

1979



**JOHN F. KAVANAGH, SCULPTOR:**  
AN EXHIBITION OF SCULPTURE AND MODELS  
FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST  
AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY  
August 29 — October, 1979

## PREFACE

This exhibition has been organised by Alexa Johnston, Curator of New Zealand Painting and Sculpture, and Eric Young, Registrar.

They acknowledge their great indebtedness to the artist and his wife Margaret for making the material available for the exhibition and for supplying all the data for the preparation of this catalogue.

Special thanks go also to Mrs. Mary Paterson for the loan of the marble head of Georgia Leprohon (Catalogue No.15).

## INTRODUCTION

John Francis Kavanagh was born on 24 September 1903 at Birr, King's County, Ireland. His early education was with the Christian Brothers College in Cork. At the age of 16, a serious accident happened which changed his life. As the result of a fall in a quarry, he received severe spinal injuries which kept him in bed for three years and lamed him for life.

To pass the time, he took up modelling in clay and made hundreds of small figures, mostly of a religious nature. Discovering that he had a special aptitude for modelling, he determined to take up sculpture as a career. He studied art first at the Cork School of Art and, later in 1920-1921, at the Liverpool School of Art. Four years followed with his family and then, in 1925 he won a scholarship to the Royal College of Art and he trained there in the School of Sculpture from 1925 to 1930 under William Rothenstein, A. Ernest Cole, Gilbert Ledward and Henry Moore.

Moore, he says, had little to teach and soon afterwards left the College to pursue his own career as a sculptor. His other teachers, however, served him well and left their mark on him.

William Rothenstein (1872-1945), the Principal of the RCA from 1920 to 1935, had studied at the Slade School and at the Academie Julian in Paris, was a member of the New English Art Club, a war artist in both World Wars and was knighted in 1931. He was a painter, lithographer and etcher of portrait, figure and landscape. Though not a sculptor, he made a strong impression on Kavanagh, both directly and indirectly through the other teachers, by his insistence upon high professional standards and achievement. During his period as Principal, he stimulated the revival of mural painting by his own work and by encouraging the employment of artists in that field.

A Ernest Cole (1890- ) was a sculptor and draughtsman who had studied at Goldsmith's College School of Art and in Italy and Paris. He was Professor of Sculpture at the RCA from 1924 to 1926, exhibited widely and is represented in many public collections in Britain.

Gilbert Ledward (1888-1960), a sculptor in marble, stone and bronze of portraits, figure subjects and monuments, was himself the son of a sculptor, Richard Arthur Ledward and studied at Chelsea Polytechnic, Goldsmith's College, the RCA under Lanteri and at the Royal Academy Schools. He won the first British School of Rome Scholarship in Sculpture in 1913 and a Royal Academy gold medal and travelling scholarship in the same year. He replaced Cole as Professor of Sculpture at the RCA from 1926 to 1929. In 1938, he became a member of the Advisory Committee of the Royal Mint and, in 1953, when Elizabeth came to the throne, executed the designs for the new Great Seal and the new Five Shilling Piece. He was elected RA 1937 and was President of the Royal Society of British Sculptors 1954-1956 and Trustee of the RA 1956-1957.

Each of these men affected Kavanagh's development and interests. His great interest in coins, for instance, was stimulated by his years under Gilbert Ledward. His passion for Italy, fed by his own years of study in Rome, had been fired by both Cole and Ledward. His belief in the nature of sculpture as an integral part of architecture probably goes back to the philosophies of William Rothenstein, the muralist, as much as to the teaching of Ledward.

In his third year at the RCA, Kavanagh was made an assistant to Charles Sargeant Jagger (1885-1934), a product of the RCA under Lanteri 1903-1910, Rome Scholar in 1914, gold medallist at the RBS in 1933. It was John Kavanagh, not Jagger, who in 1930 modelled the marvellous elephants outside the New Residence at New Delhi. Although Jagger was responsible for the overall sculptural design, he did not have the skill for some of its execution.

In 1928 Kavanagh gained his College Diploma and, in the following year, won a RCA Travelling Scholarship, with which he studied in Berlin, Munich, Vienna and Paris. In 1930 he entered the competition set by the British School of Rome and won the Rome Prize in Sculpture for two years of study. A third year was paid for by the Royal Academy. Between 1931 and 1933, therefore, Kavanagh studied and worked in Italy and exhibited in Rome and Venice.

