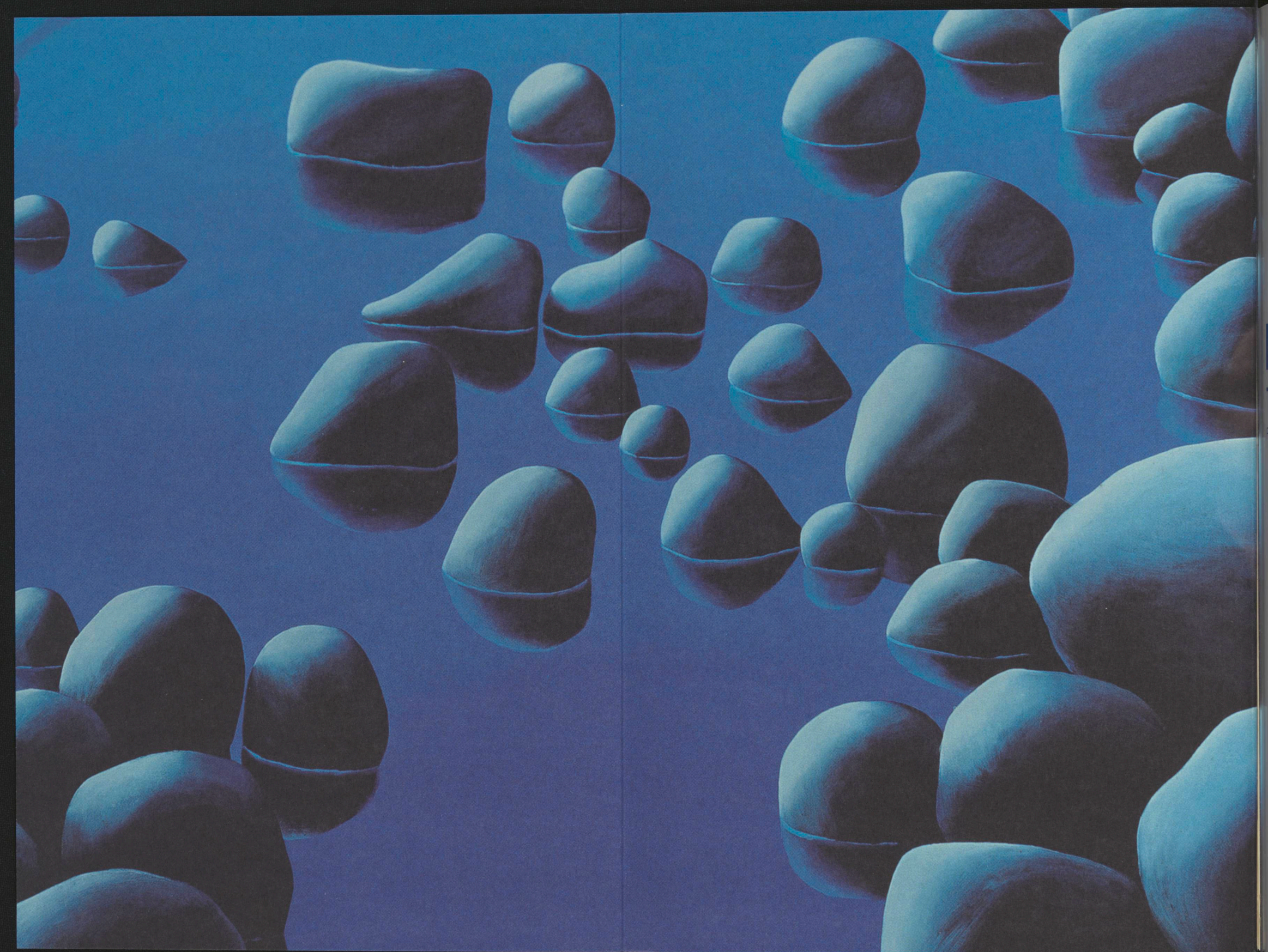


Michael Smither

The Wonder Years



Inside Cover Flap: Large blue pool with wave
invading 1970 [detail]



Michael Smither

The Wonder Years

Ron Brownson

Acknowledgements

Ron Brownson

Senior Curator

New Zealand and Pacific Art
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

First published in 2005 by Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki on the occasion of the exhibition *Michael Smither – The Wonder Years*, 3 September 2005 – 30 January 2006. Exhibition curated by Ron Brownson.

National Library of New Zealand
Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
Smither, Michael, 1939-
Michael Smither : the wonder years /
essay by Ron Brownson.
1st ed.

Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-86463-265-7

1. Smither, Michael, 1939- —Exhibitions.
I. Brownson, Ron. II. Auckland Art Gallery. III. Title.
759.993—dc 22

This book is copyright. Except for reasonable purposes of fair review, no part may be stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including recording or storage in any information retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publishers. No reproductions may be made, whether by photocopying or by any other means, unless a licence has been obtained from the publishers or their agent.

Copyright © 2005 Michael Smither: paintings, prints, drawings, texts
Copyright © 2005 Jim Barr and Mary Barr: chronology
Copyright © 2005 Ron Brownson and
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki: essay

Design by www.inhousedesign.co.nz
Editorial services by Michael Gifkins & Associates
Printed by Spectrum Print

Cover: *The family in the van 1971*

Principal Sponsor

 **ERNST & YOUNG**



I greatly appreciate Michael Smither's close aid and support in the preparation of this exhibition and associated publication. He made much research material available. Gian McGregor has also assisted with many aspects of the project's development. Trish Gribben and Ron Sang kindly provided all the textual and visual material from their book on the artist. Jim Barr and Mary Barr generously agreed to the reprinting of their incisive chronology on Michael Smither. The encouragement of these people has been essential to this project.

The following people have contributed significantly to the nature and scale of this project: Jack Body, Gregory Burke, Kate Button, Shirley Day, Linda Evans, Tim and Sherrah Francis, Marti Friedlander, Judith Fyfe, John Gow, Eric Hollis, Peter McLeavey, Paul Mitchell, Milly Paris, Ilana Paris, Zalman Paris, Justin Paton, Peter Shaw, John Todd, Jo Torr, Jennifer Twist, Linda Tyler, James Wallace, Tim Walker, Nigel Williams and Rae-Ann Sinclair, Kirby Wright.

I thank Michael Friedlander for his support, which has enabled the DVD documentary on Michael Smither and the first CD recording of the artist's *21 Piano Pieces* by David Guerin.

Sonya Korohina has project managed the exhibition. I am also grateful to my colleagues at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki for their support.

Portrait of my mother

1972



Foreword

Chris Saines

Director

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Michael Smither – The Wonder Years is the artist's first major exhibition at the Auckland Art Gallery. As it happens, Auckland was the first public gallery to acquire a Smither painting – the remarkable *Rocks, concrete and iron* of 1967. Since then, the work has become one of the most cherished and celebrated emblems of our collection, and Smither one of New Zealand's most renowned artists.

Much of what makes Michael Smither's art resonate so strongly in the imagination is his brilliant and idiosyncratic approach to realism. It is the sharply focused intensity of that vision that creates the emblematic feel of his work, where the subjects of his painting can appear fixed in a graphic and colour-saturated moment, 'stopped' in a cinematic instant.

Smither's paintings are memorable not because they are a literal account of the so-called real world, but because they are a symbolic and highly condensed account of the artist's imaginative life. It is his family and their ordinary domestic lives, the personal dramas and witness of his faith, the rural and littoral landscapes of Taranaki that largely populate this exhibition.

It focuses on the early years of Smither's life as an independent artist, the period 1964-78, when he returned to hometown New Plymouth after his time at the Elam School of Art. These decisive years set the course of a life-long artistic programme: to remain outside the centre, to exult in ordinary life, to reveal the uncommon beauty of our landscape and alert us to its vulnerability.

Michael Smither has been unrelentingly committed to his work for nearly fifty years now. He is not only one of our great painters – someone who understands how to create a compelling pictorial equivalence for experience – he is one of the most acute observers we have of New Zealand life. Little wonder that so many of his works have come to signify us as a people and this as a place.

I am deeply grateful to Michael Smither for helping us with the preparation of this exhibition. Michael has generously made his archival material accessible and has been more generous still with his time and hospitality over successive visits, as too has Gian McGregor. I wish to thank them for their support and their preparedness to take on the inevitable demands of mounting a major exhibition.

I also wish to acknowledge curator Ron Brownson, who has worked closely with the artist to produce an exhibition and publication of which they should both feel proud. Ron has again shown his ability to build a rich context for understanding through his reading of an artist's work. We are also grateful to Jim and Mary Barr for allowing us to incorporate their chronology into this catalogue.

