



BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON  
THE ART OF A. LOIS WHITE

AN EXHIBITION ORGANISED BY THE AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY

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THE ART OF A. LOIS WHITE

FIGURE PAINTER, SOCIAL COMMENTATOR, portraitist, creator of sumptuously decorative allegories: A. Lois White (1903-1984) is one of New Zealand's most distinctive painters of the mid twentieth century. Although she is well known through several frequently reproduced works, this is the first exhibition to reveal the full range of her art.

The critical controversy provoked by *War makers* in 1937 secured White's reputation as a political commentator. Here are the other works in which she responded to topical issues such as the Depression and World War II. Her 'war art', with its uniquely civilian viewpoint, contrasts with official war art of the time.

Yet alongside her political compositions White was also painting stylised groups of women at leisure: dancing, playing music, swimming, or relaxing. These luscious fantasies are accompanied by Biblical subjects, usually from the Old Testament.

White's work stands apart from New Zealand's dominant tradition of landscape painting, as well as from modernist schools of abstraction. She gradually became alienated from her peers, and her themes – religious, political, sexual – were often lost on contemporary audiences.

Puritanical decorum and nationalist art history both conspired in the neglect of A. Lois White's true achievements. Now, her blend of traditional narrative and Art Deco eroticism speaks to a generation more ready to accept a stylised art which unashamedly celebrates the female body.



**Auckland City Art Gallery**  
4 March – 8 May 1994

**Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton**  
23 July – 4 September 1994

**Dunedin Public Art Gallery**  
17 September – 13 November 1994

**Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington**  
10 December – 5 February 1995

**Hawke's Bay Museum, Napier**  
15 February – 2 April 1995

**Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch**  
14 April – 4 June 1995

*By the Waters of Babylon: the Art of A. Lois White* was organised by guest curator Nicola Green and the staff of the Auckland City Art Gallery.

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LIST OF WORKS

(\* Denotes works in the touring exhibition)

*Self-portrait* c.1925  
oil on board, 396 x 292 mm  
private collection, Auckland

*Auckland waterfront* c.1925  
etching, 128 x 124 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery, purchased 1987

\**Life studies* c.1927  
oil on textured paper, each 380 x 280 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

*Life studies* c.1927  
pencil, each 385 x 280 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

\**Life studies* c.1927  
pencil, each 385 x 280 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

\**Standing nude* c.1929  
oil on cardboard, 340 x 145 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

*Bathers* c.1929  
pencil, 560 x 758 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery, purchased 1981

*Prothalamion* 1929  
watercolour, 303 x 600 mm  
private collection, Wellington

*Self-portrait* c.1930  
oil on textured paper, 385 x 280 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

\**Self-portrait* 1932  
oil on board, 505 x 405 mm  
Alexander Turnbull Library

\**Persephone's return to Demeter* 1933  
oil on canvas, 1310 x 1310 mm  
Dunedin Public Art Gallery

*Industry* c.1934  
pencil, 560 x 425 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

*Street mission* c.1934  
watercolour, 302 x 230 mm  
Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt

\**Street mission* c.1934  
oil on textured paper, 520 x 380 mm  
Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North

\**On the air* c.1935  
oil on cardboard, 508 x 407 mm  
Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North

\**Self-portrait* c.1935  
oil on cardboard, 495 x 400 mm  
private collection, Auckland

*Palm Sunday* c.1935  
oil on canvas, 1400 x 4645 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

*\*Religion and life* 1935  
oil on canvas, 990 x 737 mm  
private collection, Auckland

*\*Funeral march* 1936  
oil on canvas, 720 x 930 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery, purchased 1936

*\*War makers* 1937  
oil on canvas, 705 x 825 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery, purchased 1970

*Deluge* 1938  
oil on board, 700 x 925 mm  
private collection, Wellington

*Summer gale* 1938  
watercolour, 210 x 288 mm  
The Rotorua Art and History Museum,  
Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa

*\*Bathers* c.1938  
linocut, 175 x 132 mm  
Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt

*\*Maoris cooking* c.1938  
linocut, 167 x 122 mm  
Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North

*\*Isthmus* c.1938  
linocut, 175 x 130 mm  
private collection, Auckland

*\*Decorative panel* c.1938  
oil on cardboard, 510 x 415 mm  
private collection, Auckland

*Expulsion* c.1939  
oil on board, 490 x 389 mm  
private collection, Wellington

*News* c.1939  
oil on cardboard, 305 x 355 mm  
private collection, Wellington

*\*Winter's approach* 1939  
oil on canvas, 653 x 495 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

*\*Weeping women* 1939  
oil on cardboard, 495 x 390 mm  
private collection, Waikato

*\*Personal design* c.1940  
pen and ink, 92 x 92 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

*\*Pattern inspired by rain* 1941  
oil on cardboard, 510 x 410 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery, purchased 1992

*\*Victims of invasion* 1941  
oil on cardboard, 533 x 610 mm  
Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust

*\*Civilised* 1942  
oil on cardboard, 765 x 610 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery, purchased 1992

*War victims* c.1942  
watercolour, 265 x 351 mm  
Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North

*\*Allegro* 1942  
varnished watercolour, 350 x 425 mm  
Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt

*Phases of life* c.1943  
watercolour, 170 x 350 mm  
private collection, Wellington