It was this period of study and work in Italy that made Kavanagh the artist he is. Here he absorbed the classic tradition of sculpture at its heart, a tradition that had begun in Egypt, continued and flowered in Greece, was taken over intact by the Etruscans and by Rome, was rediscovered by the Italian Renaissance and rediscovered again in the eighteenth century with the growth of archaeology and classical scholarship. Here he learned from the best stone carvers in the world. Here also he found subjects for his sculpture that particularly suited his style and temperament. Wanda Tiburzzi was an Italian woman he glimpsed in the streets, searched for with great difficulty until he located her and persuaded her to model for him. With Wanda he won the bronze medal at the Paris Salon in 1935, which is displayed in this exhibition. Tanith in this exhibition (catalogue no. 4), also of Italian inspiration, was well received with two others of his Italian pieces at the Royal Academy in 1933 and won an Honourable Mention at the Paris Salon in 1934.

After his return from Italy in 1934 at the age of 30, he was appointed Head of Department of Sculpture and Modelling at the Leeds College of Art, where Jagger had begun his studies. He held this position for six years.

In 1935 he was made Fellow of the Royal Society of British Sculptors, in the same year as Sir Charles Wheeler, and he later became a Member of Council of that body. With the successes at exhibitions in these years and his appointment at Leeds, came a series of public commissions.

For the Roundhay Girls' High School in Leeds, he created a memorial to the retiring headmistress titled Cora Ann: The Spirit of Youth. The model for this in bronze was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1946 and is included in this exhibition (catalogue no. 5). For the

Catholic Church of Our Lady in Leeds, he carved Christ Triumphant on the Cross. This, a memorial to Bishop Hook, the first vicar of the church from 1876 to 1891, was carved in limewood and was the largest wooden figure made in England at that time since the Renaissance. It is a superb concept of Christ on the Cross, wearing the alb and raising his arms free in blessing. It was designed to be hung on chains above the nave of the church, high above the heads of the worshippers and the design took into consideration the extreme foreshortening involved in this placement.

During this period at Leeds, Kavanagh maintained a studio also in Chelsea and continued to exhibit at the Royal Academy, at the British Empire Exhibition in Glasgow in 1938 and in Paris. In 1936 he won an international competition to design the Medal presented by the Royal Institute of British Architects to winners of the Rome Prize in Architecture. The medal, with a design incorporating the arms of the Institute, is included in this exhibition (catalogue no. 17). In London, he executed a commission for the London Catholic Hospital, Lambeth Road. This, a nine foot high statue in limestone of Our Lady of Consolation, stands above the entrance to the hospital. The bronze model for this, titled Madonna and Child, was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1948 and is included in this exhibition (catalogue no. 7). Again, it shows the sculptor taking extreme foreshortening into consideration in the design and modelling.

His most important commission at this period was in 1940 to carve all the sculpture for the new Walthamstow Town Hall. This included 16 panels of relief symbolising themes of work and plaster models for two of these panels are in this exhibition (catalogue nos. 8,9). There were also 5 statues, each seven foot six inches high, on social themes; one of them, Fellowship, incorporated a portrait of William Morris, who was born in Walthamstow.

He undertook a number of private commissions for portraits in these years. In 1937 three of these were exhibited at the Royal Academy: J. W. Dulanty; Sir Francis Joseph; and Half-length Portrait Bust. The last of these, a portrait of the etcher W. P. Robbins, was exhibited in this gallery in 1973. In 1939, he exhibited what is perhaps his finest portrait bust, Cardinal Hinsley, a bronze now the property of the See of Westminster. In 1946, the plaster for this was also exhibited, a rare occurrence of essentially the same work being twice exhibited at the Royal Academy.

Then in 1943, he exhibited at the Royal Academy Head of a Russian Peasant and had the distinction of the bronze being purchased by the President and Council of the Royal Academy under the terms of the Chantrey Bequest. The model was a Russian Jew whom he found in the Mile End Road in London and the sculpture was one of a dozen that he did of different peasant types he picked up. It is now housed in the Tate Gallery, Millbank and has been exhibited at least twice with the Chantrey Bequest, in 1949 and 1958.

With the war, such public and private commissions ceased in England, but in 1941 Kavanagh won an international competition for a monument to

Father Burke, the Dominican preacher and patriot, for whom he has always had the liveliest admiration. This eleven foot high portrait of Burke was erected in Galway, Eire, shortly after the war.