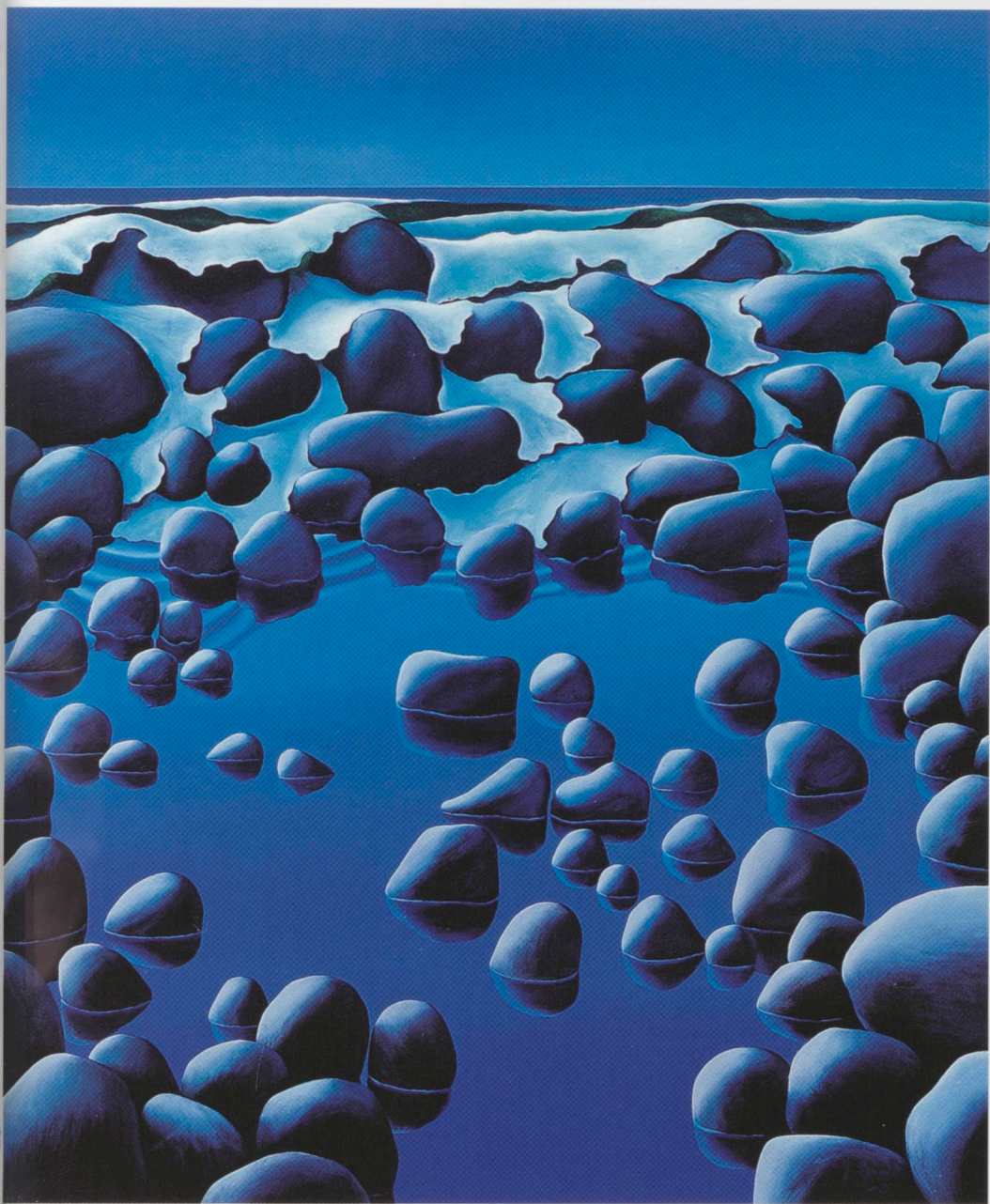
One of the unique features of this project is the addition of a video introduction to the work of Michael Smither, featuring an interview with the artist and made possible with the assistance of Gallery patron Michael Friedlander. His generous support has also enabled us to record, for the first time, a number of original piano works by Michael Smither that will premiere as part of this project.

I also wish to thank John Judge and Catherine Gardiner of Ernst and Young for their vital contribution to the exhibition and to this publication. It adds to an impressive list of monographic shows on major New Zealand artists presented by Ernst and Young over fifteen years. They have been joined by Aalto Colour and Montana Wines, whose history as sponsors is almost as long. My thanks go to them all.

Of course, many have contributed to this project – including a long list of most generous lenders, noted elsewhere – but none more so than Michael Smither himself. I reserve my warmest thanks for him.

Large blue pool with wave invading

1969



Michael Smither – The Wonder Years

Ron Brownson

Senior Curator

New Zealand and Pacific Art
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Realism is not what real things are like, but what things are really like.

*Bertolt Brecht*¹

I am painting my own situation. My work is very tied up with my life, with my childhood.

*Michael Smither*²

Art gives you an emotional map of your environment.

*Michael Smither*³

Michael Smither is a rigorously figurative painter whose art has paid tribute to New Zealand's regional surroundings. His work unites the identity of post-war provincial life with a striking and freethinking scrutiny of local reality that is severely emblematic as well as profoundly symbolic. Some of Smither's paintings have already attained the distinction of becoming national icons – they communicate provincial and domestic realities to an extensive demographic; from regions to cities, from young to old. His art acclaims the boisterously distinctive personalities of his home life, it politicises the fragile loveliness of endangered eco-systems and it visually articulates the experience of growing up a Roman Catholic.

It is an encouraging fact that Smither has devoted himself to creating art fulltime for nearly five decades. His self-motivation has resulted in one of the most staunchly persistent vocations ever lived by a New Zealand artist. While he has intentionally stood apart from the more fashionable styles of painting, he has also stayed away from the agenda-driven rhetoric intermittently encountered in New Zealand's art community. Like Don Binney, choosing to paint in the style known as realism, he placed his art apart from local responses to the post-World War II exploration of abstract, pop and conceptual art. He preferred what initially seemed to be, to some others, a traditionalist figurative style and then chose to focus on household scenes

and provincial landscapes. Nevertheless, he was not alone as an advocate for realism. His approach can be gainfully compared to the example of Rita Angus and Robin White, who similarly united the stimulus of domestic subject matter with overtly symbolic landscapes and intensely personal portraits. Then there is his religious subject matter. This work set Smither completely apart from contemporary painting practice; even Colin McCahon had retired from an explicit figuration of individuals in his 1960s religious paintings. When one looks at Smither in hindsight, the consequences of his long-term allegiance to his own subject matter and his slowly wrought and edgy figurative style become immensely impressive.

The national importance of Smither's art was first outlined in the exhibition and associated publication that Jim Barr and Mary Barr prepared for New Plymouth's Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in November 1984. *Michael Smither – an introduction* was an impressive account of the artist's achievements, organised by two of New Zealand's more incisive curators. Writing of a recent 1984 painting, *View of Motumahanga with squall* 1984, the Barrs described it as 'a chilling mixture of beauty and despair, love and anger'.⁴ That description acutely reflects the forceful responses prompted by an encounter with Michael Smither's art. His paintings render visual beauty as a startling confrontation with the rawness of reality.

Smither is one of the first post-war New Zealand artists to maintain a fulltime career as an artist from his early adulthood, so at the time that the Barrs presented his exhibition at the Govett-Brewster, he had already been working professionally for two decades. The 1984 exhibition was his first important survey exhibition at a public art gallery; it also occurred at a time when he had shifted the focus of his work away from figurative painting. While the exhibition was presented at three

¹ Kersten Stremmel, *Realism*, Köln, Taschen, 2004, p. 42.

² Trish Gribben, *Michael Smither – Painter*, Auckland, Ron Sang Publications, 2004, p. 14.

³ Michael Smither, *Dominion*, 4 December 1971.

⁴ Jim Barr and Mary Barr, *Michael Smither – an introduction*, New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1984, p. 67.

⁵ Michael Smither – an introduction was shown at the Fisher Gallery, Pakuranga.

⁶ Toss Woollaston was a distinguished earlier example of a regional artist who specifically chose to live in small towns. Nevertheless, he was still prevented from being able to work fulltime as a painter until he was middle-aged.

other venues, it was not displayed at the public art galleries of Christchurch, Dunedin or Auckland; the National Art Gallery in Wellington was the exhibition's only other major metropolitan venue.⁵ No substantial exhibition of Michael Smither's art has ever been shown in Auckland City.

The present exhibition, *Michael Smither – The Wonder Years*, assembles a key group of paintings, prints and drawings, some of which are already well known through reproduction yet have not been in the public eye for many years. I have deliberately limited this project's scope in order to acquaint a contemporary audience with the first period of the artist's career. The years 1964 to 1978 mark the beginning of the artist's professional life at Taranaki after his two years of study at the University of Auckland's Elam School of Art and his decisive return to his hometown of New Plymouth.

Early on, Smither decided that he would live well away from New Zealand's largest cities. Forty-five years ago that decision marked a truly notable determination; choosing to work fulltime as an artist away from the focus of an art community was like returning home to become a pioneer artist, living much like a local nineteenth century painter. Going back home may have been his choice, but it was still not an easy decision for an ambitious contemporary artist, especially one who had deliberately chosen to stay 'home' in the larger sense and not go 'abroad' to work.⁶

The 1960s and 1970s were a period of exceptional growth within New Zealand's visual art, with public and private art galleries recognising that there was an audience for contemporary work. Along with artists such as Don Driver and Tom Kreisler, both also in New Plymouth, Smither was part of the first generation of post-World War II painters who were learning that by choosing to live in a smaller-scaled community they could more easily dedicate themselves to their art.

From 1961 onwards, Smither contributed paintings to many group exhibitions, including the annual surveys of contemporary art organised by the Auckland City Art Gallery. These landmark shows, selected by director Peter Tomory, influenced the public's appreciation of contemporary art, while also revealing the current tensions between abstraction and figuration. The latter style tended towards overtly representational images while the alternative manner of painting staunchly advocated the international 'modernity' of abstraction. Smither dedicated himself to creating paintings that fell into three types: realist images inspired by his home life and family, provincial landscapes, and religious subjects.