*\*Fleet's in* 1943  
oil on cardboard, 505 x 400 mm  
private collection, Auckland

*\*John Gilpin's ride* 1943  
varnished watercolour, 335 x 540 mm  
private collection, Wellington

*Fire* 1943  
varnished watercolour, 558 x 354 mm  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

*Trio* c.1943  
watercolour on cardboard, 390 x 337 mm  
private collection, Wellington

*\*Fire and Fish* c.1943  
oil on paper, each 340 x 270 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

*\*Design* c.1944  
varnished watercolour, 350 x 300 mm  
Bank of New Zealand Art Collection, Wellington

*Startled* 1944  
oil on cardboard, 590 x 483 mm  
Collection of the Good family, Auckland

*\*Collapse* 1944  
oil on cardboard, 750 x 605 mm  
private collection, Christchurch

*Wild waves* 1944  
oil on cardboard, 408 x 508 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery,  
presented by Margaret Thompson 1992

*\*Self-portrait* c.1945  
oil on board, 760 x 360 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

*\*scale drawing for Ode to Autumn* 1945  
pencil, 585 x 380 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

*Ode to Autumn* 1945  
oil on board, 595 x 396 mm  
private collection, Auckland

*scale drawing for Wind witches* 1945  
pencil, 600 x 470 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

*Wind witches* 1945  
oil on cardboard, 612 x 483 mm  
Collection of the Good family, Auckland

*\*Floral design* c.1945  
varnished watercolour, 360 x 280 mm  
Collection of Bil Vernon and Denis Cohn, Auckland

*Decoration* 1946  
varnished watercolour, 255 x 310 mm  
private collection, Auckland

- sketch for *Harbinger of storm* 1946  
oil on paper, 588 x 305 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
- squared-up study for *Controversy* 1946  
pencil, 420 x 535 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
- \**Hymn to Diana* c.1946  
oil on cardboard, 445 x 570 mm  
Waikato Museum of Art and History,  
Te Whare Taonga o Waikato, Hamilton
- Spring* 1946  
oil on board, 850 x 360 mm  
private collection, Auckland
- \**Brunette* 1947  
oil on cardboard, 570 x 390 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
- Blonde* 1947  
oil on cardboard, 435 x 355 mm  
private collection, Auckland
- Self-portrait* 1947  
oil on cardboard, 405 x 300 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery collection, purchased 1992
- Foolish virgins* 1947  
oil on board, 755 x 560 mm  
private collection, Auckland
- \**Eve tempted* 1948  
oil on cardboard, 405 x 305 mm  
private collection, Waikato
- \**Elijah taken up into heaven* 1948  
oil on canvas, 750 x 520 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
- \**Jubilation* 1948  
oil on cardboard, 585 x 380 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery, purchased 1990
- \**Study for Annunciation* 1948  
pencil, 485 x 355 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery, purchased 1948
- \**Hunter resting* 1949  
varnished watercolour, 293 x 337 mm  
Collection of Bil Vernon and Denis Cohn, Auckland
- \**Bathers* 1949  
varnished watercolour, 310 x 255 mm  
private collection, Waikato
- \**Girl with antelope* 1949  
oil on cardboard, 485 x 315 mm  
private collection, Auckland
- Girl in blue* 1949  
oil on board, 470 x 370 mm  
private collection, Wellington
- Portrait of a Polynesian woman* c.1950  
oil on cardboard, 503 x 413 mm  
private collection, Auckland
- \**Pat* c.1950  
oil on board, 460 x 350 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery, purchased 1988
- Nude* 1950  
oil on cardboard, 510 x 290 mm  
private collection, Auckland
- \**Jonah and the great fish* 1950  
oil on cardboard, 560 x 385 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery, purchased 1988
- \**Lizards* c.1950  
varnished watercolour, 200 x 500 mm  
Collection of Bil Vernon and Denis Cohn, Auckland
- Fish* 1950  
varnished watercolour, 285 x 235 mm  
private collection, Auckland
- \**Portrait of Mrs Thompson* 1951  
oil on board, 575 x 375 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery, purchased 1951
- \**Aspiration* 1951  
oil on board, 490 x 390 mm  
Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru
- \**Annunciation* c.1952  
oil on board, 855 x 587 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery, purchased 1988
- Self-portrait* c.1953  
oil on cardboard, 500 x 280 mm  
Fletcher Challenge Art Collection, Auckland
- \**Poi dance* 1953  
oil on board, 810 x 502 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery, purchased 1989
- \**By the waters of Babylon* 1954  
oil on cardboard, 790 x 490 mm  
private collection, Christchurch
- Gethsemane* 1954  
oil on board, 1205 x 1525 mm  
Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui
- Peat fire* 1954  
oil on board, 380 x 480 mm  
private collection, Auckland
- \**Back door* 1958  
oil on board, 600 x 446 mm  
Auckland City Art Gallery, purchased 1987
- \**Sleep* 1958  
oil on board, 580 x 760 mm  
private collection, Auckland
- Hiroshima* c.1960  
oil on board, 1490 x 985 mm  
Courtesy of James Wallace Charitable Arts Trust
- Father Christmas* c.1960  
oil on board, 815 x 630 mm  
private collection, Auckland
- \**No bus shelter here* 1960  
oil on canvas, 752 x 556 mm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
- Cover illustration: *Bathers* c.1938  
(Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt)