ Performance scheduled to take place on and waive all claims for liability against that institution.

Signed *Gray Nichols* .....

Date *4.1.75* .....

Witnesses

*John Hayward*  
.....  
*John Barry*  
.....  
.....

## EVENTS RECOLLECTED

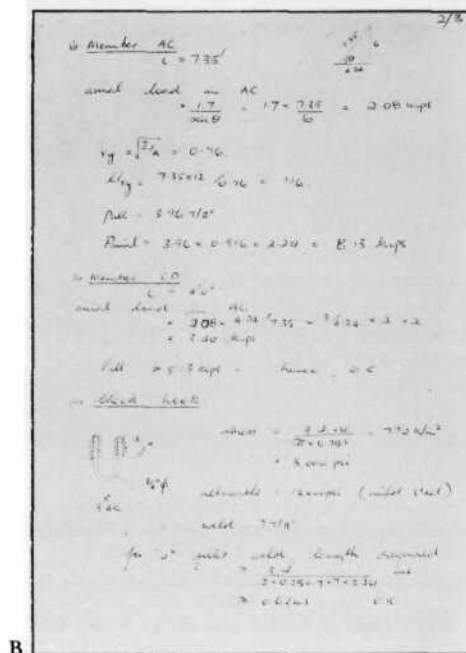
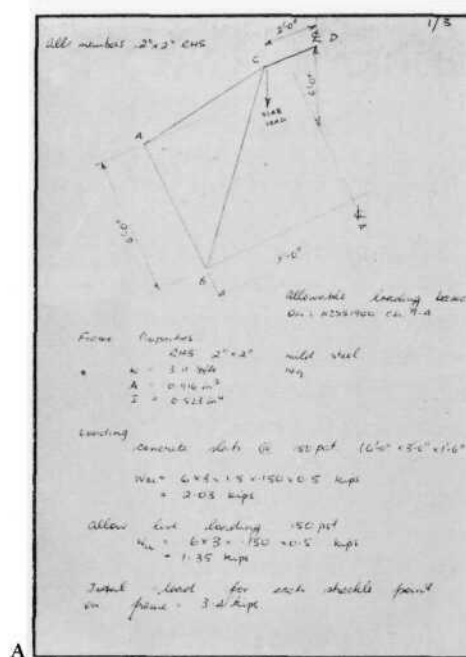
Once the idea was worked out, it was just a matter of executing it without compromise. The frame was welded to my design by a technician who knew *only* that its purpose was to support a weight of several tons. Its strength was estimated by an engineer who saw only the drawings and specifications of the materials to be used. The concrete slab was poured on the site, and once cured, was slung in the frame. Shackles were fixed to the paving underneath the slab and the latex skin stretch in placed. After fasting for three days and lowering the fluid intake sufficiently to achieve a sort of equilibrium I had myself secured in position at sunrise on the 8th of November, my intention being to remain there for the following twenty-four hours.

The loss of freedom was at first disturbing; from the upright and mobile to a horizontal and immobile position in a very tight space. I was disorientated and nauseous. But it soon passed and slowly into the day, talking a lot, answering questions, responding and not responding to abuse, or just listening. Some people were wonderful. It was so good to listen to imaginative responses. One woman in her sixties I think who had been a psychiatric nurse for many years talked with me for almost an hour. She had a lot to say about people's behaviour patterns, and she made me laugh too. One couple, he in his late thirties, she maybe ten years younger, stopped with me for a time; did not say very much, but seemed very open and considerate of my well-being, returned on their way to a restaurant, and again after their meal; she had brought me several slices of bread which she buttered with difficulty and fed to me, breaking off small portions at a time to put in my mouth. I was so touched. Another couple walked by. He stopped to talk, seemed very interested, amused, quite intense. But she walked on by, turned and shouted at him from a distance to "ignore those smartarsed students". He ignored her until she ran up and kicked him in the arse. Then they left shouting at one another. At times the situation became more comic than absurd. I found myself surrounded by a young group in the costumes of Robin Hood and his merry men, threatening to use me as a target for their arrows, posing for photographs. Double think: they are making a scene as in the theatre. I was also the target for a guy who didn't know how far he wanted to go. My only control was through words and I could not reach him. But fortunately I got through to his friend who assisted my companion in restraining him when I suggested they should do so, as he had managed to get the slab swinging from side to side to the point where it was hitting against my body. He left quickly but his friend stayed for a while: English, drunk, but very interesting with his elaborate scenarios based on my 'predicament'.