Smither's paintings have never been limited by stylistic adherence to either abstraction or representation. He considers himself simply as a figurative artist, yet his paintings made in New Plymouth after 1964 are arguably more closely connected to the traditions of magic realism. He frequently utilises points of view that range from very low or high vantage points in relation to his subjects. This skewing of perspectives, from what a standing figure looks at, is in itself unconventional in local art and is characteristic of his paintings, prints and drawings from this first Taranaki period. His realism goes beyond direct representation into areas of metaphoric naturalism; we can easily see the essentials of his subject matter but it frequently appears to be also telling us a story. An obvious example of this process is the contrasting content in *Rocks, Concrete and Iron* 1967 where water-eroded rocks and starkly rectangular blocks of concrete utilise the same colour, while interspersed with rusting railway lines. This pictorial tension reinforces the commonly held notion that beauty is at its most effective when it is tainted with the presence of profane impurities.

Frequently, Smither's paintings concern themselves with the emotional nature of

Rocks, concrete and iron
1967



⁷ One also sees a concentration on the reality of living life in the art of such diverse painters as Pieter Bruegel, Stanley Spencer and Rita Angus, all of whom Smither acknowledges as artists whose work he admires.

⁸ Michael Smither to Ron Brownson, 6 December 2004.

⁹ Michael Smither to Jim Barr and Mary Barr, 13 December 1983, in Jim Barr and Mary Barr, op. cit., pp. 19–20.

¹⁰ Frances Hodgkins, Grace Joel, H. Linley Richardson, Edith Collier and Rita Angus all painted children at various periods in their career. None ever created a sequence of paintings that had as a work's central subject their own ongoing personal relationship with children. Only Jacqueline Fahey's paintings of the 1970s bear comparison.

personal relationships, be they with nature or with other people.⁷ While *Joseph Smither as Lone Ranger* 1973 is a wonderfully humorous image of a young boy dressed up for serious playtime in the garden, it also symbolises how early in life males learn to demonstrate a spirit of aggression. In a decade's time, the painting seems to be saying, this boy could be hurtling at great speed down a highway. By characterising anger as fun, and make-believe aggression as play, Smither reveals how much his art is concerned with the complexities of being human. Paintings such as this show that Smither's acute observation of individual character gives rise to a fascination with narrative to propel the 'story' of his images.

Smither has always been a prolific artist, maintaining a studio and a regular schedule of work. Making art has been his job. He has commented about his studio practice on a number of occasions: 'That is where I am what I am.' He attributes Elam School of Art with teaching him one particularly constructive lesson: 'the discipline of the job, to work from nine to four-thirty, is one of the most important things I have learnt.'⁸

In 1983, Smither noted to Jim Barr and Mary Barr that he employed two approaches to beginning his paintings: 'One; a spontaneous reaction to the idea I want to put down. Two, I've got an image in my head ... and I want to get it down as a symbolic image ... which seems to preclude any spontaneous work ... to me it's the image that is important, the paint becomes secondary.'⁹ Getting the image down has always been assisted by the fact that Smither is a voracious sketcher. Drawing rarely serves directly as a preparatory image for a particular painting; it acts rather as a kind of visual research, systematically investigating the nature of a subject so that he may know all about it. In support of his drawing, Smither has a prodigious visual memory for both forms and volumes, especially when they are being

transformed by physical movement and the shifting of light.

Smither's prints are a telling example of how skilled the artist is at reducing reality to its key elements. Through spending thousands of hours at the shoreline and in making countless drawings, he has learnt how to imaginatively project the physical reality of his subjects. Stylistically he often uses lessons gained from both abstraction and Pop Art to convey the essentials of specific topography. The contrasting weights of diverse incarnations of water as sea and as cloud in *Back beach* 1975 are handled with such assurance that the effects of smoke pollution on the atmospheric sunset become almost a charming subtext to the image's appeal. What works especially well in all of Smither's prints is the fact that they utilise the simplicity of mass and line to demarcate layers of silhouettes at different and identifiable moments of night and day. As such, prints form as important a role in his oeuvre as his powerful drawings.

In the history of the twentieth century, the term 'magic realism' is most frequently used to define a heightened form of response to reality in post-World War II literature. It delineates a genre of writing where time becomes a narrative element and the meticulous rendition of emotional attributes is especially theatrical. Smither has a parallel visual response to reality in his images: his focus on a narrative moment heightens what is real as inhabiting the actuality of its own living situation.

One of the key subjects of these Taranaki years was his family – his wife, Elizabeth, and their three children, Sarah, Thomas and Joseph. The domestic paintings and drawings that they inspired represent some of the most unrelenting celebrations of family life ever painted in New Zealand painting. The series has no comparable local antecedent and its example has never been copied by any other painter.¹⁰

The artist has often explained his approach to his family: '... I don't use them as models. All the work is done from memory. When I see a situation, I make a sketch to get the idea into my head ... Later, I put it all together in my imagination. Since my models live with me, there is no need for any posing. I know their expressions, the shape of their hands, all that sort of thing. This lets me eliminate unnecessary things which I might feel obliged to portray if they were posing.'¹¹ In 1983, looking back at his domestic paintings, he further added: 'People thought I was joking. They couldn't believe what I was doing to my family.'¹²

Smither certainly encountered a confused response from some people to this series. They were not interpreted as being visually staged but as images about true lives, as if their purpose was like that of a documentary painting in the tradition of the eighteenth century conversation piece.¹³ While a conversation piece is certainly an informal group portrait, such works never have the intensity of Smither's domestic series. His project was as much about family life as it was about the characterisation of individuals. He wanted to paint the nature of the relationships that existed in his family; the fact that the domestic paintings were sometimes misinterpreted has to do with the way that some viewers believed that showing such relationships was tantamount to the artist being somehow disloyal to his wife, relatives and children. The subject of marriage, and the bonds with one's children, is hardly ever encountered in New Zealand painting as if it is a subject; perhaps there is a fear of revealing a domesticity that is as private as it is familiar.

Jim Barr and Mary Barr received a letter from Michael Smither that illuminates the artist's belief that honesty is one of the pre-eminent virtues of personal character: 'I saw the way that children were real devils in disguise. They held this incredible wisdom and ability

to do the right things and the wrong things with great panache. When they loved, they really loved and when they hated, they really hated.'¹⁴

The domestic paintings have a raw, direct response to encounters of mother with child, child with child, grandparent with child, child with object and action. Feeding and playing, being good and being naughty, there is the gamut of everydayness to Smither's images of growing up. Yet he, as the father, as the painter, the Dad, never includes himself in any of the domestic scenes as a participant in the action. He remains the observer; tension pervades the domestic paintings and they recoil from anything that is passive.

Smither notes: '... none of the paintings I made were sort of pretty paintings, they were uncompromising sort of things and I think ... they were good paintings and they were really accurate in lots of ways – before women's lib got off the ground in New Zealand they were paintings for women's libbers because they were about the sort of tensions and things that exist between mothers and children – the difficulty of being a mother and a child. I always saw that aspect of it rather than the pretty child lying down on the rug sort of thing, the way that everybody liked to see the child.'¹⁵

What he does show, and this was difficult for some early viewers, is the sheer amount of work that is involved in bringing up three children: the figure of the mother frequently looks assailed by her offspring.

For Michael Smither, art acts like a map that can guide one towards life; not images of life but images of life being experienced. His work is a testament to the narrative of his life, to where he has lived and who he has lived with and about how he honestly feels. He celebrates the expedition from being a child to being part of an extended family in his New Plymouth paintings. His dedication to ecology and the ocean's life, to each specific

¹¹ Peter Taylor, 'One of the rare ones he does what he likes', *New Zealand Herald*, 29 October 1973.

¹² Michael Smither to Jim Barr and Mary Barr, 17 March 1983, in Jim Barr and Mary Barr, op. cit., p. 23.

¹³ Mario Praz notes: 'The term "conversation piece" is used in England for paintings, usually not of large dimensions, which represent two or more identifiable people in attitudes implying that they are conversing or communicating with each other informally, against a background reproduced in detail.' Mario Praz, *Conversation Pieces: A Survey of the Informal Group Portrait in Europe and America*, The Pennsylvania University Press, University Park and London, 1971, p. 33.

¹⁴ Michael Smither to Jim Barr and Mary Barr, 28 March 1983, in Jim Barr and Mary Barr, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁵ Judith Fyfe interviews Michael Smither – tape 5: on Sketchbook 25, p. 114. Oral History collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand.

¹⁵ Ann Lloyd, 'Portrait of the artist as hunter', *Thursday*, 25 September 1975, p. 12.

¹⁷ Gerstle Mack, *Gustave Courbet*, London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1951, p. 89.

¹⁸ Michael Smither, *New Zealand Geographic*, January/February 2004, p. 52.

landscape's own distinctive ambience, is always at the call of emotional authenticity. Considering Smither's paintings from the 1960s and 1970s reinforces the implications of his 1975 statement: 'You can't just be a painter. I'm intensely interested in what human beings are. They are an incredible phenomenon.'¹⁶

Gustave Courbet was one of the first modern realist painters whose approach was to observe reality and then to paint one specific, everyday moment. Courbet wrote: 'Painting is the representation of visible forms ... The essence of realism is its negation of the ideal.'¹⁷ There is never any idealisation of reality in Smither's art. He focuses on the vernacular, the personal and the known.