At the close of the war in 1946, he was commissioned by Ford Company of Dagenham to design a monument to Free Europe and created a Statue of Spartacus. In 1947, he was active with the National Society of Painters, Sculptors, Engravers and Potters and, in 1949, was appointed Member of the Faculty of Sculpture of the British School at Rome.

In 1947 there occurred one of those unhappy accidents that can negate the best efforts of man. A competition was held to design the bronze door for the Basilica S. Pietro in the Vatican. Kavanagh worked on this and submitted designs, but because of the extremely bad conditions of transport so soon after the war, his models were not able, despite an extension of deadline, to reach the Vatican in time and his entry was disqualified. The tragedy is the greater in that there is a very good chance that Kavanagh would have won the commission, and if he had, his reputation would have been secure for all time.

In 1950, with an architect named Daithi P. Hanly, he won a commission in competition against 14 other sculptors for a monument to those who died fighting for the Eire Republic in 1916 to be erected in front of the Dustom House, Dublin. His design for this shows the figure of Ireland striding forward towards freedom and being defended by a couching figure of Fionn Mac Cual using a bow and arrow. It was the largest bronze statue which had been cast in Ireland for thirty years.

The following year, 1951, he came to Auckland as Senior Lecturer in Sculpture at the Elam School of Fine Art in the University of Auckland. Here he remained until his retirement. In his first year in Auckland, he won a competition to design the Seal for the Medical Research Council of New Zealand. A number of stages in the design of this are shown in this exhibition (catalogue nos. 22-24).

Monumental commissions such as I have described are conceived as integral parts of the architectural context in which they are to be seen. This applies not only to relief panels but also to fully three-dimensional figures. They conform in theme and subject, in style and pose, and in detail and surface treatment to that context.

John Kavanagh, as we have seen, was trained in the full academic tradition and brilliantly continues that tradition in his work. It is basic to that tradition that the artist be a perfect craftsman, fully conversant with the tools and techniques of his art, steeped in the classic philosophy of art and prepared, where necessary, to subordinate himself to the demands of the commission, to work within conceptual and stylistic restrictions imposed both by the architectural context and by the academic tradition itself. World War II virtually ended that tradition, not because of a massive blood-letting, such as had decimated sculptors and other artists in World War I, but because the social and economic disruption of war accelerated the growth of the spirit of individualism that had begun in the previous three or four decades and that made artists no longer willing to be

subordinated to tradition nor to the strictures of society. Sculpture would no longer be subordinated to architectural context but would seek to dominate, or at least to be independent of that context.

John Kavanagh, the perfect embodiment of sculptural tradition, could not go along with the new philosophy, which for him was a non-philosophy of a non-art. Indeed, he has been known to refer to much of the contemporary art of the last quarter century as 'codswallop' and to deprecate the influence of present day art schools and the modern art movement. The war, which had seen the end of a vital academic tradition, also totally disrupted society both socially and economically. Finance for public commissions dried up for a number of years and then, when public money again became available in the early 1950's, the scene had changed and the modern school had taken over. Also, in coming to New Zealand to teach at Elam, Kavanagh had cut himself off from a cultured English society which could provide private commissions for portrait sculpture. The result was that, during his first twenty years in New Zealand, he received only one commission for a portrait head and one for a medal design, the one mentioned.

During this long period of teaching and in the years since his retirement, he has continued assiduously to sculpt, sketch and paint, largely without the catalytic impulse and encouragement of commissions. A number of portraits were of his friends: Anthony Stone, who wrote a brief tribute to Kavanagh for Landfall in 1968; A. W. S. McLaren, who was Senior Lecturer in Painting at Elam. One series of portraits was of condemned New Zealand murderers whom he modelled from photographs.

That he should have remained true to his art is a tribute to his character, to his Irish determination. That his art has retained its high level of perfection within his chosen field is shown by the invitation which he received in 1978 to exhibit at Lyons and by his winning the Grand Prix de Lyons with a bronze taken from the superb marble head of Georgia Leprohon which is featured in this exhibition (catalogue no. 15). Such acclaim does not come by chance; nobody wins in international competition, as Kavanagh has done time and time again, unless he or she has something fine and unique to offer.