Media coverage brought the piece to the attention of many people during its performance. In the evening the location resembled an outdoor party. I drank sparkling wine through a chain of plastic

(A) & (B)

Vector diagram and calculations relating to the structure used in Project 7

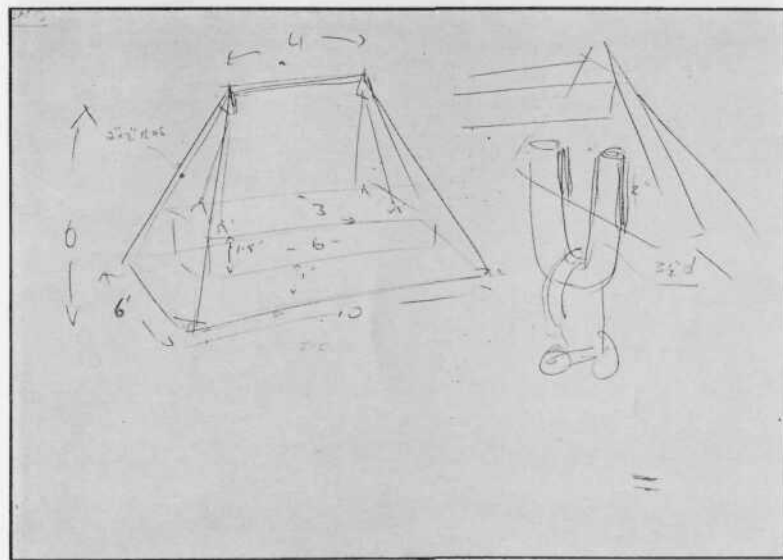


straws. People were congregating there, enjoying the company on that arbitrary public place. A little before midnight I found my limited field of vision filled with well dressed feet and hemlines which brushed the ground, then a mass of knees and elbows and sideways faces all talking at me and each other: "We heard about you over Hauraki (radio station) so we thought we'd . . ." etc; the whole of some formal function had come visiting.

The action thinned out a bit after 3 am. My concentration was beginning to flag by then anyway. By 4 am cramps in the small of my back were demanding attention please; and I had to concentrate on overcoming that. Time moved so slowly it seemed sunrise would never come. But it did come and it was good to roll up in a ball and then to run around a bit. I felt like a new chicken and grateful to Kim who had stuck around to loosen the shackles.

\*NOTE: The rest of Project Programme No. 7 was an exhibition of paintings by the following: Maree Horner/ Paul Hartigan/ Nicholas Grant/ Alan Harold/ Kion Stevens/ Robert Kcmpen/ Ian McMillan/ Diana Wall.

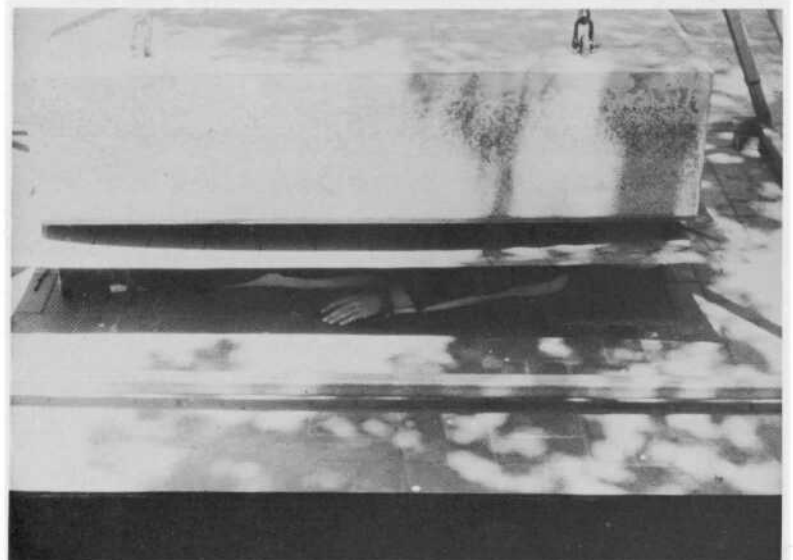
- (A) A general view of Project 7 installation in the sculpture court of the ACAG
- (B) Side view of installation



Preliminary sketch of structure used in Project 7



A



B

PROJECT PROGRAMME 11:  
PHILIP DADSON  
Video plus performance/4-7 December 1976

This show was an opportunity to put together a few things which have interested me for some time . . . ideas and feelings about pulse, rhythm, simultaneity, change . . . How to combine imagery and sound in ways that express these concerns has led me to composing and to the media of video and performance. These works come somewhere near what I aim for.

**Earth:** Two simultaneous 20 minute videotapes.

**Crossings:** For two grand pianos, two typewriters and closed circuit television.

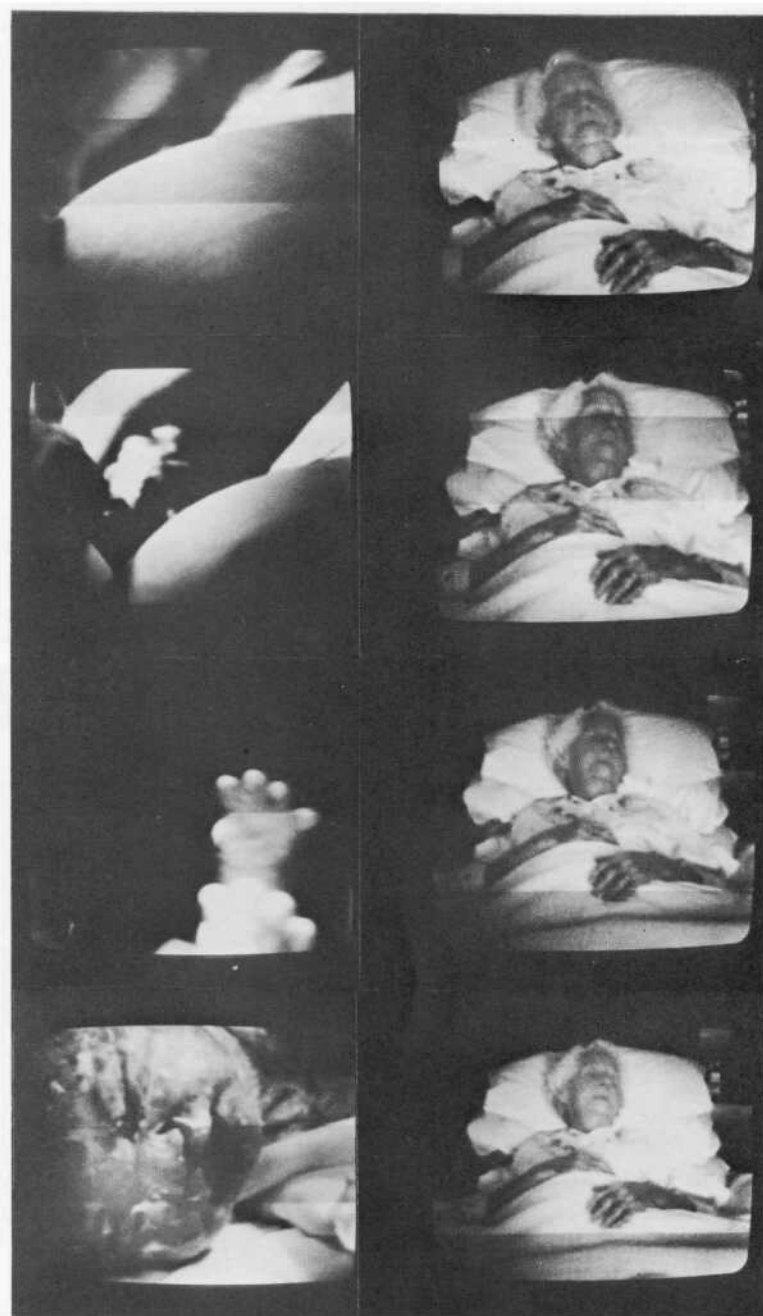
**Physical:** Four simultaneous 50 minute videotapes for eight monitors: Les Mills Health Studio/YMCA Businessmans' Health Club/ Chidokan Karate/ Spa Health Studio.

**Parabola:** Crater drumming; a fifteen minute videotape.

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EARTH

The juxtaposition of two processes. Two 20 minute tapes that observe the final stages of childbirth and old age. A simple statement about breath, birth and death.



## CROSSINGS

For two pianists, two typists and closed circuit TV. Based on overlapping and resolving rhythmic and melodic patterns. The two typists type related texts on natural and social change. Both texts are slowly typed through the duration of the piano music and displayed on two screens opposite each other. All slightly confusing.

The texts were as follows:

- (i) *A natural process of change generally occurs so slowly as to be almost imperceptible; growth, day into night, the seasons etc. The exception is change by violence, an eruption, flood or famine for example. Change by violence is preceded by signs. . . of accelerating transformation, and succeeded by temporary calm.*
- (ii) *A social process of change generally occurs so slowly as to be almost imperceptible; conventions, surroundings, balance of power etc. The exception is change by violence, a rebellion, revolution or war for example. Change by violence is preceded by signs . . . of accelerating transformation and succeeded by temporary calm.*



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## PHYSICAL

This is concerned with three things: firstly the particular kind of energy that emerges from a group activity . . . a sort of group dynamic more perceptible when there is movement. A situation where each person's identity amalgamates into a common identity. A process which expands the further one stands back.

Secondly with the rhythm, complex and straight forward,

overlapping and contrasting. Each situation dictates its own seemingly choreographed routine which group participants realise either individually or in unison. A variety of equipment is used which reinforces body rhythms with sound. And thirdly the juxtapositions of situations that reflect different preoccupations and sometimes obsessions with the body . . . body building, Djjo rituals, figure trimming and plain old losing weight.







PARABOLA (unexhibited at ACAG/took place in Mt Eden crater)  
A fifteen minute videotape of drumming inside Mt Eden crater. Since 1970 local "Scratch Orchestra" enthusiasts have drummed from dawn to dusk each Winter Solstice (information on this released about June 23 each year). Parabola was an event similar to that of Solstice Drumming. The location has always created certain problems some of which I attempted to come to grips with in Parabola ... particularly the problem of keeping a steady pulse with players widely separated around the inner slopes of the crater. Synchronisation is almost impossible unless planned for. But the event turned up more than we bargained for. Replay later revealed a surprising mix of radio signals amongst the drumming: VHF radio communications from taxis, police, trucks etc in the city. The big aerial on top of Mt Eden is a post office repeater station for mobile radio links in the city and somehow the video recorder received, amplified and put the signals on tape unassisted. The camera visuals were no match for the sound, so the tape was omitted from the ACAG Project Programme 11 and shelved for the future.

Philip Dadson/Feb 1977



Philip Dadson at the bottom of Mount Eden's crater coordinating *Parabola*



## SOME YOUNGER ABSTRACT PAINTERS by John Tarlton

**"Personally, I do not need a movement.  
What was given to me, I take for granted."  
— de Kooning**

Within the self imposed limitations of non-objective subject matter, the abstract painter attempts to unravel obvious content, to reduce and re-arrange, in order to achieve a fresher and more personal abstract order. He does this by enlisting codified techniques and compositional devices on a surface level, rather than camouflage subjective intentions within a representational mode. The abstract painter works without the aid of psychologically connotative elements found in romantic or realistic depictions of nature. His is an inner or highly personal picture which relies heavily upon the mechanics of technique, form, and colour manipulations. Abstract painting can be seen as systems where line, form, and colour are distributed either intellectually (formal), or non-intellectually (free-form), premeditated or accidental, in order to achieve an intensification of visual information which overcomes the absence of traditional, recognisable imagery.

Being free of realistic imagery the abstract painter explores all the possibilities inherent in pure painting. Yet because of these systems based within the mechanics of painting and the stylisation of forms, abstractions can become narrow, confining, and ego-centred, mere cathartic extensions of the artist's ego having meaning and relevance only to himself, and little stimulus for public appreciation. Accidents and ambiguities can be hidden behind the seductive qualities of pattern, colour, flatness, and the purification of forms through simplification. Abstract paintings are viewed as paintings, their appreciation is essentially surface level, and do not exist (as representational paintings do) as paintings of an illusional 'something else.'

It is because of this dependence on surface levels that abstract paintings must achieve and sustain visual intensifications which are both immediate and long lasting.

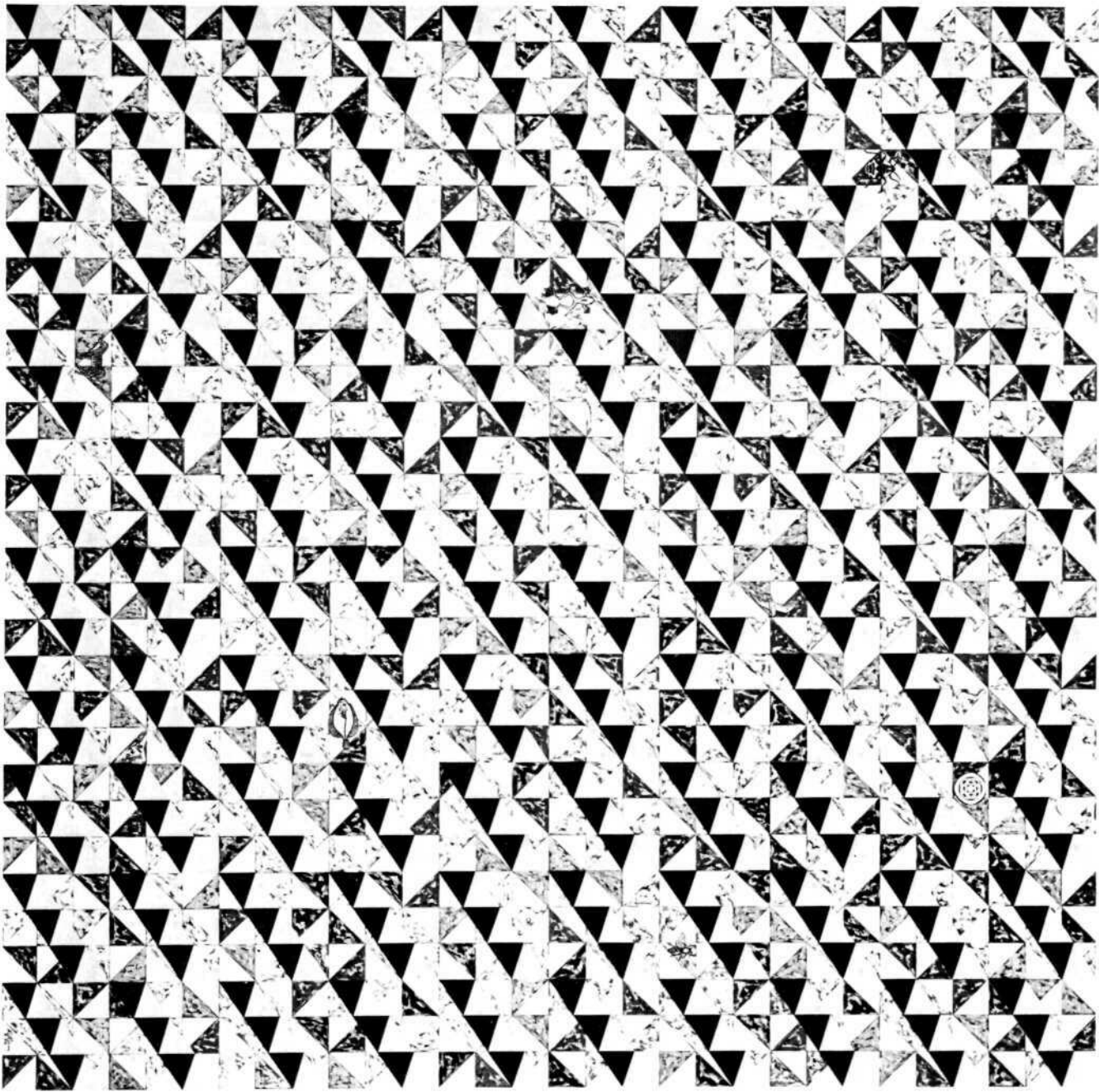
Recently in New Zealand there have been many intellectual attempts to fashion younger abstract painters into a formalised school, to find similarities or artistic preoccupations which provide evidence of a unique and indigenous New Zealand abstract academy. The tendency for such general classifying and pigeon-holing of individual artists into larger, co-operative adventures is fundamental to New Zealand's brief art history, and probably stems from the few published accounts by novice art historians of such 'schools' as the Christchurch Group. These tell of a group of European-influenced painters who simplified their palettes and compositions in order to try and capture the idiosyncrasies of the New Zealand landscape. In actual fact, the Christchurch Group had been little more than a New Zealand extension of the Precise Realism of Charles Sheeler and other