Smither frequently uses the device of 'stopped action' in his approach to movement, further substantiating each painting's narrative content. This perspective on realism as projecting a heightened reality is in contrast to local abstract painting with its aspirations to intellectual purity. Smither's work stands apart too from the intuitive tumult of Toss Woollaston's painterly brushwork or Colin McCahon's inspired and heroic metaphors of New Zealand as a site for spiritual agony. His 'magic' realism conjures up a scenario where all the elements are compositionally harmonised but placed together in deliberate and heightened contrast. *Rocks with mountain* 1968 is a compellingly reductive view of Taranaki: the five elements of sky, mountain, water, rocks and tractor are all seen from a worm's-eye view and the mountain is made even more huge by the scale of the rock-strewn shoreline. While each painting is a signpost to the essentials of place, Smither's more personal vision seems in opposition to Christopher Perkins' earlier, yet equally renowned, painting *Taranaki* 1931, where the identity of place literally grows out of the province's many dairy factories.

As one of the emblems of Smither's career, *Rocks with mountain* is more than just a symbolic painting in the manner of Perkins' *Taranaki*. The artist comments: 'I used to stay on a farm here with a friend of mine. He lent me his tractor to drive out on the farm, which extended onto the coast. It's an incredible environment. Like a big stone toe on the land, these rocks form a barrier between the sea and the farmers who live behind. You wouldn't think nature could do anything with a place like this, but it just goes ahead and does it anyway. I was painting this at the time of the Czechoslovakian revolution. Looking up, I saw the red tractor, the mountain, and the pool in the foreground with pink coralline on the rocks – and it struck me as being like the blood of martyrs, squeezed out and trickling down into these waters. So, there is a political aspect to this painting.'¹⁸

There has never been an extensive tradition of religious painting in New Zealand. When images of Christian testimony have occurred it has usually been because of commissions by either Roman Catholic or Anglican Churches. In the twentieth century, the two earlier artists to make personal images of biblical narratives were Colin McCahon and A. Lois White. No artist of Michael Smither's generation could have been unfamiliar with their previous example, yet by the time that Smither encountered Lois White at the Elam School of Art the period of her religious paintings was long over and Colin McCahon's images about Christian faith had become devoid of any specific human figures.

In 1968, after completing his series of paintings dedicated to St Francis, Smither wrote about the works at the time of their exhibition at Auckland's Barry Lett Galleries: 'For an artist such as myself (being largely parochial) the chance to react to the world's strife and problems ... are limited. I cannot paint what I do not know or experience directly. But my religious paintings are a

Rocks with mountain

1968



¹⁸ Catalogue introduction, *Michael Smither – religious paintings and drawings*, Barry Lett Galleries, 1968, unpaginated.

²⁰ Trish Gribben, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

²¹ Jim Barr and Mary Barr, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

²² Trish Gribben, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

different matter and are made up of things I am intensely familiar with, to the point where they become part of my environment. Born a Catholic with a strict moral upbringing, the lives of the saints and apostles, have been, if not my daily bread at least my weekly instruction, and in this field I am able to give expression to some of the moral and intensely spiritual emotions that concern me.'¹⁹

A spectacle of human drama pervades Michael Smither's religious images which are frequently full of pain or conflict. *St Francis rolling in the thistles* 1968 is emotionally charged by the self-scourging of the Saint in the presence of bovine copulation. This is much more than a mixture of the sacred and the profane because St Francis's ordeal is treated as if is occurring in the present time in New Zealand. Of this painting the artist comments: 'I felt that the story of St Francis overcome by lust on an evening stroll through a valley resonant with the sighs of local lovers and throwing himself into a bush of thorns needed a Taranaki interpretation. No pain, no gain?'²⁰

Crucifixion 1966 and *Christ driving the money lenders from the temple* 1972 take two much painted events from the New Testament and transform them into breathtaking illustrations of murder and the depravities of usury. The faceless Christ in *Crucifixion* serves as a cipher not only for a specific person but also for a universal being, here argued over by rampant seagulls.

The English painter Stanley Spencer frequently employed biblical narratives and his art is an apt parallel for Smither's own handling of his own local experiences of place and people. In contrast to Spencer, Smither prefers to simplify faith's narrative drama into one major pictorial action so that his images have an immediately personal relevance for viewers. As depictions of human faith experiencing a state of confused turbulence, Smither's religious

works are without parallel in New Zealand's painting of figurative images.

Michael Smither's landscape paintings, on the other hand, have expanded our notions of how we can respond to place. He ranges from a distant perspective to close up, he throws horizons from the bottom of a view to its top, and he looks at places during day and night. One memorable example is *New Plymouth Railway Station* 1967. The full moon over the Tasman Sea is one of the city's many unforgettable sights and Smither contrasts this God's-eye view with a panoply of light sources; even the glowing silhouette of a steam train's engine stoker is included. By focussing on a medley of details, shown as they are actually seen at night, the painter exploits a heightened naturalism.

The Barrs in their 1984 essay noted: 'Smither has been consistently concerned with working from the specifics of his experience. In his landscapes, this orientation is constant...[He] has always needed to record his experiences and perceptions, both to retain and analyse them for himself and to share them with others.'²¹ *Rocks, concrete and iron* 1967 shows how acutely aware the artist is about human degradation of the natural environment. The painting is replete with an ecological perspective that is probably a generation ahead of the national consciousness. The beauty of the ugliness does not lessen the environmental significance of industrial rubbish becoming the landscape's man-made detritus. Smither writes of his concern: 'I grew up witnessing attempts to keep the sea at bay after the depletion of the sand flow along the coast by the introduction of breakwaters and dredging for harbour that transferred the sand out to sea. I slowly began to recognise the whole process and became involved to save beaches. While this scene of chaos was of great aesthetic interest it is also the recognition of our aggressive responses to the powers of nature.'²²

Two icons of the artist's career are among his most quintessential landscapes. *Rock pool with Neptune's necklace* 1968 and *Large blue pool with wave invading* 1969 are signature works, unconventional in that they are actually rock- or shore-scapes. Much of the artist's youth was spent exploring the local shoreline and his knowledge of the ways seawater encounters rocks is profound. He is an experienced diver and fisherman, each of these pursuits influencing the course of his life and his art's subject matter. In *Large blue pool with wave invading* the way rocks break the speed of a wave and then quickly calm the arriving water to a limpid stillness is palpable. It has summer's penetrating sunlight entering water-worn rock crevices that are contrasted with algae-surfaced and super-smooth stones.

The first person publicly to acclaim Michael Smither's accomplishment as a painter was Dr Bernard Smith, Australia's celebrated art historian. Smith had met Smither during a visit to New Plymouth in 1965 to advise on the establishment of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. In 1966 he offered to organise in Melbourne an exhibition of 60 paintings and wrote for the *Melbourne Age* about the works in the exhibition:

Perhaps it is only because he lives rather hidden away in New Plymouth that we have not seen Smither's work before.

Smither impresses me deeply as one of those rare beings, a natural painter. I mean an artist who uses paintings as a language which reveals every aspect of his experience. He does not stifle his pictorial life with a firm straight-jacket of style, to which everything must be bent. Family life, Mt Egmont, underwater subjects, all demand different treatment.

It takes courage to respond so variously to life these days, when so many buyers want only a name to stick to a style-tag.

Yet with the apparent variety one may discern an instinctive feeling for tone, that enviable gift as essential for pure abstraction as pure naturalism.

However, there is more than tone: there is also commitment and vision. When I first saw Smither's North Island landscapes they struck me with the force of an illumination.

For other New Zealand painters I had noted the close-cropped acid green endlessly undulating hills were always seen in their pettiness, as land stripped and exploited, robbed of its noble natural cover. The country is full of Oedipus artists pouring hatred and scorn upon the work of their fathers.

For Smither, however, there is something more than outrage to be seen in the stripped hills. There is a great feeling of space and energy. It takes spiritual courage to see New Zealand that way.²³

Elizabeth Young, also an Australian art historian, presented another perceptive evaluation of Smither's work in her 1971 book *Figuratives Now: Five Australasian Painters*. Young wrote:

Most down to earth and uncompromisingly realistic, yet at the same time most mystical ... is the New Zealander, Michael Smither. Like the members of the Kitchen Sink School in England, Smither has found an inexhaustible fund of subject matter in the domestic scene, the ordinary routines of family life – making the bed, bath time, washing up – the daily round of work and play. His wife and children, especially his flaxen-haired daughter Sarah, figure constantly in his paintings; they are individuals, they are also symbolical figures in the drama of humanity.²⁴

²³ Bernard Smith, in Patricia Gribben, 'Painter is working his way to serenity through his art', *New Zealand Herald*, 25 February 1967, p. 9.

²⁴ Elizabeth Young, *Figuratives Now: Five Australasian Painters*, Melbourne, The Aldine Press, 1971, pp. 41–42.

New Plymouth Railway Station
1967



Thomas under table
1970



²⁵ P. Æ. Hutchings, 'Young Contemporary New Zealand Realists', *Art International*, XVII/3, March 1973, p. 14.

²⁶ Trish Gribben, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

²⁷ P. Æ. Hutchings, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

²⁸ Another figure that may also be considered an outsider is Ronald Hugh Morrieson (1922-1972), a writer whose books have an air of provincial gothic realism and who lived in Hawera, South Taranaki.

These two early accounts of Michael Smither's paintings emphasise just how much his art is generated by the transformation of everyday experience into narratives about family relationships. P. Æ. Hutchings described Smither's domestic paintings as being the 'social democratic living arrangements of its inhabitants'.²⁵ By personifying his domestic interiors as if they are like painted stills of theatrical performances, Smither constructs figurative 'homescapes'. The interior surroundings of his domestic life and the landscapes of his exterior environment are, in Smither's eyes, mutually inclusive. Each is a part of the same location. Such integration between the world that exists 'outside' and the world that exists 'inside' is one of the artist's key successes.