The fact that Kavanagh has always worked within the framework of sculptural tradition does not mean that his art is eclectic, or anonymous, or has no character of its own. Far from it. His style, particularly his modelling for bronze, but also, though less obviously, his carving style, is characteristically and unmistakably his own.

His sculpture, no matter how stylised in general concept or in detail of execution, is always solidly based on natural form, especially the human figure. In the female nude, which for him as for so many other artists has been the subject par excellence, he gives the figure a pose which is at once sensuous and complex, with subtle changes of axis throughout the figure and with the hip jutting out provocatively and the head turned away as if in disdain from the spectator (catalogue no. 4). The face, chosen for its fine lines, has its features subtly exaggerated. The hair may have locks and strands stylised into sinuous curves and spirals (catalogue no. 15). In monumental clothed figures,

where problems of foreshortening must be considered or symbolic statements made, the clothing over the drawn-out figure sweeps down in fluted drapes with sharp folds and abrupt angles which give an effect somewhere between Gothic and expressionistic and yet is neither. In voluptuous non-religious figures, the clothing clings to every rounded contour of the body (catalogue no. 5) or, in complete contrast, the masses of the clothing may be simplified into voluminous sub-geometric shapes, a little reminiscent of Ernst Barlach but with a more 1930's flavour (catalogue no. 11). In clothed portrait busts the clothing may be worked in flat planes and sharp angles.

In panels of relief or in free-standing sculpture symbolising aspects of work or industry, the modelling becomes architectural or machine-like as required, but still incorporates the abrupt angles and changes of plane that are so characteristic of his more naturalistic figures.

In medal designs, which Kavanagh normally works in reserve in intaglio, the mythological figure may be posed with a symmetry of limb placement which only a god could adopt (catalogue no. 23). Every element of design and lettering is perfectly balanced in scale and placement and shows a thorough knowledge of elements of design going back to the superb coinage of ancient Greece. Indeed, Kavanagh often incorporates motifs, such as dolphins, that go back two and half thousand years to Greek coin designs that are still acknowledged as unsurpassed.

In all this work, Kavanagh always remains true to his materials. In stone carving the form of the original block is implicit in the finished design. In modelling in clay or plaster, the plasticity of the material is emphasised rather than disguised and is faithfully recorded in bronze.

To listen to John Kavanagh talk about his work or reminisce about the people he has known in the British art world, is to glimpse a broad panorama of a traditional society that is now largely passed away. The world of art has new and very different values today and the time is probably for ever gone when artists with such deep discernment for and knowledge of the great ages of the past can mature and successfully practice their art. Where now will you find an artist who writes Egyptian hieroglyphics to practice his draughtsmanship or jingles ancient Greek coins in his pocket during class?

The world is that much the poorer.

CATALOGUE

All works are the property of the artist, except catalogue no. 15.  
All measurements are in millimetres, height before width unless stated.  
All directions are in reference to the sculpture not to the spectator.

1. Torso

stone

H. 405

This has been carved as an exercise in extreme stylisation and accentuation of the female figure, designed within the limitations of an irregular block of stone, the rough surface of which can be seen on the right side.

2. The Satyr and Nymph c1930

bronze

H. 360

This figure group is a design for the centre portion of a fountain. It shows many features that will become characteristic of Kavanagh's sculpture: the sensuality and complex pose of the figures, the jutting out of the woman's hip, the strong stylisation of hair and features and the modulation of the surface treatment.

3. Portrait of C. St Clair R. Oakes, Rome Scholar in Architecture 1931 1932

bronze

H. 360

Exhibited: RA 1932

Oakes won the Rome Scholarship in the year after John Kavanagh and, although they were in different fields of study, they were naturally thrown together at the School. This is the earliest portrait in the exhibition and displays the stylisation of hair, subtle accentuation of features and complex plastic surface modulation that were to become hallmarks of this sculptor's modelling.

4. Tanith 1933

Bronze

H. 1650

Exhibited: Rome, Anglo-American Association (Piazza di Spagna), 1933; RA 1933 (no. 1576); Paris Salon de la Société des Artistes Français, 1934

Awards: Honourable Mention, Paris Salon, 1934

Tanith is Kavanagh's supreme work on the female nude and one of the best of his Italian period portraits, second only to Wanda Tiburzzi which won the Bronze Medal at Paris in the following year. The treatment here is naturalistic; only the face and hair are given a degree of stylisation by the sculptor. The complexity of the pose, with its changing axes and asymmetrical disposition of the body, and the subtlety of the modelling are superb. The accompanying photograph is of the original clay version.