American artists. Historically, the grouping of avant garde or younger artists into loosely organised 'schools' was as much for their own artistic protection (safety in numbers) as for any real art movement or even technical similarities. In the New Zealand experience we would prefer to see our artists as members of an indigenous movement rather than accept the more factual accounts of individuals working independently in isolation and public indifference. Realistically, groups or schools of New Zealand painters were more types of Social clubs, used to exchange philosophies and experiences, and insulate themselves against the chilly void wind of public suspicion.

Any attempt then at classifying younger New Zealand abstract painters into a formalised school would not only be premature, but also detrimental to their individual artistic growth. Philosophically, the younger painters in New Zealand are still working in isolation, but now their influences come directly (and openly acknowledged) from international movements and trends, specifically the abstract New York schools of the 1950's and 1960's. Perhaps this is the basic similarity between younger New Zealand abstract painters — their apparent break away from older abstract-orientated painters in their acceptance of international, formal abstraction, and an avoidance of local island experiences and motifs. However, some structural and contextual similarities do occur, and it perhaps does no real harm to loosely examine some recent paintings by four of New Zealand's prominent younger abstract painters; **Richard Killeen, Ian Scott, Geoff Thornley, and Ross Ritchie.**

Closed and definitive compositions are employed by all four painters. Each painting is executed within the European tradition of dependence and inter-relationships established through geometric order. All are formal, and there are no etherial, free form movements of shapes or colour. Compositions are rigidly controlled and relegated to work solely within the confines of each canvas' surface. Each painting is a complete and premeditated compositional thought and nothing is left to chance. There is also a relative scale similarity within all four works which probably stems from pure economical reasons.

Geometrically, within Scott and Thornley, the abstract attitude of simplification becomes of primary importance. In Scott, the central focusing of diagonal stripes upon a void white background reduces and draws attention to the middle areas. Through simplification, the white background acts as both a void where the centrally placed stripes float, and as a type of tonal encasement which restricts any further sideward movement. Scott has simplified and reduced all pictorial information to its limit, and illustrates the extreme abstract philosophy that "less is more." Like the American abstract painter Barnett Newman, Scott has attempted to use emptiness as a substance in itself, a type of formal severity. In Thornley, we are presented with a monochromatic, rain field of drips and splashes held together and dissected by an imposing grid system of black lines. This grid pattern divides the painting's surface into regimented components. The reduction and simplification apparent in Thornley is used however for



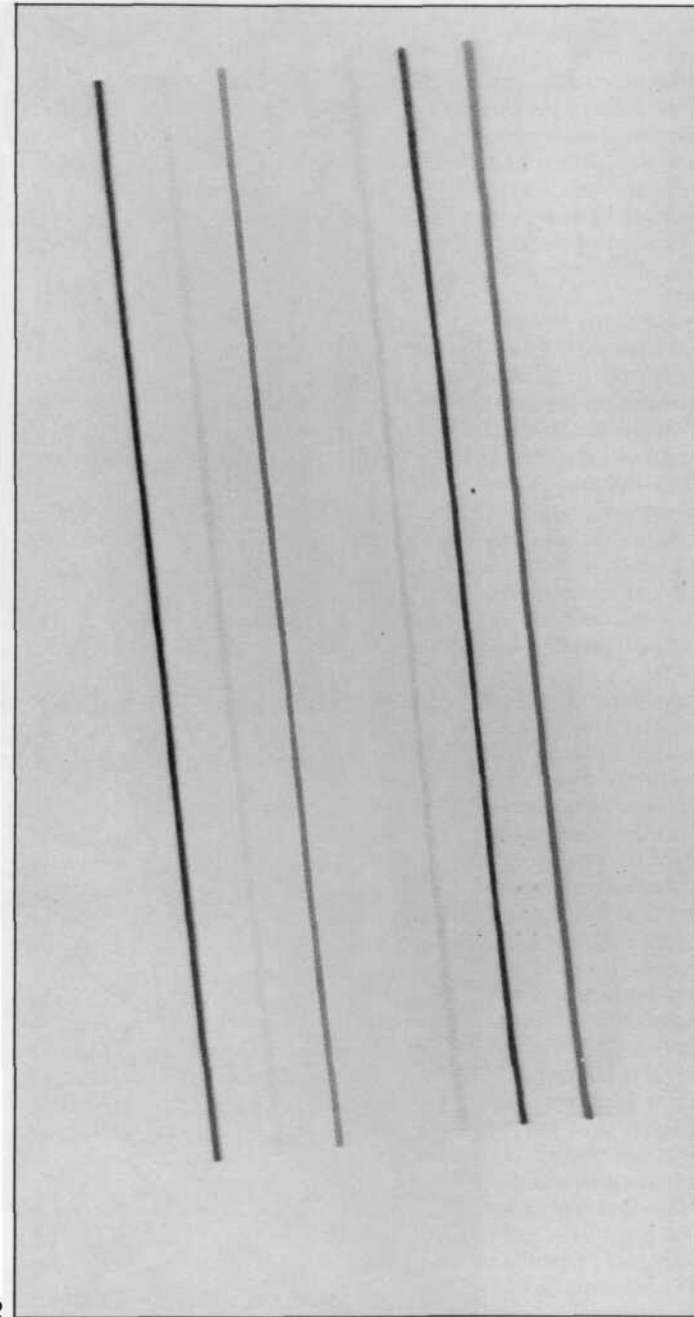
a structural severity, to dissect the surface, and relegate form. This is in direct counterpoint to Scott's use of simplification as an intricate part of the painting itself.

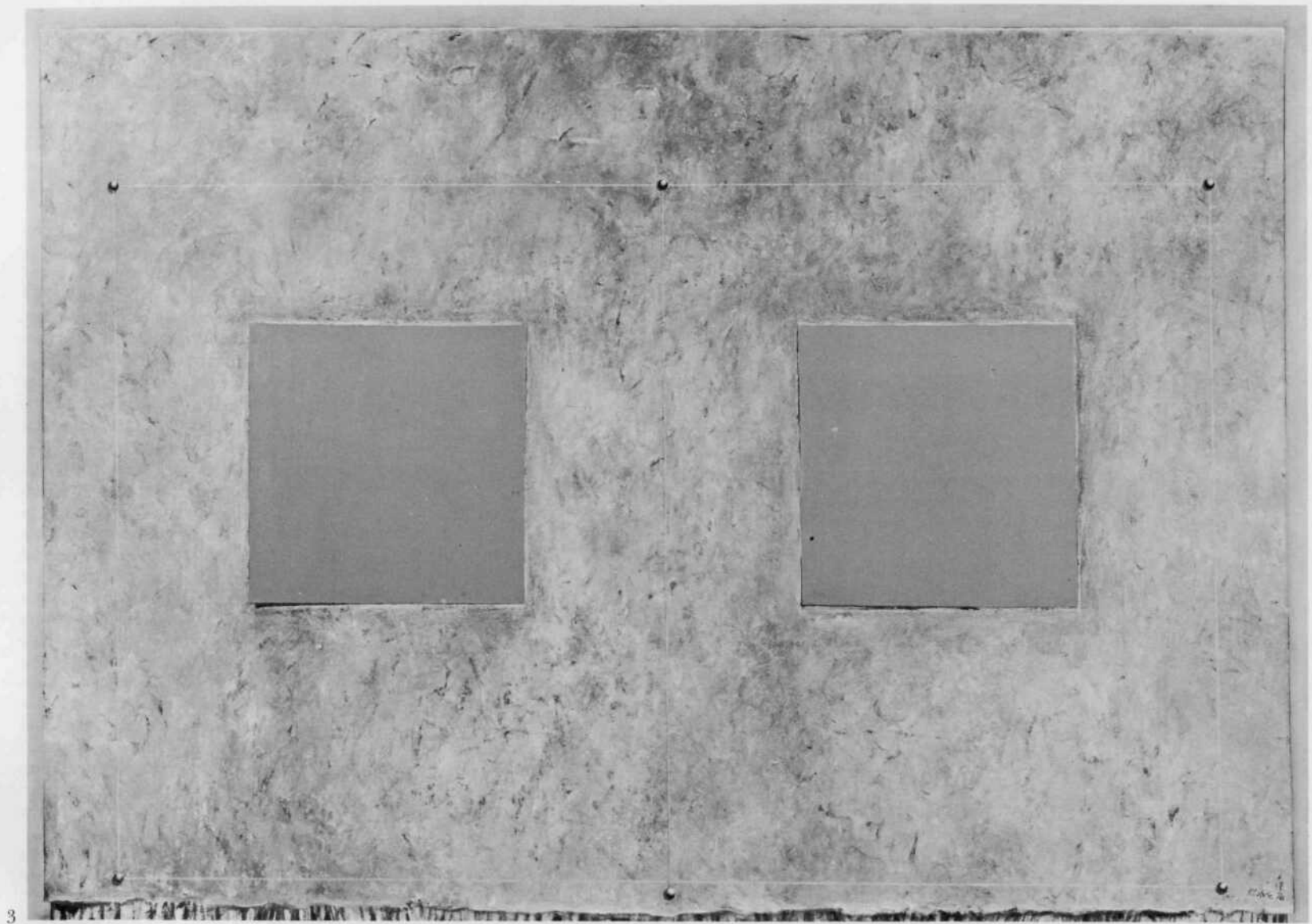
Richard Killeen also presents a closed composition, composed of fragments of geometric forms, colours, and interspersed representational animal and insect forms. The painting assumes its compositional entirety and unification by visually mixing these smaller components into an overall visual-optical pattern. Killeen's painting is similar to Thornley's through the dependence of geometric patterning and grid orientation. The simplification of formal elements combined with delicate detailed passages of colour blends make the painting both structurally simple and technically complicated.

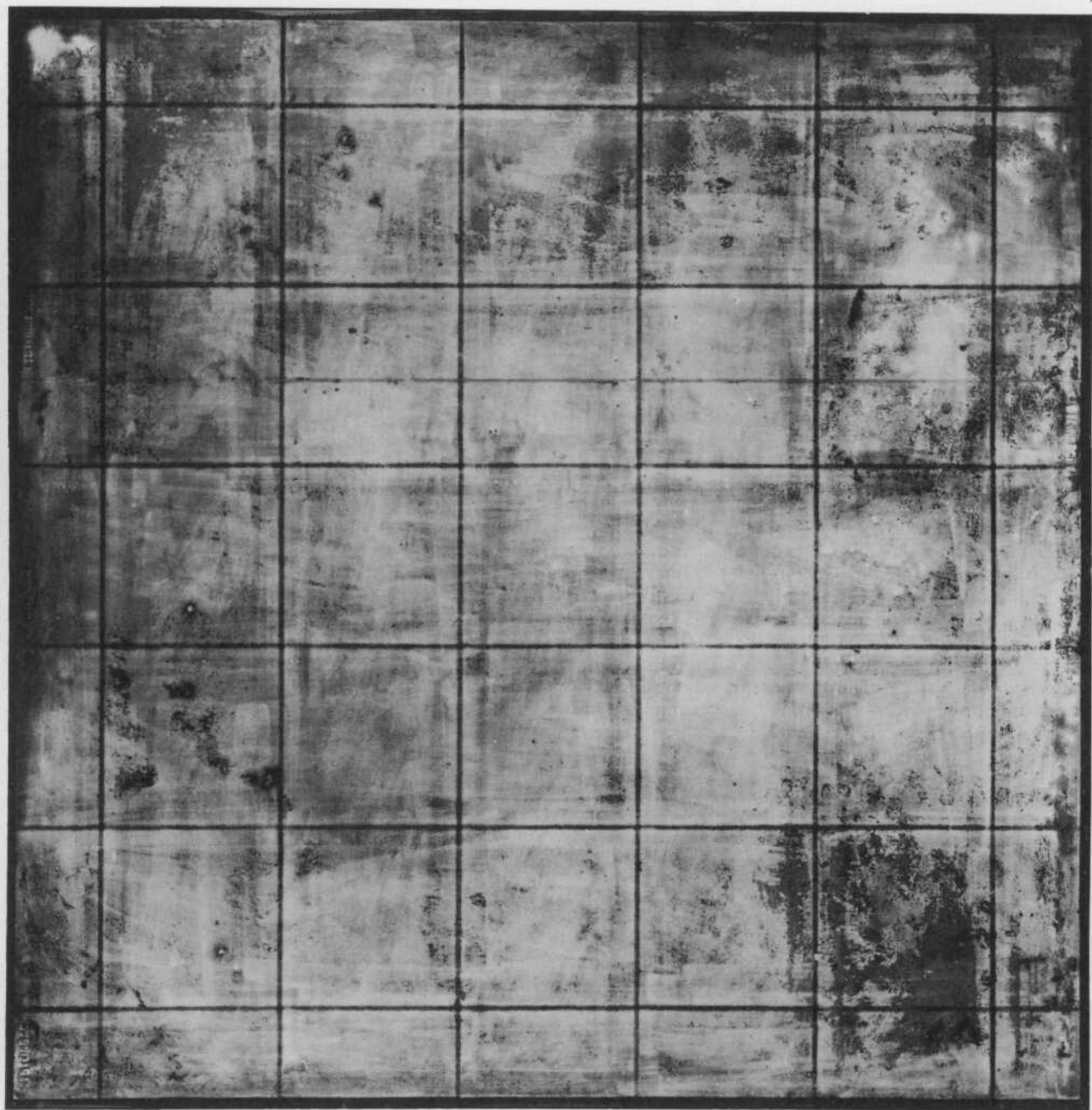
In *CC*, Ross Ritchie has achieved a formal order by the employment of doubled, centrally poised geometric squares of grey. Throughout the painting the square format and dependence upon geometric order are echoed. Even the painted white lines held in square formats by *trappe l'oeil* push pins literally accent the desire to enclose and control all visual information within a centrally focused, closed composition. Though Ritchie has employed certain aspects of natural imagery, the general composition revolves around the self-referring geometric shapes and overall double emphasis of forms.

Unlike more established and older New Zealand painters who have dealt with abstraction, the younger painters have divorced the concept of nature by removing landscape as the central and primary influence on subject matter. The earlier abstract works of such artists as Mrkusich, McCahon, and Walters were based upon associations and connotations found within the landscape. Mrkusich used circular, earth and sun related shapes, local colour, and naturalistic brushwork in such pioneering abstract paintings as *Golden Centre*, *Earth Emblem*; *Dividing the Waters*, and *Four Elements Above- (Crimson)*. Even in his more anti-naturalistic treatment of *Six Elements in Combination- (Veridan)* the emphasis upon chaos and harmony seems based within the connotations associated with cityscape. Landscape elements in structure and colouration are always present in the more abstract works of McCahon, while many of the patterned, optical works of Walters have a strong base within Maori motifs, all of which derive some feeling from the land. What was based upon the landscape or figurative elements in the older New Zealand painters has been replaced by a contemporary insistence on geometric order, non-natural and formal abstraction. The new abstract painters accept the non-sensuous, and in the work of Killeen, Scott, Thornley, and Ritchie there is an attempt to exclude all natural references, to establish paintings based upon formal relationships which depend solely upon interaction of form and colour for effect. Theirs are intellectual approaches to subject, independent of sensuous, natural connotations, and heavily rooted in international trends.

Scott, Killeen, and Thornley have executed their paintings in a







mechanical handling of surface. There is no association to anything outside the pure, physical structure of line repetition in Scott's *Quiver*. Nothing exists except the severe and formal minimisation of line. In order to further divorce his painting from natural or personal associations, Scott has employed spray gun techniques and a non-natural intensification of colour. Even the light mists of colour between the stripes are produced mechanically. Through this handling of surface, the finished painting has become neutral and de-personalised.

Killeen has also embraced a more formal, de-personalised style which does not depend upon anything outside technique — his optical geometric system into which flatness and repetition of colours are relegated into standardised, precise areas. As with Scott and Thornley, Killeen has also employed elements of hard-edge painting, and has attempted to de-personalise any personal or natural associations. The attitudes of the sporadically placed insect and animal forms are also mechanical and stencil-like, and do not seem to have been used for any purpose other than mere visual rest stops of curval forms within the total repetition of patterning. The insect and animal shapes are void of all personality, and maintain a flatness and non-natural aspect.

Though a more personal and traditional handling of paint is apparent in *CC*, Ritchie also works into the painting a feeling of de-personalisation. Throughout the painting there are ambiguous uses of both natural and real life associations with those of pure abstraction. The pictured surface of an overlapped, wall-like area can be read visually as both a natural form and as a pure, subtle abstract colour field. The references to representational push pins and string are counterbalanced by the abstract solidity of the centrally placed grey squares. Natural references to depth, perspective, space, and shadow also interplay ambiguously throughout the painting. There are constant paradoxes of solidity as opposed to space, and of flatness opposed to perspective. The painting seems totally committed to the ambiguous manipulation of surface, which is further intensified by a face-on, atmospheric light source. It is of interest to note that Ritchie is the only painter who has made use of a light source. Killeen, Scott, and Thornley have removed all feeling of outside lighting, preferring solid colour fields or grid systems to eliminate all sensations of real life atmosphere.

It is far too early in the younger abstract painters' artistic growth to saddle them with stylistic labels. For New Zealand abstract painting (and contemporary New Zealand painting in general) is in a state of fluctuation, re-examination, and experimentation. Artistic styles shift with each new international idea and personal investigation. The younger abstract painters' work could have been painted in centres such as New York or London, rather than Auckland, for their art is not one of regional artistic dogmatism, but of acceptance of universal qualities in art. It would be several years before any real specific overview on New Zealand abstract painting could be possible, that is, if the situation warrants such verbiage. In the meantime the younger

painters continue to work and experiment, accepting and discarding many influences, while the public have the opportunity to observe each new bend and discovery along their individual, artistic routes.

**1 Richard Killeen** (1946-) New Zealand.

*Frog shooter* (1976)

pva on canvas 1498 x 1498mm. Acc. no. 1976/37/1

Signed (LR) Killeen

**2 Ian Scott** (1945-) New Zealand.

*Quiver* (May 1974)

pva on canvas 2184 x 1143mm. Acc. no. 1975/53

**3 Ross Ritchie** (1941-) New Zealand.

*CC* (1976)

Oil on canvas 1680 x 1175mm. Acc. no. 1976/37/2

**4 Geoff Thornley** (1942-) New Zealand.

*Albus series no. 4: Nigresco* (1974)

Mixed media, paper on canvas 1130 x 1130mm. Acc. no. 1975/24/1

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