The French term *mise en scène* is employed in film and theatre to describe the setting of an event as it relates to what is occurring within it. Smither's domestic paintings always present a combination of setting and event whereby the action is summarised in an instant which becomes symbolic of the image's meaning – as in Henri Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment'.

Landscape and domestic tableau are brilliantly combined in *The family in the van* 1971, of which the artist comments: 'This image has found its way into our imaginations. Who are these people? Where are they from? Where's the driver? The painting is based on a photo I took of my family in the old ambulance.'²⁶ P. Æ. Hutchings earlier commented:

This family-group is at once a social democratic document, showing a moment of ordinary middle-class life, and an image of homo-viator [human traveller]. The mountains, here part of the landscape of central Otago in the South Island, do more than repeat the softened corners of the van's window frames: they come right inside the cabin. This 'coming in' is a notion which is rendered beautifully by

placing of the child's stubby fingers on the dashboard, and by the meticulous but deliberately irregular rendering of the grips on the steering wheel. The people are journeying through a landscape, which in an old but efficient van they dominate; but it is a countryside which, in a psychological sense, seems to dominate them. They, coated and cowed like pilgrims – it is cold in New Zealand when it is cold – are there on the landscape's terms not theirs.²⁷

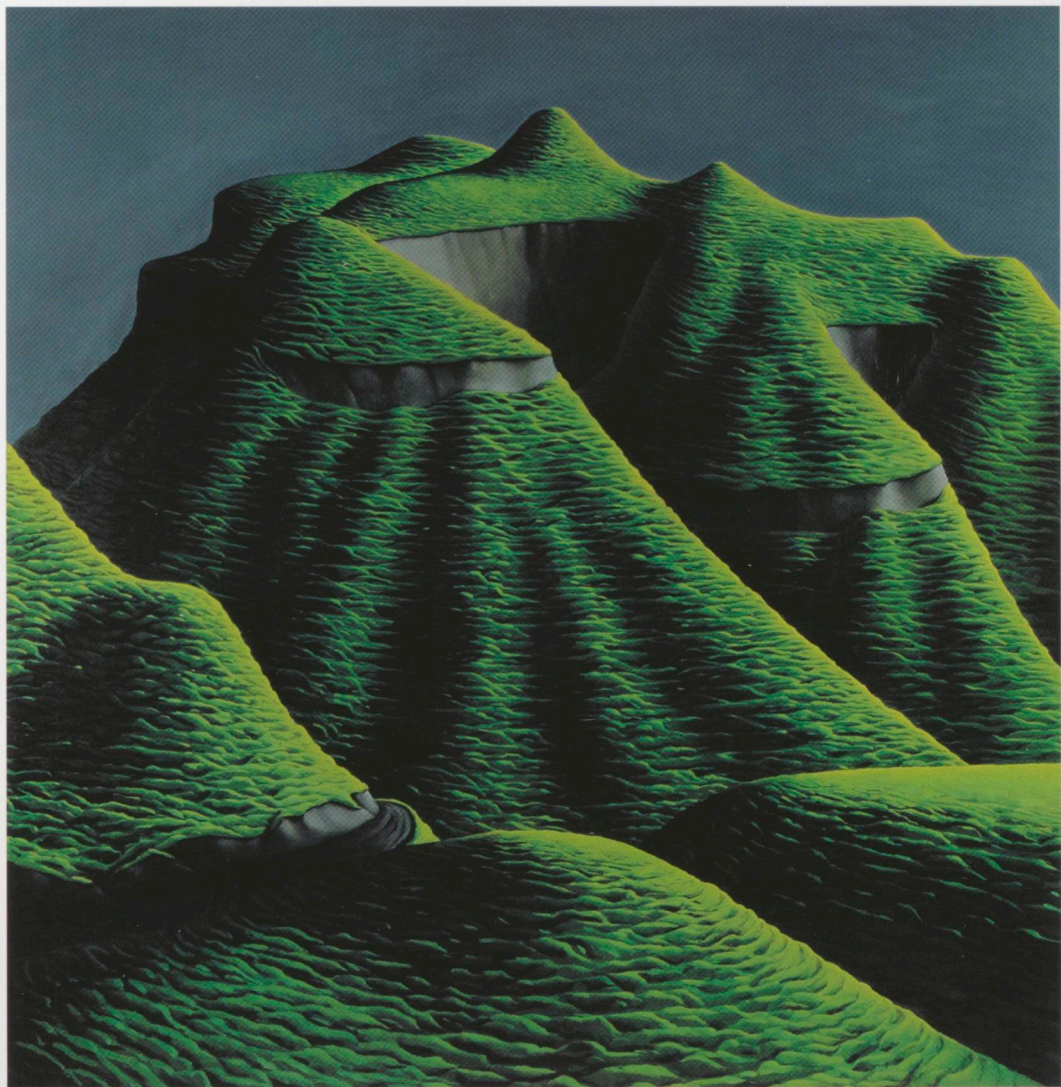
Michael Smither's art is based on the integrity of his own personal experience and opposes any kind of cynicism while still being entirely self-referential. It is confident, knowing the nature and scale of its subject; it is unafraid to examine the home truths which reach out from reality. He scrutinises individuals and reveals authentic human insights with his domestic, religious and landscape paintings. Figurative realism is his signature as he reports on how he is living his life as an artist. Being a New Zealand artist is a pivotal theme; Smither's private life in the provinces has become the imaginative stimulus to the very public nature of his art.

Smither's depiction of everyday subjects promotes the artist's reputation as a maverick realist working with what was sometimes regarded as too homely for art; he treated provincial subjects with a realist style when realism itself was already considered by some commentators to be unfashionable. Today, it is apparent that by having committed himself so intently to his own stylistic direction, Michael Smither belongs more closely to the centre of New Zealand's art history simply because he has retained the customary practice of an articulate visionary, for which some other local visual artists are also cherished. While Smither is certainly one of New Zealand's eminent living artists, he has always fostered an identity akin to that of the rural 'outsider'.²⁸

Harry, Thomas and Sarah on bed
1969-1970



Hills at Tongaporutu
1972



St Francis rolling in the thistles

1968



Boys fighting over pink plastic gun

1978

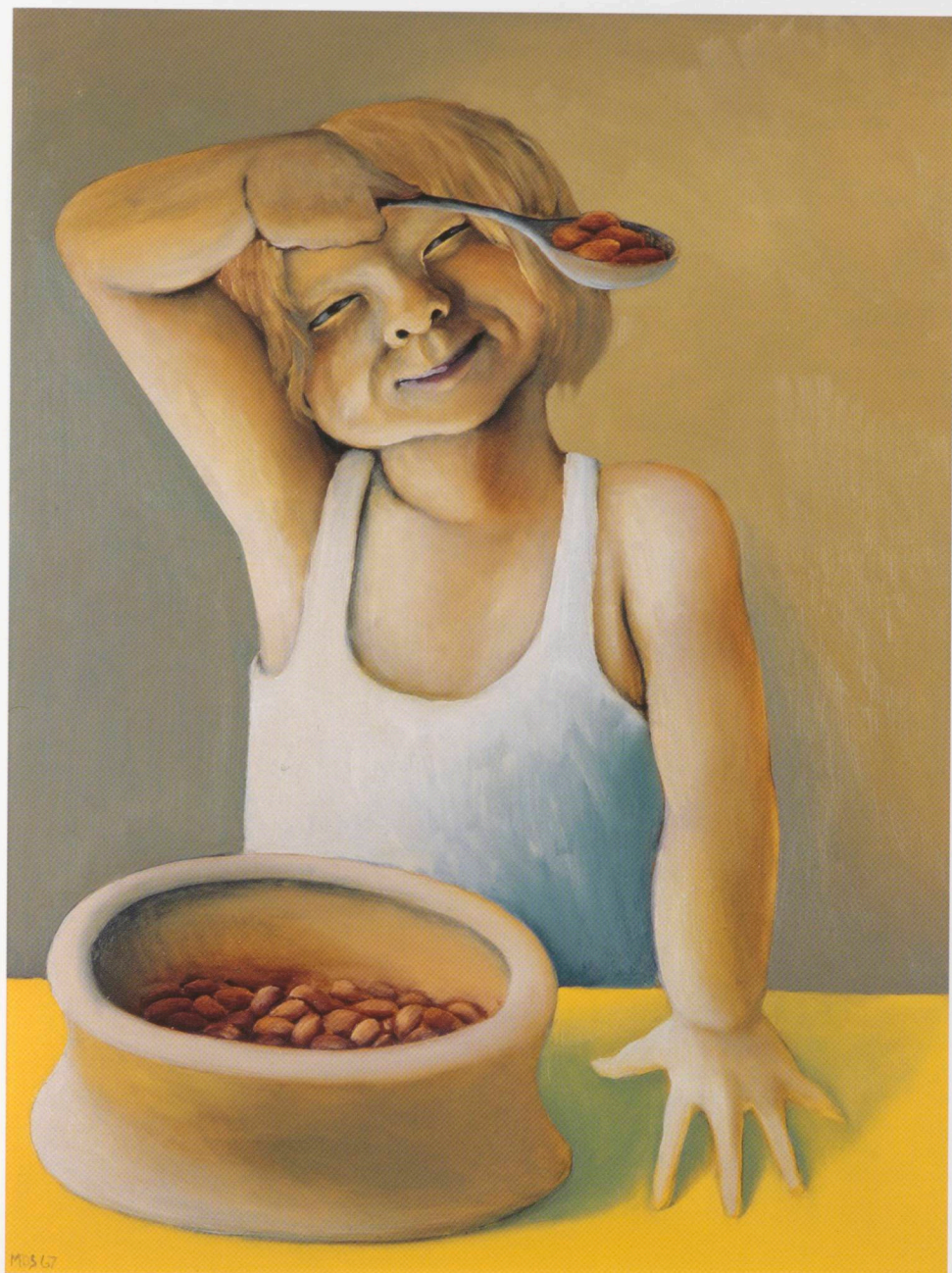


Large composition with Harry folding napkin
1968



Sarah eating baked beans

1967



Michael Duncan Smither born at New Plymouth on 29 October 1939 to Mary Ellen (née Duncan) and Reginald Edward (Bill) Smither.

Educated at St John Bosco School, Fitzroy, New Plymouth and New Plymouth Boys' High School.

1958

Leaves school and works at Ivon Watkins Dow's New Plymouth factory which later appears in his *Paintings for the Revolution*. His main interests are art, music and underwater diving. Many of his paintings from this time have an underwater theme. Lives with his parents at 48 Doralto Road. His father takes samples of his work to A.J.C. Fisher, Director of the University of Auckland's Elam School of Fine Arts. Smither is accepted for the next year's enrolment.

1959

Attends the Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, where he is taught by A. Lois White, Robert Ellis, Peter Brown, John Weeks, Kees Hos and Peter Tomory. Among his contemporaries are Stanley Palmer, Don Binney, Suzanne Goldberg and Malcolm Warr. Spends holidays in New Plymouth where he has, among others, a job in a car spray shop which introduces him to the lacquers he will later use in his paintings.

1960

Leaves the Elam School of Fine Arts in July but remains in Auckland supporting himself by designing posters and painting portraits of National Orchestra members. Although he is keen to get an illustration job in newspapers, he is unsuccessful. At the Auckland City Art Gallery sees *Contemporary Australian Painting* which includes work by Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale, William Dobell, and also *Contemporary Japanese Woodcuts*.

1961

Exhibits in first *Group 60* show in New Plymouth but spends most of the year painting in Auckland. Part-time jobs include painting backdrops for plays, portraits on commission and a coffee bar mural. Sees *Painting from the Pacific* at the Auckland City Art Gallery in May and is particularly impressed by the Japanese work. Pieter Bruegel the Younger's *A Village Fair* is purchased by the Mackelvie Trust. First solo exhibition held at Moller's Gallery results in a number of sales. *Cell structure* is selected by Peter Tomory for the Auckland City Art Gallery's *Contemporary New Zealand Painting* exhibition during November. Later, the show tours the country. Four works from the Moller's exhibition are published in the December issue of the literary magazine *Mate* (no. 8). Returns to New Plymouth for Christmas.

1962

Spends most of the year in Patearoa, Central Otago, painting and doing part-time jobs. Exhibits paintings including a series based on hoarfrost in Dunedin. Returns to New Plymouth and begins his first drawings of rocks.

1963

Lives at 37 Breakwater Road and works as trawlerman for a commercial fishery. Marries Elsie Harrington (Elizabeth) 31 August. Begins making silk-screen prints.

1964

Starts first rock pool paintings in January. Moves to 48 Mill Road. Paints a number of still lives on the 'utensil' theme. His sculpture *Victoria reigns* is shown at the New Plymouth Public Library and causes great public controversy. Moves to the Gables. Visits Eric Lee Johnson at Waihi in September. Sarah Smither is born 16 November.

1961

Selected exhibitions
Solo: Auckland, Moller's Gallery.
Group: Auckland City Art Gallery, *Contemporary New Zealand Painting*. New Plymouth Public Library, *Group 60*.

1962

Selected exhibitions
Solo: Auckland, Moller's Gallery.
Group: Auckland City Art Gallery, *Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Sculpture*.

1963

Selected exhibitions
Solo: Auckland, John Leech Gallery, New Plymouth, Taranaki Museum.

1964

Selected exhibitions
Solo: Wellington, Artides Art Gallery, New Plymouth, Bernard Woods Art Centre, New Plymouth, Taranaki Museum, New Plymouth Public Library, *Victoria reigns*.

1965

Selected exhibitions
Solo: New Plymouth, Taranaki Museum, Auckland, John Leech Gallery, Auckland, Giotto Art Gallery, *Collection of sketches and linocuts by Michael D. Smither*.
Group: Christchurch, Pan Pacific Arts Festival exhibition, Auckland City Art Gallery, *New Zealand Painting 1966*, Auckland, John Leech Gallery, Opera House basement, *Group 60*.

1966

Selected exhibitions
Solo: Melbourne, Argus Gallery, *Michael Smither Paintings*. Hamilton Art Gallery.
Group: Auckland City Art Gallery, *New Zealand Painting 1966*, Auckland, John Leech Gallery, Palmerston North Art Gallery, *Manawatu Prize for Contemporary Art*.

Self-portrait
1975



Michael Smither in his studio, New Plymouth
1978, photograph by Marti Friedlander



1967

Selected exhibitions

Solo: Whangarei, Reyburn House, Northland Society of Arts.

Group: Ashburton Society of Arts, Third annual arts exhibition in the Arcadia. Christchurch, Durham Street Art Gallery, The Group, Palmerston North Art Gallery, Manawatu Prize for Contemporary Art.

1968

Selected exhibitions

Solo: Hamilton Art Gallery, Waikato Society of Arts, Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries, Religious paintings and drawings. Palmerston North Art Gallery, Religious paintings by Michael Smither. Auckland, John Leech Gallery, Melbourne, Argus Gallery.

Group: Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries, Benson and Hedges Art Award, Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries, This land. Christchurch, Pan Pacific Arts Festival, 100 New Zealand painters. Melbourne, Pinacotheca Gallery, The Essentialists (tours to Brisbane, Adelaide and Sydney).

1969

Selected exhibitions

Solo: Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery, Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries, Dolphins and lovers. Christchurch, Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Exhibition of paintings and drawings. Dunedin, Dawsons Gallery. **Group:** Washington, Smithsonian Institution, Exhibition of New Zealand modern art. Dunedin, Otago Arts Society, 93rd annual exhibition. Sydney, Blaxland Gallery, The Essentialists.

1965

In March begins designs for Stations of the Cross to be placed in a modernised St Joseph's Church. *Madonna and child* is selected for the Auckland City Art Gallery's *New Zealand Painting* exhibition. Australian art historian, Professor Bernard Smith, arrives in New Plymouth to advise on foundation of Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. He meets Smither and sees his work; also undertakes to organise an exhibition in Melbourne the following year. Advises on plans for Govett-Brewster Art Gallery with John Mathews while constructing cut metal sculpture for St Pauls, New Plymouth.

1966

Sculpture of St Paul is installed at St Paul's Roman Catholic Church at Spotswood, New Plymouth in February followed by intense public controversy. Travels to Melbourne, Australia in April and stays with Professor Bernard Smith and his wife. Exhibition at the Argus Gallery, arranged by Smith. Writes piano score for short film on Australian artist Anne Graham. Returns from Australia in June. Shares studio space with Australian John Maynard who is in New Plymouth to set up the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, and Don Driver who is working on a large mural for the New Plymouth Airport.

1967

Thomas Smither is born 11 May. Paints *Study for baptism of Christ*. Commissioned to produce a stained glass window depicting the Transfiguration for Ramsay House, Victoria University, Wellington. Uses resins to paint directly onto glass and perspex. *Rocks, concrete and iron* purchased by the Auckland City Art Gallery.

1968

Two rocks pools accepted for the Benson and Hedges Art Award in February. Returns to Melbourne for his second exhibition at the Argus Gallery in March. Awarded H.C.

Richards Memorial Prize of \$1000 by Professor Bernard Smith at the Brisbane Art Gallery, Queensland for *The colander*. Formally commissioned to produce the 14 Stations of the Cross for St Joseph's, New Plymouth. Works on a series of black and white rock pool studies for *Landfall*. Commissioned to produce a cover for Maurice Shadbolt's novel *This Summer's Dolphin*.

1969

In January draws the dolphins at Mt Maunganui Marineland. After a prolonged battle, the New Plymouth clock tower is demolished. *Large blue pool with wave invading* exhibited at Peter McLeavey Gallery in Wellington. Leaves the Gables in March and travels with his family to Patearoa, Otago. *Dolphins and Lovers* series exhibited at Barry Lett Galleries in June; Maurice Shadbolt's *This Summer's Dolphin* is launched at the opening. Selected to provide work for the New Zealand Pavilion at Expo '70 in Osaka, Japan. Exhibits with the Essentialists at Blaxland Galleries, Sydney. Travels to New Plymouth in August to install *Stations of the Cross* at St Joseph's; they are officially blessed in September. Awarded the 1970 France Hodgkins Fellowship.

1970

Takes up Frances Hodgkins Fellowship at the University of Otago, Dunedin. Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth opens in April. Shares studio space with Ralph Hotere and Jeffrey Harris. Meets Tony Watson, Mozart Fellow. Paints crosses in memory of Rita Angus. Joseph Smither is born 17 November.

1971

Returns to New Plymouth in February and is awarded A.S.P.A.C Fellowship to Japan. Returns to live at 19a Mt View Place. Exhibits with *Figuratives now*, Hawthorn City Art Gallery, Melbourne; the book *Figuratives now* featuring the Essentialists is launched at the opening.

1972

Visiting lecturer at Victoria University Extension, Wellington. Paints *Joseph with bear and bottle* and finishes *Christ driving the moneychangers from the temple*.

1973

Spends much of his time producing prints with his father and starts building a new studio onto the house. Asked to submit designs for Beehive mural at New Zealand's Parliament. Commissioned to design dustjacket for Dick Scott's book *Ask that mountain*.

1974

Foyer mural commissioned for new Shell BP and Todd Oil Services offices in New Plymouth. Works on mural for Robert Jones House in Wellington.

1975

Begins *Paintings for the revolution*.

1976

Commissioned by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council to draw in the Rotorua area during the Pan Pacific Arts Festival.

1977

Starts rebuilding track down to Paritutu Beach and planting the cliffs. *You, me, us* exhibition at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in July with emphasis on public participation in art. Illustrations to *Ten for St Francis* by Elizabeth Smither published in *Islands* 18. Begins Gribben family mural in Auckland.

1978

Begins working on sound-of-colour theories, giving up painting to devote himself to music and environmental issues.

1979

Completes harmonic mural for New Plymouth War Memorial Hall. Active in the fight for a sewage treatment plant for New Plymouth.

1980

Starts experiments with driftwood on the Back Beach and campaigns with New Plymouth City Council to prevent the erosion of local sand dunes. The twelve *Polyphonic chords* are first exhibited at the Dowse Art Gallery, Lower Hutt. Paints pavement mural in Liardet Street, New Plymouth.

Chronology by Jim and Mary Barr, with additions by Trish Gribben and Ron Brownson.

The chronology has been deliberately restricted to cover the period explored in the exhibition *Michael Smither – The Wonder Years*.

1970

Selected exhibitions
Solo: Dunedin, Dawsons Limited Exhibition Gallery. Dunedin, University of Otago Library. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery, *An exhibition of paintings by Michael Smither*. Dunedin, Otago Museum Foyer, *M.D. Smither Frances Hodgkins Fellow 1970*, University of Otago.
Group: Auckland, John Leech Gallery, 1970 festival exhibition. Osaka, Japan, Expo '70 exhibition. New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Acquisitions 1969-1970*. New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Taranaki review*. Palmerston North Art Gallery, Manawatu Centennial Prize for Contemporary Art. Christchurch, Canterbury Society of Arts, *The Group*. Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, *New Zealand Art of the Sixties*. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery. Christchurch, Canterbury Society of Arts, *Otago Arts Society*.

1971

Selected exhibitions
Solo: Timaru, Aigantighe Art Gallery. Christchurch, Canterbury Society of Arts. Auckland, John Leech Gallery. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery. Dunedin, Dawsons Exhibition Gallery.
Group: Palmerston North, Manawatu Art Gallery, *Centenary collection*. Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries, *Earth/Earth*. New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Taranaki review 2*. Melbourne, Hawthorn City Art Gallery, *Figuratives now*. New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 111 *views of Mount Egmont*. Taumaranui Art Society, annual exhibition. Palmerston North, Manawatu Art Gallery, *Print/Pac, Manawatu Prize for Contemporary Art, Printmaking 1971*.

1972

Selected exhibitions

Solo: New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Michael Smither paintings prints drawings*. Wellington, Victoria University Library. Lower Hutt, Dowse Art Gallery, *One-man show of work by Michael Smither*. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery, *An exhibition of watercolours*.

Group: New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Taranaki review 3*. Palmerston North, Manawatu Art Gallery, *Manawatu Prize for Contemporary Art 1972*.

1973

Selected exhibitions

Solo: Palmerston North, Manawatu Art Gallery, *Domestic paintings*. Auckland, John Leech Gallery, Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery, *Domestic paintings 1966-1973*. New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Domestic paintings*.

Group: Wellington, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, *Manawatu Art Council permanent collection at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts*. Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries, *Landscape - a survey exhibition*. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery, *Watercolours, drawings and prints*. Palmerston North, Manawatu Art Gallery, *Drawing invitational*.

1974

Selected exhibitions

Solo: Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries, *Watercolours*. Auckland, John Leech Gallery, *Back Beach series*. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery, *Works on paper by Michael Smither (1959-1974)*. **Group:** Christchurch, Canterbury Society of Arts, *Art N.Z. '74*. Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries, *New year/New works*. Auckland, New Vision Gallery, *Gallery choice*. Auckland, New Vision Gallery, *Portraits by contemporary New Zealand painters*. Auckland, John Leech Gallery, *Group 74*. India, *Sixth international graphic art exhibition*. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery, *New Zealand on paper*. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery, *Watercolours, drawings and prints*.

1975

Selected exhibitions

Solo: Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery, Hamilton, Waikato Art Museum, Auckland, John Leech Gallery, *Michael Smither new paintings*.

Group: Auckland, John Leech Gallery, *Group 75*. New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Exhibition of Taranaki Art Societies and independent artists*. Nelson, Suter Art Gallery.

1976

Selected exhibitions

Solo: Hamilton, Waikato Society of Arts Studio Gallery, *Exhibition of retrospective work by Michael Smither - on loan from private collections in the Waikato*. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery. Auckland, Peter Webb Galleries, *Recent paintings*. Christchurch, Brooke Gifford Gallery. Rotorua, Rotorua Museum, *Commission for Pan Pacific Festival*.

Group: New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Taranaki review 1976*. New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Painting in Taranaki*. Auckland, Auckland City Art Gallery, *New Zealand Drawing*.

1977

Selected exhibitions

Solo: Thames, Pofflatt Gallery. New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *You, me, us*. Rotorua, Rotorua Art Gallery, *Inaugural exhibition*. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery, *Eleven paintings*.

Group: Auckland, Auckland City Art Gallery, *New Zealand prints*. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery, *Works on paper and prints*.

1978

Selected exhibitions

Solo: Rotorua, Rotorua City Art Gallery. Thames, Pofflatt Gallery, *Retrospective exhibition of drawing*. Hamilton, Aquarius Fine Arts Ltd, *Retrospective drawings exhibition 1964-1977*. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery.

Group: Auckland, Peter Webb Galleries, *Rangitoto special*. New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Taranaki review 1978*. Whangarei, Reyburn House, Northland Society of Arts. New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *The Govett-Brewster's great show of its purchases over ten turbulent years*. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery.

1979

Selected exhibitions

Solo: Rotorua, Display Art Gallery, *Exhibition of drawings in retrospect*. Auckland, John Leech Gallery. Auckland, Denis Cohn Gallery, *Paintings for the revolution*.

1980

Selected exhibitions

Solo: Auckland, John Leech Gallery, *Taranaki panels*. Hamilton, Studio Gallery, *Michael Smither - retrospective drawing*. New Plymouth, Taranaki Arts Centre. Lower Hutt, Dowse Art Gallery, *Polyphonic chords*. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery. **Group:** Christchurch, Canterbury Society of Arts, *Humour and satire in painting*. New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Carnival of the animals*. Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery.



Bibliography

Books

- Jim Barr and Mary Barr, *Michael Smither: An Introduction*, New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1984
- Elizabeth Caughey and John Gow, *Contemporary New Zealand Art 1*, Albany, Bateman, 1997
- Michael Dunn, *Contemporary Painting In New Zealand*, Roseville East, Craftsman House, 1996
- Trish Gribben, *Michael Smither – Painter*, Auckland, Ron Sang Publications, 2004
- Alexa M. Johnston, *Anxious Images*, Auckland, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1984
- McKenzie, Stuart, *An Exhibition, Including Christ Driving The Money Changers From The Temple*, by Michael Smither, Wellington, Adam Art Gallery, 1999
- Gregory O'Brien, *Lands & Deeds: Profiles Of Contemporary New Zealand Painters*, Auckland, Godwit, 1996
- Justin Paton, *Hills Of Gold: Michael Smither's Central Otago*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 2000
- Michael Smither, *M.D. Smither, Domestic Drawings*, Wellington, National Art Gallery, 1985
- Elizabeth Young, *Figuratives Now: Five Australasian Painters, A Critical Evaluation*, South Yarra, Aldine Press, 1971

Articles

- Jim Barr and Mary Barr, 'Get real: recent paintings by Michael Smither', *Art New Zealand* 69, 1993/94, pp. 44-47
- Penelope Bieder, 'Changes in the landscape', *New Zealand Herald*, 6 November 2004, pp. 14-16
- Peter Cape, 'Michael Smither', *Landfall* 108, 1973, pp. 339-347
- David Eggleton, 'Glory', *Listener*, 22 January 2005, pp. 38-40
- Trish Gribben, 'Identity thrives at Birds Nest', *Art New Zealand* 104, 2002, pp. 60-63
- Robert Leonard, 'To my father the printer', *Midwest* 2, 1993, pp. 35-38
- Patricia Sarr, 'The commodities of the human spirit', *Art New Zealand* 7, 1977, pp. 42-43
- Simpson, Peter, 'A renovating virtue: Michael Smither's spots of time', *Art New Zealand* 85, 1997/98, pp. 34-36

Audiovisual

- Michael Smither* [filmstrip], Wellington, Department of Education, Visual Production Unit, 1981
- Michael Smither* [sound recording, 29 minutes], Wellington, Department of Education, Visual Production Unit, 1982
- Michael Smither* [video recording, 30 minutes], directed by Darcy Lange, Auckland, Darcy Lange, c.1999

Alphabetical List of Works

- Alfred road bridge with trout* 1968
oil on board
880 x 1095 mm
private collection, Auckland
- The artist's mother* 1975
oil on board
963 x 683 mm
The Dowse, Lower Hutt
- Back beach* 1973
screenprint
724 x 610 mm
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
gift of Michael Smither
- Back beach* 1975
screenprint
388 x 309 mm
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
gift of Michael Smither
- Back beach rock* 1974
oil on board
1230 x 1234 mm
Terry and Angela Boon collection, New Plymouth
- Big city* 1970
oil on board
915 x 612 mm
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington
gift of the Friends of the National Art Gallery, 1984
- Blowing out matches* 1969
oil on board
1215 x 910 mm
Williams/Sinclair collection, Wellington
- Blue rock pool* (light version) circa 1974
screenprint
553 x 395 mm
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
gift of Michael Smither
- Boys fighting over pink plastic gun* 1978
oil on board
1545 x 1200 mm
private collection, New Zealand
- Children at breakfast time* 1969-1970
oil on board
911 x 911 mm
Hocken Library Uare Taoka o Hakena, University of Otago, Dunedin
Charles Brasch bequest
- Christ driving money changers from the temple* 1972
oil on board
1210 x 1696 mm
Victoria University of Wellington art collection
- Crucifixion* 1966
oil on board
1013 x 1210 mm
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
- Dolphin and lovers, with onlookers* 1971
oil on board
1260 x 960 mm
private collection, Tauranga
- Domestic interior* 1968
pencil on paper
525 x 610 mm
Chartwell Collection
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki
- East end roundabout* 1979
oil on board
2435 x 3660 mm
courtesy of John Leech Gallery, Auckland
- Elizabeth in polka dot dress, Sarah with spoon* 1967
oil on board
805 x 962 mm
Williams/Sinclair collection, Wellington
- The family in the van* 1971
oil on board
488 x 630 mm
private collection, New Zealand
- Grandparents at the door* 1969
oil on board
1220 x 837 mm
Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton

<p><i>Grey sky</i> 1975 screenprint 337 x 202 mm Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth gift of Michael Smither</p>	<p><i>Large blue pool with wave invading</i> 1969 oil on board 1445 x 1206 mm private collection, Wellington</p>	<p><i>Portrait of Peter McLeavey</i> 1975 oil on board 910 x 635 mm private collection, Wellington</p>	<p><i>Sarah eating baked beans</i> 1967 oil on board 710 x 550 mm private collection, New Zealand</p>	<p><i>Sketchbook 22A pages 28 and 29</i> 1966 paper each 252 x 200 mm Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington gift of Michael Smither</p>
<p><i>Hamilton Diggings, Central Otago</i> 1969 oil on board 885 x 1215 mm The Fletcher Trust collection</p>	<p><i>Large composition with Harry folding napkin</i> 1968 oil on board 1272 x 971 mm Chartwell Collection Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki</p>	<p><i>Railway Station bridge and old step</i> 1967 oil on board 1130 x 812 mm Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington</p>	<p><i>Sarah with ball</i> 1970 screenprint 508 x 218 mm Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth gift of Michael Smither</p>	<p><i>Sketchbook 22 page 40</i> 1965-1967 paper 252 x 199 mm Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington gift of Michael Smither</p>
<p><i>Hapuka head on plate</i> 1979 oil on board 910 x 1220 mm private collection, New Zealand</p>	<p><i>Low tide at Kawaroa</i> 1964 screenprint 620 x 430 mm Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth gift of Michael Smither</p>	<p><i>Rock painting</i> 1974 oil on board 501 x 555 mm Chartwell Collection Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki</p>	<p><i>Sarah with grandfather and great grandmother</i> 1965 screenprint 415 x 410 mm Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth gift of Michael Smither</p>	<p><i>Sketchbook 23 page 51a</i> 1966 paper 253 x 201 mm Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington gift of Michael Smither</p>
<p><i>Harry, Thomas and Sarah on bed</i> 1969-1970 oil on board 1200 x 1290 mm Dunedin Public Art Gallery gift of Sam Neill</p>	<p><i>Mother and child</i> 1965-1966 oil on board 890 x 780 mm private collection, Wellington</p>	<p><i>Rock painting with grasshopper</i> 1975-1978 oil on board 880 x 1190 mm private collection, New Zealand</p>	<p><i>Sarah with yellow ball</i> 1970 oil on board 152 x 237 mm Te Manawa, Palmerston North</p>	<p><i>Sketchbook 25 page 14</i> 1965 paper 252 x 200 mm Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington gift of Michael Smither</p>
<p><i>Hills at Tongaporutu</i> 1972 oil on board 1210 x 1210 mm The Fletcher Trust collection</p>	<p><i>New Plymouth Railway Station</i> 1967 oil on board 1083 x 1205 mm Friedlander collection, Auckland</p>	<p><i>Rock pool with Neptune's necklace</i> 1968 oil on board 910 x 1220 mm John and Trish Gribben collection, Auckland</p>	<p><i>Self-portrait</i> 1975 oil on board 910 x 580 mm private collection, New Zealand</p>	<p><i>Sketchbook 26 page 28</i> 1965 paper 252 x 200 mm Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington gift of Michael Smither</p>
<p><i>Hostages</i> 1978 oil on board 1200 x 1800 mm private collection, Auckland</p>	<p><i>Nude on a green couch</i> 1975 acrylic on hardboard 611 x 690 mm Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington</p>	<p><i>Rocks with mountain</i> 1968 oil on board 1219 x 1600 mm Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki purchased 1969</p>	<p><i>Self-portrait</i> 1971-1972 oil on board 775 x 657 mm Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui</p>	<p><i>Sketchbook 28 pages 23a and 24</i> 1967 paper 251 x 199 mm, 251 x 200 mm Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington gift of Michael Smither</p>
<p><i>Interior with child</i> 1971 oil on board 635 x 725 mm The Fletcher Trust collection</p>	<p><i>Portrait of Elizabeth Smither</i> 1972 oil on board 915 x 637 mm Hocken Library Uare Taoka o Hakana, University of Otago, Dunedin</p>	<p><i>Rocks, concrete and iron</i> 1967 oil on hardboard 997 x 889 mm Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki purchased 1967</p>	<p><i>Sketchbook 3 page 11a</i> 1962 paper 251 x 197 mm Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington gift of Michael Smither</p>	<p><i>Sketchbook 29 page 35</i> 1967 paper 251 x 198 mm Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington gift of Michael Smither</p>
<p><i>Joseph Smither as Lone Ranger</i> 1973 oil on board 1530 x 1220 mm Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth</p>	<p><i>Portrait of Hilary McLeavey</i> 1975 oil on board 910 x 635 mm private collection, Wellington</p>	<p><i>Rubber gloves</i> 1977 oil on board 1190 x 1285 mm Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth</p>	<p><i>Sketchbook 11 page 17a</i> 1966 paper 254 x 200 mm Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington gift of Michael Smither</p>	
<p><i>Joseph with bear and bottle</i> 1972-1973 oil on board 1212 x 860 mm private collection, New Zealand</p>	<p><i>Portrait of my mother</i> 1972 oil on board 1220 x 935 mm Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu</p>			

List of Works

- Sketchbook 31 page 44* 1968
paper
252 x 201 mm
Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa,
Wellington
gift of Michael Smither
- Sketchbook 32 pages 29b and 30a* 1967-1968
paper
each 254 x 198 mm
Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa,
Wellington
gift of Michael Smither
- Sketchbook 33 page 39* 1968
paper
253 x 198 mm
Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa,
Wellington
gift of Michael Smither
- Sketchbook 46 page 13* 1972
paper
252 x 201 mm
Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa,
Wellington
gift of Michael Smither
- Sketchbook 47 pages 45b and 46a* 1972
paper
each 251 x 202 mm
Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa,
Wellington
gift of Michael Smither
- Sketchbook 48A page 36a* 1973
paper
251 x 201 mm
Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa,
Wellington
gift of Michael Smither
- Sketchbook 52A page 35a* 1975
paper
250 x 202 mm
Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa,
Wellington
gift of Michael Smither
- The spring night of Kirby Wright* circa 1967
oil on board
860 x 860 mm
private collection, Wellington
- Springtime at Pukekura Park, New Plymouth* 1965-1970
oil on board
913 x 1245 mm
Hocken Library Uare Taoka o Hakena, University of Otago, Dunedin
- St Francis receives the stigmata* 1967
oil on board
1220 x 912 mm
Williams/Sinclair collection, Wellington
- St Francis rolling in the thistles* 1968
oil on board
945 x 890 mm
James Wallace Arts Trust collection
- Summer evening in Taranaki* 1974
oil on board
870 x 1065 mm
private collection, Wellington
- Thomas and Joseph with red chair and piano* 1972
oil on board
1161 x 533 mm
Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui
- Thomas and the rubber suit* 1970
oil on board
1335 x 755 mm
The Dowse, Lower Hutt
- Thomas under table* 1970
oil on board
916 x 916 mm
Te Manawa, Palmerston North
- Thomas with blue plastic ring* 1969
oil on board
1220 x 1094 mm
Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton
- Thomas with light cord* 1970
oil on board
1260 x 960 mm
Dunedin Public Art Gallery
- Thomas' first jump* 1974
oil on board
651 x 609 mm
The Dowse, Lower Hutt
- Thomas' second birthday* 1970
oil on hardboard
597 x 774 mm
Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa,
Wellington
- Toys' tea party* 1969
oil on board
971 x 1073 mm
Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa,
Wellington
- Untitled (back beach - yellow)* 1974
screenprint
795 x 547 mm
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
gift of Michael Smither
- Untitled (grey back beach with large green wave)* 1976
screenprint
430 x 643 mm
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
gift of Michael Smither
- Untitled (squid lights on horizon)* 1976
screenprint
586 x 516 mm
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
gift of Michael Smither
- Wave* circa 1967
screenprint
519 x 515 mm
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
gift of Michael Smither

Inside Back Cover: Big Occity 1970

Inside Cover Flap: Large blue pool with wave
invading 1970 [detail]