A review of the Royal Academy Exhibition, 1933, by Kineton Parkes in Apollo, June 1933, includes the following remarks:

'In the Central Hall is a strange, somewhat uncouth knobbly figure of a woman, "Tanith", in bronze, life-size, by John F. Kavanagh, who is a Prix de Rome 1930 Scholar. It has originality, and is its author's most important work to date. He has, however, two others in the exhibition; a bust "Wanda Tiburzzi", and one of an old Italian. Both are full of character, and if we combine this feeling for character with the fresh feeling for form in "Tanith", there seems to be a considerable chance of the making of a fine sculptor of this definitely plastic artist.'

5. Cora Ann: The Spirit of Youth c1935

bronze H. 750

Exhibited: RA 1946 (no. 1176)

This is the model for a memorial to a retiring headmistress which Kavanagh modelled for Roundhay Girls' High School, Leeds. The final bronze statue is two and half metres high and was cast in five sections. The sculptor has a full scale model in plaster still in his studio, seen in the accompanying photograph. Both the plaster and the small scale bronze model here show the design planning for the joining of the separate castings in the finished work. Joints occur at the waist, at the tops of the arms and at the neck.

The figure is wearing the Spartan running chiton and has Kavanagh's characteristic exaggeration of modelling and pose, emphasized by the clinging of the clothing over the body. Kavanagh has a preference for sharp folds and abrupt angles in his depiction of dress which show here in sinuous ridges over the body and flaring sleeves, designed to throw strong shadows to emphasize the modelling of the figure.

6. Torso 1936

bronze H. 335

Exhibited: RA 1936

This female nude torso and head has been modelled in clay as an exercise and later cast in bronze. It bears a strong relationship to the nymph in The Satyr and Nymph (no. 2).

7. Madonna and Child 1940

bronze H. 540

Exhibited: RA 1948

In 1940 Kavanagh was commissioned to carve a statue over the main entrance of the Catholic Hospital, Lambeth Road, London. This is a bronze from the model and a photograph of the final work, three and a third metres high in Portland stone, is displayed nearby. Comparison of the two will show the differences of interpretation between stone carving and modelling in clay. It would be proper to call this bronze a small scale version, rather than a model, of the final work and this points up the fact that the creation of a large work of sculpture from a model is not a matter of mere mechanical enlargement. Each version is a work of art in its own right. Each has its own validity. In this case, the differences are accentuated by the differing materials, but there are also considerable differences of interpretation: the manner in which the Madonna holds the Child; the arms of the Child are raised in the bronze and his head merges into her shoulder; the headdress is different and the drapery more flowing in the stone than in the bronze. When Kavanagh carved the final sculpture, he created the work of art anew.

8. Model for Relief Panel: Navvy 1940

plaster 455 x 460

9. Model for Relief Panel: Mechanic 1940

plaster 458 x 458

Signed: KAVANAGH (vertically at centre)

These are models for two of the sixteen panels which Kavanagh designed and carved for the new Walthamstow Town Hall. They were not, of course, intended for display, unlike the bronze models in this exhibition (nos. 2, 5 and 7). The modelling is only taken far enough to indicate the final effect and guide lines and reference marks have not been eliminated. Work on models such as this is a combination of carving from a solid block of plaster and modelling, where areas have to be raised or altered, by the addition of wet plaster. The result is a bastardised style, neither one thing nor the

other. However, it is interesting to see the panels in relation to the rest of the exhibition because they illustrate the sculptor's working habits and methods and they show design relationships with pieces as diverse as Work (no. 10) and some of the medal designs (nos. 22, 23).

10. Work 1940

stone

H. 2108

The Walthamstow Town Hall design included five over life-size figures in addition to the reliefs. Work is an early concept for one of these, rejected in favour of the more simplified design finally adopted. Here Kavanagh is translating into a free-standing figure the design concepts of the reliefs to produce a highly stylised, symbolic figure. As in the designs for The Spirit of Youth (no. 5) and Madonna and Child (no. 7), likewise intended to be installed high above the viewer, the figure has been lengthened to counteract foreshortening and the modelling is conceived to cast strong shadows which would aid in 'reading' the figure from a distance.

11. Lady Jane c1940

bronze

H. 530

Exhibited: American Tour 1944 (New York, Chicago, Los Angeles) in aid of the British Red Cross during World War II (with works by Frank Dobson, Jacob Epstein and Henry Moore).

Lady Jane is a work of apparent simplification of form in which the clothing has been fluffed out into great voluminous masses. Closer examination, however, will reveal some of the same complexity of modelling as in the other female figures, coupled with a very plastic surface treatment. The sculptor's revelling in sensuality and 'cheeky' sense of humour are revealed by the unexpected modelling of the buttocks.

12. Head of Sheila Maillard 1940

plaster

H. 280

Kavanagh modelled this head about three years after the portraits of John W. Dulanty, Sir Francis Joseph and Cardinal Hinsley with bronzes of which he had such success at the Royal Academy. Sheila Maillard has never been put into bronze, yet it would make one of his finest bronze portraits and deserves to be so immortalised. In the high degree of stylisation of the hair it is very close in spirit to the marble Georgia Leprohon (no. 15), but the differences between stone carving

and modelling are clearly exhibited by such a comparison. Kavanagh is a first rate plastic artist and, if he had remained in England modelling such portraits, he would have rivalled Jacob Epstein in this field. Indeed, in some respects a head by Kavanagh has more 'style' and presence than an Epstein and, without doubt, Kavanagh is the more versatile sculptor. This raises the thorny question of the fickleness of fame. What makes one man famous or infamous while an equally or more talented man is neglected? The answer, it seems, must be pure chance.

13. Greyhound 1940

plaster

H. 305

Kavanagh is a countryman and has always been close to animals, especially horses. His very studio is an old stable by the Ellerslie Racecourse. His ability at modelling animals was called upon by Jagger for the Delhi elephants (see Introduction) and is marvellously exhibited by this model for a greyhound. Animals are far more difficult than people to portray and require a special talent, shown here by the lithe modelling of the head and body combined with the stylised treatment of the genitals.

This was modelled on commission for George East and Fred Brookes, two London bookmakers, at the Greyhound Racing Association, Hackridge, south of London, and the final figure was cast in silver.

14. Head of Krushev 1961

plaster for bronze H. 300

Signed: J.F. KAVANAGH (on right of neck)

Exhibited: New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington, 1961;  
London 1961 (bronze)

Bibliography: Landfall 85, March 1968, pl. 3

This head of the Russian President was modelled from photographs, the only portrait here not from life. It is remarkably accurate and lively portrayal of a remarkable personality. With squinting eyes, his head cocked on one side, Krushev is obviously about to make one of his famous forceable and uninhibited statements before taking off his shoe and pounding on the table.

15. Miss Georgia Leprohon, aged 4 1977

marble

H. 205

Exhibited: (bronze) Paris Salon, 1978; Lyons, 1978

Awards: Grand Prix de Lyon, 1978

Kavanagh's mastery of his craft is nowhere better expressed than in this head of a young child. The soft style of modelling of the features captures the very essence of childhood and combines perfectly with the extreme stylisation of the locks of hair. Virtuosity of design goes along with superb manual control.

Kavanagh has testified to the difficulty of portraying a young child, paralleled by the difficulty of portraying animals in the fact that it is almost impossible to get them consciously to hold a pose. To this in a child is added the fact that over the period of modelling, which may stretch to fifteen or twenty sittings, a period of some months, the child at this stage is growing and changing in features before the artist's eyes. The result, like that in very early photographs with their one or two minute exposures, is a generalisation, an evening-out of features. Such a result we have seen in the work of Charles Despiau (Quarterly 56, 6) not because of the extreme youth of the sitter, but because of Despiau's habit of requiring up to sixty sittings for a portrait. Kavanagh, by contrast, can if need be take a likeness in one day of modelling, the result of a three month period at the Royal College of Art when he was required to model a different head every day, each day's head being returned to the clay bin at the end of the day. Such discipline is nowhere to be found today. It forces the sculptor to concentrate on the basic form of the head, to go in effect directly to the heart of an artist's problem as a painter or draughtsman must do in life class at art school.

16. Design for Obverse of Medal for Rome Prize in Architecture 1936

plaster

154 x 150

This was an unsuccessful design originally for the King's Poetry Medal in May 1935, the commission for which was won by Dulac against three other contenders. The accompanying photograph shows that design at its final size. Kavanagh reused the model for the Rome Prize medal but finally submitted a very different design (no. 17).

A female sprite, in a typically complex Kavanagh pose, rides the sea on the back of a dolphin, while other dolphins and swallows besport themselves about the central figure. Elements such as these are translated directly from classic Greek coins.

17. Medal for Rome Scholarship in Architecture 1936

bronze

D. 76

Kavanagh won an international competition for this medal to be presented annually by the Royal Institute of British Architects. It incorporates the Arms of the Institute, lions rampant on either side of a column and the inscription ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS 1834, the year being the date of founding of the Institute. The reverse has a blank central field surrounded by the inscription ROME SCHOLARSHIP IN ARCHITECTURE (see no. 21).

18. Trial Cast No. 5 from Design for Obverse of Medal for Rome Scholarship in Architecture 1936

plaster

D. 165

Inscribed: TRIAL CAST No 5 .36 K (reverse in pencil)

Separate designs must be made for the front (obverse) and back (reverse) of a medal or coin. The original design for a medal such as this (no. 17) is carved in plaster in intaglio, that is in reverse in the actual form of the die that will later punch the medal. Trial casts are taken from this at stages of the work until the sculptor is satisfied. The final design is then mechanically reduced to the size of the finished medal to produce the die and preliminary strikes are made by the mint master in lead to check the accuracy and quality of the die. Three such strikes are shown, two of the obverse (nos. 19, 20) and one incorporating both obverse and reverse (no. 21, shown here in the reverse).

19. Preliminary Strike of Medal for Rome Scholarship in Architecture: Obverse 1936

lead

D.86

20. Preliminary Strike of Medal for Rome Scholarship in Architecture: Obverse 1936

lead

D.87

21. Preliminary Strike of Medal for Rome Scholarship in Architecture: Obverse and Reverse 1936

lead

D.76

See catalogue no.s 17-18

22. Trial Cast from Design for Reverse of Medal for Rome Scholarship in Architecture 1936

plaster 172 x 172

This is an alternative design for the reverse of the medal which was rejected in favour of the plain design (no. 21). The cast has unfortunately been broken but is included here because of the design relationship with the Walthamstow reliefs (nos. 8, 9) and Work (no. 10). The fine control of scale and design and the manner in which the figures and other elements are stylised are typical of Kavanagh's work.

23. Preliminary Stage in Design for Obverse of Medal for the New Zealand Medical Research Council 1951

plaster 93 x 107

Kavanagh's practice of working in reverse intaglio (cf. no. 18) is clearly demonstrated in this unfinished early stage of the design. Pencil work on the design shows the sculptor working out his ideas and a comparison with the cast from a design (no. 24) and with the photograph of the finished design nearby shows that certain elements were to be altered, notably the angle of the sword and the positions of the symbols to either side of the figure.

24. Cast from Design for Obverse of Medal for New Zealand Medical Research Council 1951

bronze 100 x 104

25. Alternative Design for Obverse of New Zealand Medical Research Council Medal 1951

plaster 150 x 152

Not used.

26. Cast from Alternative Design for Obverse of New Zealand Medical Research Council 1951

bronze 75 x 78

Both designs for this medal depict Aesculapius struggling with the serpent of disease.

27. Design for Reverse of New Zealand Crown Piece 1953

plaster 154 x 153.

When Queen Elizabeth came to the throne in 1953 new coinage, Great Seal and other symbols had to be designed. In the usual manner competitions were arranged and this is an unsuccessful entry for the new five shilling piece. Although the design was highly praised by the judges it was not what they were looking for as a symbol, which was a naturalistic design more readily associated with New Zealand.

28. Cast from Design for Lion Rampant Armorial on Mt. Albert War Memorial 1952

plaster

356 x 375

The design for this has been worked in intaglio as for a medal (see catalogue no. 18). The ability to think and work in reverse is similar to that required by an engraver or etcher, but the difficulty is greatly increased by being in three, not two dimensions. In addition to reversing orientation the sculptor has to translate positive form into negative form. The trials casts are for the same purpose as artist's proofs in an engraving or etching, to check the progress of the design.

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We also had access to catalogues of some of the Royal Academy exhibitions in which the sculptor appeared, newspaper clippings, letters and testimonials, photographs of various commissions and other works and the certificates of the honours awarded to the artist (some exhibited here). This data has been checked and supplemented by personal reminiscences of the artist and his wife Margaret.



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