

CELEBRATING COLIN McCAHON



AN AUCTION EVENT

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COLIN McCAHON**

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McCahon House invites you to dinner

McCAHON
HOUSE

McCahon House hosts three Artists in Residence per year. As part of each residency a bespoke dinner between our current artist and a guest chef is created. Join us for an evening of art inspired cuisine, and be part of an ongoing dialogue where ideas around art are exchanged amongst artists and peers.

These events are exclusive to the Gate Project. We invite you to join and help strengthen opportunities for New Zealand's artists and our culture. For more information about the Gate Project and to join visit: mccahonhouse.org.nz/gate

*Roasted carrot with kaffir lime sauce
and orange blossom candy floss by
chef Alex Davies of Gatherings,
Christchurch, in collaboration with
2019 artist in resident, Jess Johnson.*



— The Gate Project



Marti Friedlander
Gretchen Albrecht underneath McCahon's "As there is a constant flow of light ..."
 Courtesy the Gerrard and Marti Friedlander Charitable Trust
 Marti Friedlander Archive, E.H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, on loan from the Gerrard and Marti Friedlander Charitable Trust, 2002

Marti came to our house in (I think) 1977 to take photos for the book she was doing with Jim Barr and Mary Barr, together with the publisher Alistair Taylor: *Contemporary New Zealand Painters A-M*. As you may know *N-Z* never saw the light of day.

Marti spent almost the whole day with us photographing me, Jamie and my son Andrew, at our dining table, with Jamie outside, in my studio... the Marti Friedlander archive at the AAG has them all. She wanted me to wear colourful clothing for the studio shots so there was a change of clothing half way through the session. The black and white of me under the Colin McCahon makes me look very peaceful and contemplative. The painting's message has such a calming serenity about it.

Gretchen Albrecht

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Photography: Sam Hartnett
 Design: Fount-via
 Print: Graeme Brazier

This auction event, including art works made solely by Colin McCahon, felt like a fitting tribute in 2019, his Centenary year. We hoped to put together a small offering that would reflect the quality and variety of work that McCahon produced during his life-time and I think you will find that within these pages.

Recently I felt that the esteemed writer Peter Simpson spoke for many of us when he said that he does not remember the first actual painting by McCahon that he saw, but rather he remembers the feelings that were evoked in him on first viewing of McCahon's work. Simpson recalls visiting exhibitions in Christchurch during the '60s like *Contemporary New Zealand Paintings*, toured by Auckland City Art Gallery and annual exhibitions by *The Group*, in which McCahon exhibited.

While those exhibitions were just a little before my time, I have my own McCahon memories. Early in my art dealing career, a large and beautiful *Muriwai* painting, circa 1972, with a rich, golden sunset arrived in the gallery 'wrapped' in an old box that had formerly encased a washing machine. In 2011, to celebrate it's re-opening, Auckland Art Gallery's exhibition *Toi Aotearoa: Colin McCahon - Texts and Gates* bought together two important bodies of work that were simply breath-taking. Giving rise to questions of both fear and delight in the world, the issues that the artist was facing then seem only more relevant in the world we live in today.

McCahon's profound interest in the landscape of his country and surroundings, his deep spirituality and the intense questions he poses to us through his paintings have all contributed towards the recognition of him as a distinctive figure in the history of New Zealand art. The paintings force us to think not so much about how they were made, but perhaps more *why*. It is this deep questioning that holds our interest to this day.

Since the formation of Art+Object in 2007 we have been privileged to successfully handle a growing number of fine paintings by Colin McCahon. This catalogue makes a fine addition to that history and we hope that you will take the opportunity to attend the viewing and join us for the public programme featuring Judy Millar and Peter Simpson on Saturday 2 November. We look forward to seeing you there.

Leigh Melville

Colin McCahon's Windows

Good glass holds your hands up high and a certain glory filters through your fingers¹

The Auckland Art Gallery is currently displaying one set of carefully conserved Colin McCahon clerestory windows and the Way of the Cross from the Convent of Our Lady of the Missions in Upland Road. This commission is recognised as being critical in the development of McCahon's religious painting over the next ten years. It was the start of a collaboration with architect James Hackshaw which spanned thirteen years and resulted in a dozen buildings. Eight of these buildings were Catholic churches and in six of them, Paul Dibble made tabernacles, crucifixes and candlesticks.

Bishop Delargey engaged Hackshaw to design the Upland Road convent in 1965, shortly after arriving back from three years at Vatican II in Rome with a mandate to democratize the liturgy. There was to be full and active participation in the Mass by lay people; the Mass was to be conducted in English facing the congregation, women were to be included and collaboration with other religions was encouraged. It was fitting to engage local artists.

Hackshaw had been a member of Group Architects from 1948–60 and his church designs carried on the basics of the Group's philosophy. That is, local natural materials, avoidance of ostentation and foreign influences, the involvement of local artists to design windows, tabernacles, stations of the cross etc and emphasizing and encouraging the congregation's involvement in the ritual of the Mass.² His rational and efficient structures fulfilled the need for low cost new churches in rapidly expanding suburban areas.³

McCahon had shown his understanding of the liturgy and the symbols of the Christian Church in his work prior to 1965. These commissions provided Colin with the opportunity to create work in a real, religious context. Colin said that he felt he was '*in the world*' doing real work making these windows, '*working towards meaning*'.⁴ In making paintings or windows with religious themes, his son William McCahon said that Colin's painting '*was writing for an audience who knew and understood the Christian faith's visual symbols even though they might not understand the theory and theology.*'⁵

McCahon was keen for his windows to be where the public could see them. *The kids could use the buildings and move around them.*⁶ Hackshaw said that Colin was able to weave a story around every window. He showed his amazing sympathetic ability to express the [geographical and social] area in which the building existed.

McCahon's letters to Peter McLeavey, John and Anna Caselberg, Patricia France and Ron O'Reilly reveal the joy, meaning and frustrations to him in working with glass.









Glass has a discipline – like a sonnet – break the rules and the window blows in.⁷

I love these jobs – I can relax from painting and I'm working as I would as a useful member of society. I'm not alone any more.⁸

We have looked at the drawings for the glass & talked about it – it's all go. I'm lucky James and I can question & criticise our work & arrive at good answers. I lop off bits on his buildings – he changes my glass panels.⁹

The Upland Road convent chapel is now an indoor swimming pool. St Patrick's Church in Te Puke with its two sets of splendid McCahon windows was closed recently because it doesn't meet earthquake standards. A fifteen seat chapel attached to a convent built in 1966 in South Auckland probably housed windows, a metal crucifix and a Way of the Cross made by McCahon. Now it is almost derelict, and the artworks are unaccounted for. There are wonderful sets of windows at three schools. A handsome pair of windows was relocated from the science block at Baradene when it was demolished and installed in a new auditorium. Recently we found two beautiful metre square windows at a school in Rotorua which had been removed from their original location and will now be relocated to a safe and prominent place. The windows in the chapel at the third school are cherished. Windows from three private houses have been removed; two gone. Windows at St Ignatius in St Heliers incorporate lovely old leadlight panels from the original church on the site, into larger McCahon works.

McCahon referred to two 'rose' windows at a North Shore church as his *'Five Wounds windows'* [which] *are pale in colour and very small in their walls ... they are lovely and delicate. It all ticks over. It's all just beautiful, strong and a great tribute to James H.*¹⁰

It is important to share these buildings and artworks with a wider audience before they are gone and also to complete the story of McCahon's work. Christopher Dudman and I are making a short film to document and celebrate these works and spaces. We are very grateful to the following supporters who have funded the film to 60% of budget – Adrian Burr, Progear, The Warren Trust, Charissa Snijder and Mark Hackshaw, the family of Alan Wild, Pip Cheshire and Anna Killgour-Wilson. Thank you also to Pete Bossley and Miriam van Wezel, Lady Sarah Fay and the Auckland Art Gallery. Please write to us at bridget.hackshaw@gmail.com if you would like to support the making of this film in any way.

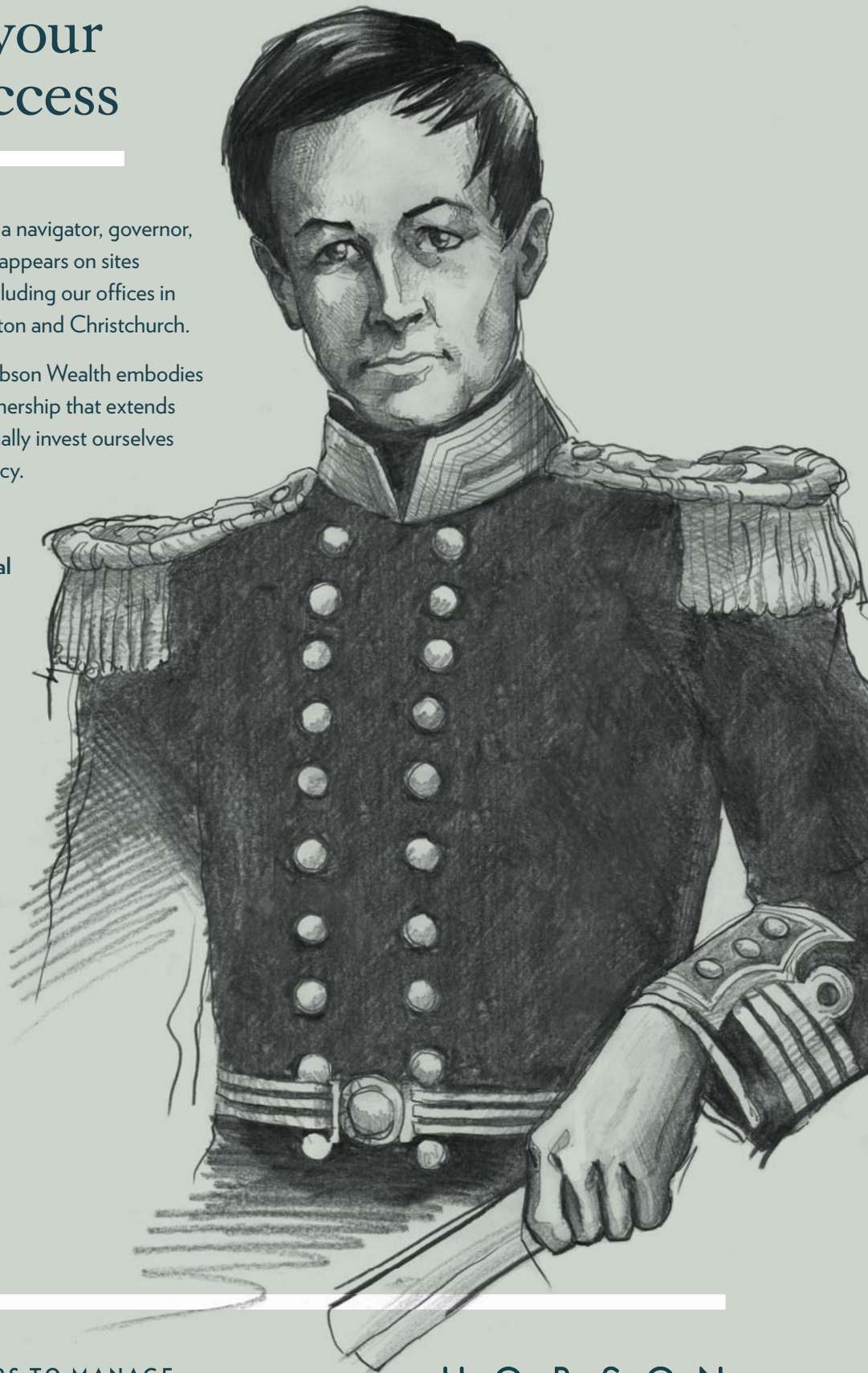
- 1 Colin McCahon letter to Peter McLeavey, 1976
- 2 Frederika Hackshaw Group Architects 26 July 2004
- 3 Andrew Barrie, *James Hackshaw's Public Buildings* Block Architecture Guide
- 4 Colin McCahon, *Colin McCahon: A Survey Exhibition*, Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland, 1972, p 26.
- 5 William McCahon, 'A Letter Home' in *A Question of Faith* 2003
- 6 James Hackshaw, talk at Auckland Art Gallery 1987
- 7 Colin McCahon letter to John and Anna Caselberg 2 August 1976
- 8 Colin McCahon letter to Patricia France January 1976
- 9 Colin McCahon letter to Peter McLeavey, 6 June 1978
- 10 Colin McCahon letter to Peter McLeavey 28 April 1978

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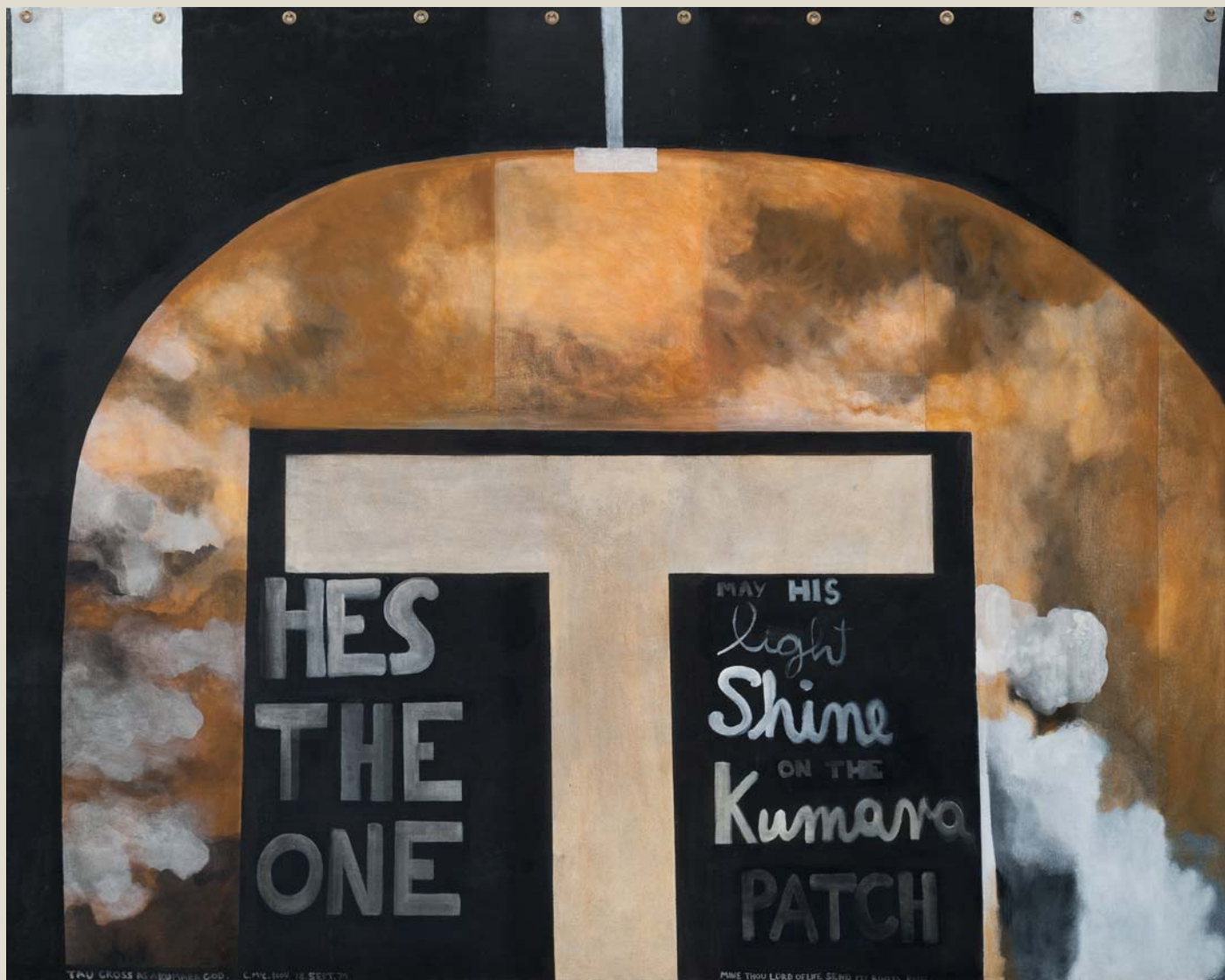
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H O B S O N
W E A L T H





A Place to Paint

Colin McCahon in Auckland

Featuring major works by Colin McCahon from the 1950s to the 1970s and drawing upon Auckland Art Gallery's extensive collection, this exhibition considers McCahon's sustained relationship with Auckland and the significance of the physical, spiritual and cultural landscape on his painting.

Sat 10 Aug 2019—
Mon 27 Jan 2020

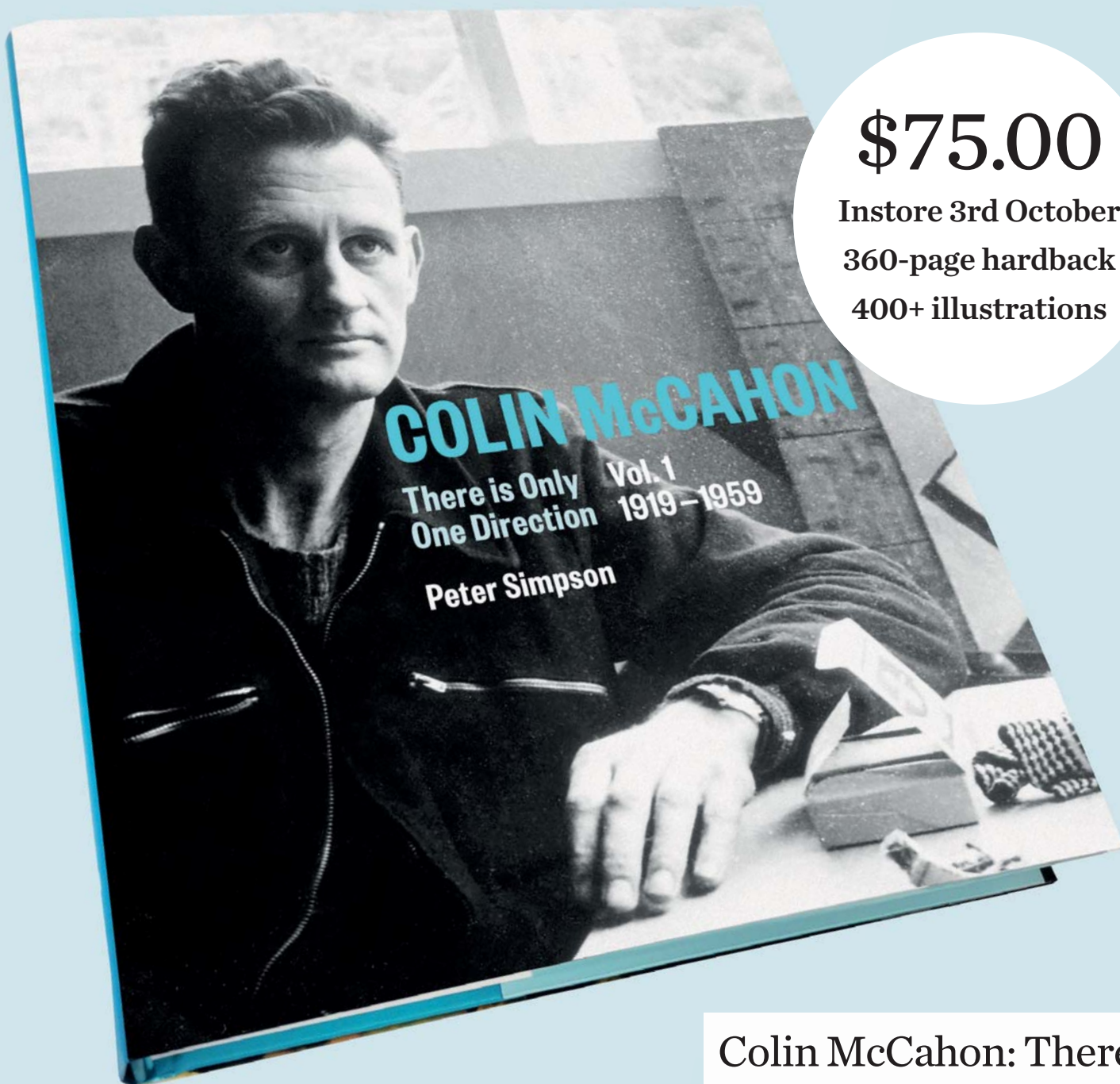
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Colin McCahon *May His light shine*
(*Tau Cross*) 1978–79, Chartwell Collection,
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki 1994.
Courtesy of the Colin McCahon Research
and Publication Trust.

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\$75.00

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'Peter Simpson has crafted an indispensable work of art-historical scholarship.

Colin McCahon: There is Only One Direction draws upon diaries, letters and other contemporary sources to document the artist's life from 1919 until 1959, alongside a magnificent selection of his works, many of which have not been reproduced before.

It is a remarkable achievement.'

– Martin Edmond

Colin McCahon: There is Only One Direction Vol. 1 1919–1959

Peter Simpson

The first in an extraordinary two-volume work chronicling forty-five years of painting by our most important artist, Colin McCahon. In this richly illustrated work, written in an accessible style and published to coincide with the centenary of Colin McCahon's birth, leading McCahon scholar, writer and curator Dr Peter Simpson chronicles the evolution of the artist's work over McCahon's entire career.



AUCKLAND
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

CELEBRATING COLIN McCAHON

AUCTION

Tuesday 5 November 7.00pm
3 Abbey Street, Newton, Auckland

OPENING/PREVIEW

Tuesday 29 October 6.00pm – 8.00pm

VIEWING

Wednesday 30 October	9.00am – 5.00pm
Thursday 31 October	9.00am – 5.00pm
Friday 1 November	9.00am – 5.00pm
Saturday 2 November	11.00am – 5.00pm
Sunday 3 November	11.00am – 5.00pm
Monday 4 November	9.00am – 5.00pm
Tuesday 5 November	9.00am – 2.00pm

AN AUCTION EVENT

PUBLIC PROGRAMME

A Necessity of Vision: Judy Millar in Conversation with Leigh Melville Saturday 2 November 3.00pm

It is easy to take for granted the work of a painter who was produced his most important work nearly half a century ago. In our current world filled with entertainment it is easy to forget the lives and achievements of those no longer around, but McCahon and his work stick with us. It's a testament to the complexity and necessity of his vision that we go on looking at and questioning his lifetime's work.

We can go on discussing McCahon's work in any number of ways, but in any discussion of his work I speak as a fellow painter. Having spent most of my life dedicated to understanding paint and what it can do I know only too well the daily toil, the frustrations, the doubt and the sense of aloneness that is part of a painter's life. Fortunately I also know the drive that keeps a painter going on in the quest for images that matter.

Judy Millar

Judy Millar is a painter, who has lived on the West Coast of Auckland for the last 35 years. She represented New Zealand in the Venice Biennale of 2009. Earlier this year Kunstmuseum St Gallen in Switzerland exhibited the first major survey on her work, covering work from 1981 to 2018.



Installation view, *The Future and the Past Perfect – a survey of Judy Millar's work from 1981 to 2018*. Kunstmuseum St Gallen, Switzerland, 2nd March – 19th May 2019

PUBLIC PROGRAMME

Floor talk by Peter Simpson Saturday 2 November 4.00pm

Please join us as leading McCahon scholar and author Peter Simpson takes an in-depth look at Colin McCahon's 1959 masterpiece, *Elias will he come will he come to save him*. Simpson will investigate the work's relationship to other paintings from the small and highly-important *Elias* series as well as to McCahon's work after his crucial trip to America in 1958. All but one of McCahon's *Elias* series was exhibited at Gallery 91 in Christchurch in 1959, an exhibition which Simpson refers to as 'arguably McCahon's greatest'.

Peter Simpson is a writer, curator and editor who lives in Auckland. His publications on Colin McCahon include *Candles in a Dark Room: James K. Baxter and Colin McCahon* (AAG, 1996), *Answering Hark: McCahon/Caselberg* (Potton 2001), *Colin McCahon: The Titirangi Years 1953–59* (AUP, 2007), *Patron and Painter: Charles Brasch and Colin McCahon* (Hocken, 2010), and a chapter in *Bloomsbury South: The Arts in Christchurch 1933–53* (AUP, 2016). He has also curated four exhibitions on McCahon. He received the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement in non-fiction in 2017.

He has just completed the publication *Colin McCahon: There is Only One Direction Vol I. 1919–1959* to coincide with the centenary of McCahon's birth. Please join us after the talk for a glass of wine as we celebrate the publication of this landmark book. Copies will be available for purchase through Auckland University Press and Peter will be signing copies.



Peter Simpson talking in front of *The Northland Panels*.

1.

Colin McCahon
Hoeing Tobacco
potato-cut print on paper
accompanied by Christmas
Card, circa 1944
title inscribed; Christmas Card
inscribed *Christmas Greetings*
from Colin and Anne McCahon
124 x 96mm

Note:
Another example held in the
Hocken Library Collection,
Dunedin.

Reference:
Colin McCahon Database
(www.mccahon.co.nz)
cm000725.

Provenance:
Gifted by Colin and Anne
McCahon to Rita Angus, circa
mid-late 1940s.
Passed by descent to Jean
Jones, sister of Rita Angus.
Private collection, Christchurch.
Acquired in June 2010 from a
descendant of Rita Angus.

\$12 000 – \$18 000

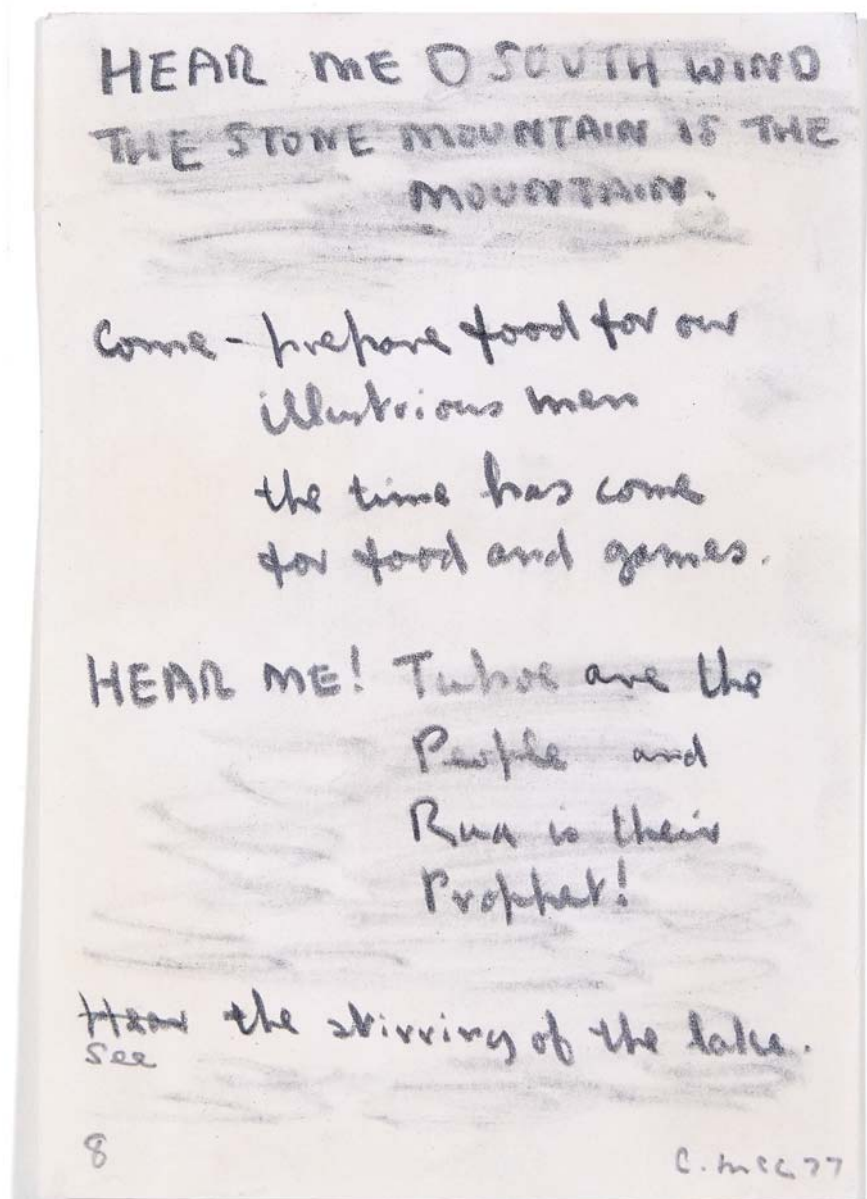


2.

Colin McCahon
Hear me O south wind, No. 8
graphite on paper
title inscribed, signed with artist's initials
CMcC and dated '77; inscribed No. 8
164 x 113mm

Reference:
Colin McCahon Database
(www.mccahon.co.nz) cm000938.

\$11 000 - \$17 000



3.

Colin McCahon

*Truth from the King Country: Load Bearing
Structures No. 1 (Third Series)*

synthetic polymer paint on canvasboard
title inscribed, signed and dated '78 verso
227 x 305mm

Exhibited:

Colin McCahon, Victoria University Library,
Wellington, 22 June – 19 July 1981, Cat No. 9.

Reference:

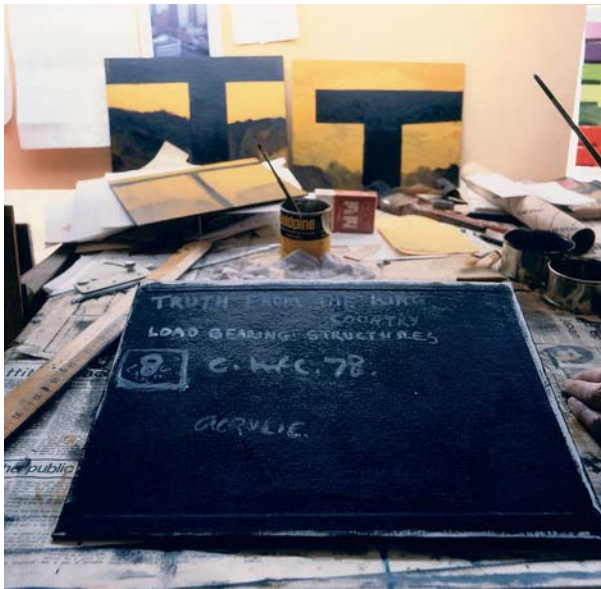
Colin McCahon Database
(www.mccahon.co.nz) cm000866.

Provenance:

Private collection, Tasman district.

\$50 000 – \$70 000





Marti Friedlander, Colin McCahon's Studio (c.1978). Marti Friedlander Archive, courtesy of E.H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

This is a work from a series of thirty or so small paintings Colin McCahon made in 1978 and 1979; they all show a black tau cross before a predominantly ochre landscape beneath a turbulent sky. The earlier works in the series, of which this is one, bear the subtitle *load bearing structures*; later ones feature the five or the seven wounds of Christ. They are said to have been inspired by one of the railway viaducts on the Main Trunk Line. The Mangaweka viaduct is often mentioned; however that is in the Rangitikei, not in the King Country. If there is a single inspiration for the series, it is more likely to have been the Makatote viaduct south of Erua.

If you're driving from Horopito north on Highway 4, you pass under the southern end of the viaduct and head down the hill to a hairpin bend at the bottom; then climb up the other side to the top of the next ridge. Halfway down there's a place where you can pull over. Toetoe grows luxuriantly here; the bush is mostly rimu, which has that characteristic yellow-green colour to its foliage, with a few other big trees, like tōtora and tōwai, rising above the understory. From the rest area, if you look back up, you will see the massive T-shaped structures of the pylons and the bridge before the bluffs on either side of the gorge of the Makatote River, which is a tributary of the Manga-nui-o-te-Ao, which in turn flows into the Whanganui.

McCahon liked to go for long drives into the landscape. He was in the habit of stopping at vantage points and spending some time, hours perhaps, in front of a particular view. This was not simply in order to memorise it; he wanted to log the changes of light and therefore the passage of time. Most of the works in this series recall a dusky, dusty orange-black

late afternoon sky: you do often see this precise shade of ochre swirling in the air as the sun sets over the dissected hill country to the west of Hauhungatahi, the small volcanic cone which is an outlier of Ruapehu.

I'm not suggesting that McCahon was painting this actual place; rather, that the landscapes of the series are reminiscent of that country; while the tau cross which stands before the bush-covered hills and the ochre skies is both an interdiction and a gateway through into what lies beyond. King Country is Pākehā usage for what Māori call Te Rohe Pōtae, the area of the hat; that part of the central North Island, defined by the circle of the rim King Tāwhiao's hat when placed upon a map, where Pākehā could not go and where no more land would be sold. This border, Te Aukati, was in fact breached, by agreement, when the Main Trunk Line was put through.

What does McCahon mean by 'truth'? Here I always think of the prophetic movement Māramatanga, the way of light. Māramatanga comes from the same source as the Rātana movement; they share a prophetess, Mere Rikiriki, who is said to have given to Wiremu Rātana responsibility for the world of political action; and to Enoka Mareikura, custodianship of the spiritual realm. Be that as it may, Māramatanga consciously seeks to unite with all other prophetic movements in Aotearoa. The truth McCahon is speaking of may be found there; but, if so, to reach it you must somehow answer the questions asked by that resounding black tau cross. To paraphrase Justin Paton: whose land is this and upon which side of its borders do you stand?

4.

Colin McCahon

Manukau 2

watercolour and gouache on paper

title inscribed, signed and dated Jan '54

543 x 740mm

Exhibited:

The (54) Group Show, Durham Street Art Gallery, Christchurch, 2–17 November 1954.

Illustrated:

Marja Bloem and Martin Browne, *Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith* (Craig Potton, Nelson, 2002), p. 180.

Peter Simpson, *Colin McCahon: The Titirangi Years, 1953–1959* (Auckland University Press, 2007), plate 10, p.84.

Peter Simpson, *There is Only One God, Vol. I 1919–1959* (Auckland University Press, 2019), p. 220.

Literature:

Peter Simpson, *Colin McCahon: The Titirangi Years, 1953–1959*, *ibid.*, p. 27.

Reference:

Colin McCahon Database
(www.mccahon.co.nz) cm000852.

Provenance:

Private collection, Auckland.

\$65 000 – \$85 000

Painted in the year which proceeded the artist's big move north to take up a position at Auckland Art Gallery, *Manukau 2* (1954) is revelatory in its engagement with the unique bush, harbour and light of Tāmaki Makaurau. Colin McCahon captures it all in this lucid and fresh watercolour of the Manukau harbour. Initially difficult, the artist's move to Auckland precipitated a time of increased financial stability which allowed him to acquire a permanent house for his family in French Bay. In regards to his painting the artist began a practice more defined by seriality and painting in sequences. This work comes from a small series which can be loosely defined by the broader title *Manukau*, and the closely related small *Towards Auckland* series.

Predominantly made up of watercolours and gouaches, these two contemporaneous series represent all the joy, hope and creative possibilities which McCahon's new life in the upper North Island offered. Taken together the series appears light, airy and full of creative optimism. The artist remarked: "At this time the bush and the harbour were of prime importance as subjects – so was the whole magnificent spread of Auckland seen from Titirangi Road on the endless journeys into town every morning. The November light for that first year was a miracle. It remains a miracle and still an obsession." *Manukau 2* was produced after Auckland's infamous Spring rain, at the height of the Auckland summer in January, and continues with the proto-Cubist surface construction of crisscrossed diagonal lines with no discernible emphasis or predominance of the land, water or sky. The artist explained that the works were done on the bus trip from Titirangi to work in the morning, and both are titular in that the *Towards Auckland* represents the view on the way in from Titirangi, and the *Manukau* series, the view on his way home.

McCahon's work would, as always, shift and morph quickly into other directions following on from these two small and interrelated series. This time around it would be the mighty kauri which would dominate in the three or four years which would follow, McCahon still as enraptured and inspired by his new environment as ever but finding inspiration even closer to home. *Manukau 2* and its companion works, in all their bright and fresh wonder, are unique in the artist's oeuvre, unbridled in their love and desire of a new environment and a new beginning.



5.

Colin McCahon

Waterfall

enamel and sand on board, 1964

303 x 303mm

Reference:

Colin McCahon database

(www.mccahon.co.nz) cm000507.

Provenance:

Private collection, Auckland.

Purchased by the current owner

from Art+Object, Auckland, Lot

No. 118, 7 August 2012.

\$45 000 - \$65 000

Lucid, bold, simple, eloquent and accessible. Not necessarily the usual adjectives one might associate with the work of Colin McCahon. But here they stand in this 1964 *Waterfall* painting in glorious abundance.

The vast majority of works from this series were painted in 1964 and exhibited soon after at Auckland's Ikon Gallery. The paintings sold surprisingly well, causing an elated McCahon to remark: "For the first time ever have had a near sell out with my exhibition and it's about the toughest I've done yet." 'Tough' seems a strange choice of word, as these predominantly small paintings have long appeared as among McCahon's most accessible and undemanding. As Peter Simpson has noted, McCahon could mean here that what was 'tough' was discovering a motif and means of expression that could mediate between popular taste and his own painterly concerns. A fine line which he often found difficult to negotiate.

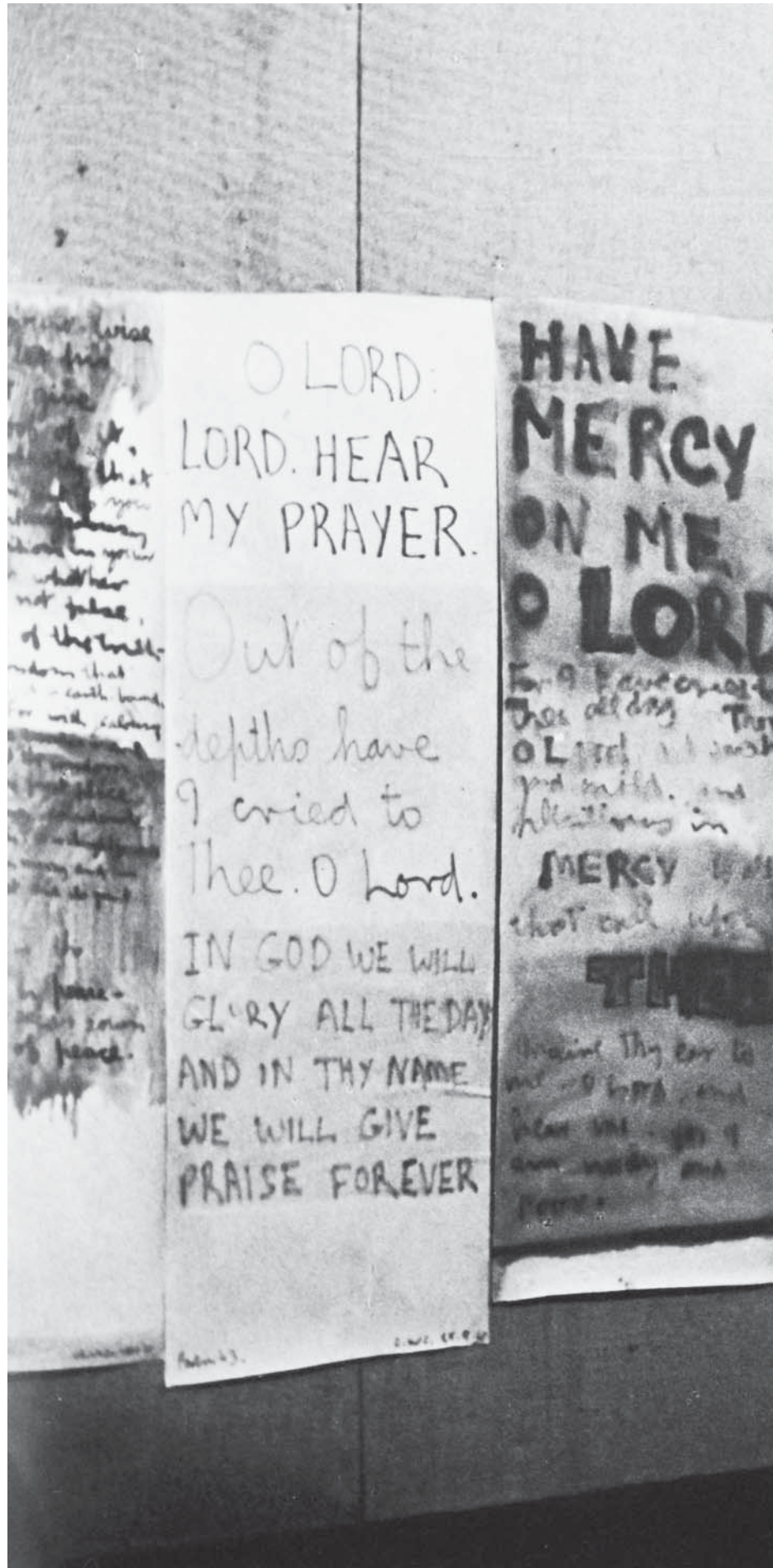
Some ten years on from his move to Auckland to take up a position at Auckland Art Gallery, McCahon was still taking direct inspiration from Auckland's beautiful West Coast. Here the inspiration lay in a trip to the Fairy Falls, deep in the Waitākere Ranges and today inaccessible due to the proliferation of kauri dieback and the Rāhui. McCahon would remark: "The waterfalls started flowing in 1964 and there were hundreds of them. They grew out of William Hodges' paintings on loan to the Auckland City Art Gallery from The Admiralty, London... Hodges is my hero in all these paintings but the Fairy Falls in the Waitakares and Japanese and Chinese painting are the real influences later... Waterfalls fell and raged and became still as silent falls of light for a long time. I look back with joy on taking a brush of white paint and curving through the darkness with a line of white".

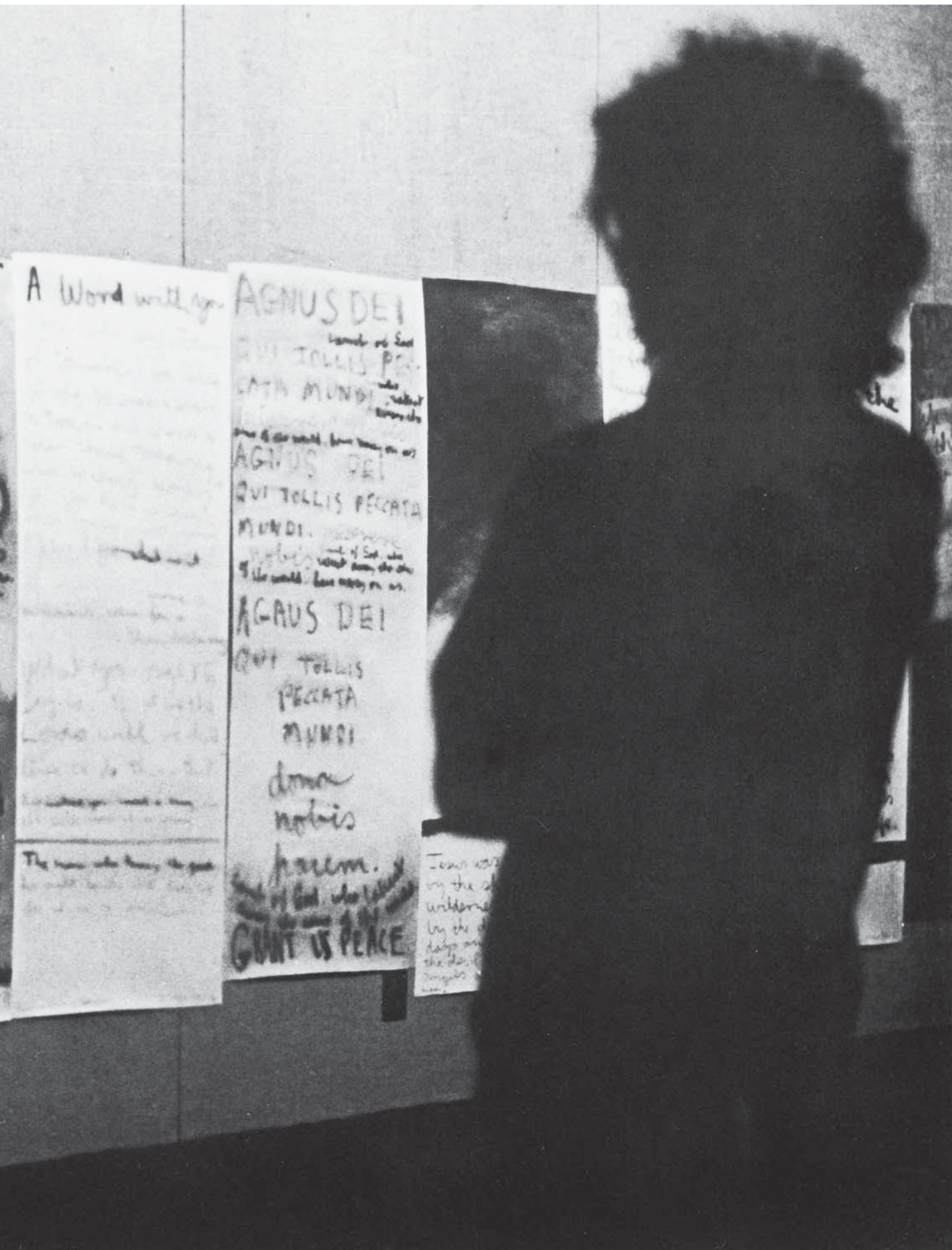
McCahon's claim that there were 'hundreds of them' seems an exaggeration as, despite the series being among the artist's largest numerically, the McCahon database lists 75 works in the series. This example is especially memorable due to the rich, burnt red palette which predominates. The artist used red, so redolent of the local volcanic Waitakere clay, in several of his *Waterfall* compositions but seldom in such fiery intensity.

With McCahon, as always, his 'Waterfalls' represent landscapes of the heart. The artist long repudiated the Western or Pākehā landscape tradition, his deep connection to the land, especially Auckland's West Coast, sharing much more with the Maori notion of Whenua. Whenua is the Maori word for both placenta and land. For McCahon, as for Maori, it is the source that provides sustenance for life itself.



Marti Friedlander, Installation of Colin McCahon's Scrolls exhibition at Barry Lett Galleries Auckland (6-17 October 1969). Courtesy the Gerrard and Marti Friedlander Charitable Trust.





HAVE
MERCY
ON ME
O LORD

For I have cried to
Thee all day. ^{Thou}
O Lord, and sweet
and mild, and
reluctant in
MERCY to all
that call upon

THEE

Incline Thy ear to
me, O Lord, and
hear me: for I
am needy and
poor.

6.

Have Mercy On Me O Lord
watercolour and pastel on paper
title inscribed, signed and dated
Sept 4 1969 and inscribed *Can
you hear me St. Francis*
1555 x 532mm

Provenance:

Private collection, Auckland.
Purchased by the current owner
from Webb's, Auckland, Lot No.
15, 14 June 1995.

Exhibited:

Written paintings and drawings:
Colin McCahon, Barry Lett
Galleries, Auckland, 6-17
October, 1969.

Reference:

Colin McCahon database
(www.mccahon.co.nz) cm001558.

\$50 000 – \$70 000

In September 1969 Colin McCahon acquired from a relative a large roll of plain wall-paper about 550mm wide which he cut into strips around 1330mm in length and proceeded to cover with writing and lettering; he filled the Barry Lett Galleries with about seventy of them hung touching side-by-side from 6-17 October 1969. The exhibition, called *Written Paintings and Drawings*, was a one-off; nothing quite like it was done either before or after.

The texts, apart from a few outriders, were drawn in roughly equal numbers from four main sources, all part of McCahon's current reading. First, the New English Bible (a recent gift from his wife, Anne) – this was the version of the bible used in all McCahon's later paintings; second, *I Pray the Mass: The New Sunday Missal*, a collection of prayers used in Catholic worship; third, *Journey Towards an Elegy* by West Coast poet and novelist Peter Hooper, a gift from John Caselberg; and, fourth, *The Tail of the Fish: Maori Memories of the Far North* by Matire Kereama, a recent gift from his daughter Catherine, also used for paintings such as *The Lark's Song* (1969).

The 'written drawings' vary considerably in how the texts are inscribed. Some are almost perfunctory while others (like the present example) are elaborately contrived. Some texts are very short – a few words of a Maori proverb, for instance – others are long, extending in some cases over two or more strips. Sometimes McCahon uses cursive script (handwriting) at others block capitals and in some (as here) the two are combined. Some include small figurative or geometrical devices, others employ coloured washes. Some are written in Maori or Latin, with or without translation.

Have Mercy On Me O Lord is one of the most visually striking and elaborate of the written drawings, because of the range of colours used for the lettering and background washes – blue, brown and pink – and the variety of lettering, ranging from bold Roman capitals, to scrawled and, in some cases, barely legible handwriting. The text, a prayer of supplication to God for mercy, comes from Psalm 86, the translation being taken from *The New Sunday Missal*. It reads: 'Have mercy on me O Lord. For I have cried to Thee all day, for Thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild, and plenteous in Mercy to all that call upon Thee. Incline Thy ear to me, O Lord, and hear me: For I am needy and poor.' The bare text is worked up into a powerfully expressive statement by McCahon's use of coloured washes and the placement, form, colour and scale of the lettering. Note for instance the extraordinary highlighting of 'THEE'.

An additional element to this powerful work is provided by a pencilled note at the bottom, marked off from the rest by a horizontal line: 'Can you hear me St Francis': this is the title of a Peter Hooper poem which recurs in several other works including *The Lark's Song* and gives an extra turn of the screw to this impassioned cry for mercy and communication.



huruwai - High wind & rain. Light falls through a slat



7.

Colin McCahon
*Muriwai. High Wind & Rain. Light Falls
Through a Dark Landscape*
charcoal on paper
title inscribed, signed C McC and dated
Oct '71
450 x 590mm

Exhibited:
Necessary Protection, Barry Lett
Galleries, Auckland, 1-12 November 1971.

Reference:
Colin McCahon Database
(www.mccahon.co.nz) cm001849.

Provenance:
Private collection, Auckland.

\$60 000 - \$80 000

8.

Colin McCahon
Little Landscape with Tree
oil on board
signed and dated 1951
400 x 500mm

Exhibited:
New Zealand Artists,
Victoria University,
Wellington, 1954.

Reference:
Colin McCahon Database
(www.mccahon.co.nz)
cm001673.

Provenance:
Private collection, London,
United Kingdom.

\$90 000 – \$150 000

This gem of a landscape painting is one of which very little is known. It appears on the McCahon database with only scant details and a poor image and has been repatriated for sale in New Zealand from London where it has resided for several decades. It belongs to a small body of landscape paintings that the artist produced when he lived in Christchurch between 1948 and 1953. Prior to moving to Christchurch the artist had lived in the suburb of Tahunanui in Nelson for a year and despite his love of the local Nelson landscape and its capacity for manifesting itself in some of his most significant early works, he was unsettled and keen to move. After considering several options he eventually settled on Christchurch, most likely as a result of it being home to the Group, where he had first exhibited in 1940 alongside artists including Rita Angus and Leo Bensemann. It is likely that *Little Landscape with Tree* (1951) had one of its only public appearances in this context, in the Group Exhibition of 1951. It was a small show populated by works from the dual veins which McCahon was working in at the time – reductive paintings of the South Island landscape alongside religious paintings.

It was a difficult time in both the life and career of the artist, alleviated somewhat by the arrival of his family who had been living in Dunedin for his first year in Christchurch. McCahon expresses the creative stalemate he felt in a letter to John Caselberg: “I seem to have arrived at a place to stop painting. Something has been worked out at last – I can now make a start on a new direction. Still very vague, only a feeling & not yet clothed with a subject but I feel the need of a deep space & order, this applied by me & not the earlier order which was so much intuition. I feel I must learn more and make a better foundation for intuition... after recent work I feel the need for something more conscious.” This ‘need of a deep space and order’ comes in the form of an overt shift away from theological paintings towards a more pure representation of the landscape, with his combined religious, figurative paintings seldom appearing henceforth.

The landscape remained of utmost importance to McCahon until the end of his life, becoming the defining trope in his practice and omnipresent. In the early 1950s one couldn’t paint landscapes without engaging in the debate that dominated creative and literary circles at the time: namely how best to establish an independent and unique New Zealand cultural voice, free from colonial origins.

In winter of 1951 McCahon visited Melbourne on his first overseas trip. Here he studied the work of the elderly Australian Cubist, Mary Cockburn-Mercer. Her influence is discernible in *Little Landscape with Tree* and other paintings from the time which witness an increased attention to surface structure. Featuring strong diagonals, an elevated viewpoint and a reductive ochre palette, *Little Landscape with Tree* presents the Canterbury landscape as barren, reductive and ordered.

McCahon remarked of his work at this time in a letter to Ron O’Reilly: “Painting now a series of landscapes from aerial photos of North Canterbury townships. These inspired by a film on the Vatican. Such perfection & stillness. I felt the necessity for a change from my past to something more simple and subtle, less obviously emotional, or possibly just a different emotion. That is more correct.”

From here McCahon’s landscapes would increase in size, scope and ambition. In the short term however he took a job in gardening, his love for the land taking a different but necessary bent.



Colin McCahon

Cross

synthetic polymer paint

title inscribed, signed and dated Feb–Mar '71

787 x 585mm

Exhibited:

View from the Top of the Cliff: An Exhibition of Watercolours, Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, 16–24 April 1971.

Reference:

Colin McCahon Database
(www.mccahon.co.nz) cm001217.

Provenance:

Private collection, Auckland.

\$130 000 – \$180 000

1. Colin McCahon, *McCahon's "Necessary Protection": The Catalogue of a Travelling Exhibition of Paintings from Colin McCahon's Various Series from 1971 to 1976*, New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1977, p. 12.
2. Tony Green, 'McCahon and the Modern,' *Colin McCahon: Gates and Journeys*, Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1988, p. 35.

This important seminal painting is one of a small group of possibly five works that prefigure McCahon's Necessary Protection series. All of the Cross paintings were exhibited at the Peter McLeavey Gallery in April 1971 with the title *View from the Top of the Cliff*. McCahon, in a letter to McLeavey, insisted that his Necessary Protection paintings were 'about the Almighty looking after us.' The immediate inclination is to read McCahon's image as a giant letter 'I' or, following his title, as a Tau cross that has been provided with a broad base upon which to stand upright. Tau is the nineteenth letter of the Ancient Greek alphabet and is associated with the biblical prophet Moses. The sign T was made in blood on doorposts on the eve of Passover by Jewish families to avert evil. The Tau has also been described as the staff Moses raised before his journey into the wilderness. As such McCahon's cipher is both writing and image, letter and sign. Both Christian and pre-Christian; a bridge between the Old and New Testaments. In the catalogue for the 1977 Necessary Protection exhibition at the Govett-Brewster McCahon wrote: 'The I of the sky, falling light and enlightened land, is also ONE. The T of sky and light falling into a dark landscape is also the T of the Tau or Old Testament or Egyptian Cross.'¹

The cliff referred to in the exhibition title is that of Ōtakamiro Point, between Maukatia (Māori Bay) and Muriwai beach with its rocky nesting areas that are home to a colony of gannets, close to where McCahon had his studio at the time. Once you see them, the cliff outlines could almost be read as positive not negative space and thus a resistance to darkness, as opposite from what they seem, a sort of testing ground. 'Cliffs of fall, wise or deep,' McCahon wrote on a drawing of the location quoting the writer Dan Davin. The architectonic dark grounds of the cliffs of Ōtakamiro Point, and the vertical stack of rocks that is the small island Motutara and its gannet colony, appear to offer sobriety but they actually serve to contain and direct the exuberance of the brush lines channelled between them. Several years later in the Jump series these lines would become dotted and represent the birds that McCahon watched fall between the

cliffs and then flit to the sky along a diagonal. In another potent connection for McCahon the space between the cliffs is a 'gate' or passageway through which understanding may travel. Notice how the painted brushstrokes appear to surge upwards. So meaningful was this location for McCahon that his ashes were scattered there by his family after his death. So here in *Cross* there is more (potential) action going on than you might expect. The black lines of the adamantine armature swell and contract. Tony Green evocatively captures the impact of McCahon's image: 'clustering symbolisms growing from one simple image. Upright cross, light between cliffs, heavenly light falling to earth, eternal continuity of light in heaven, its momentary flash to earth, salvation, truth, path, way...'²

The subsequent Necessary Protection paintings depended upon the endless variousness of McCahon's simple formula first experimented with here: two cliffs, the spaces between, and the sky and sea above and below. The formula offered protection of, but also from, the environment. The landscape depicted is both a fragile ecosystem and a protective force. McCahon, observing the gannets negotiating strong offshore winds to land on their rocky outcrop, came to understand that the chasm between mainland and island was both an obstacle and a protective force, to be conquered for the sake of survival. The Necessary Protection shapes, of course, do spell out an 'I'. How is one to read this 'I' in McCahon's painting? Francis Pound proposed that the grammatical term for the 'I' that is so central to these works, and to many other paintings by McCahon – such as the monumental *Victory over Death 2* – is a 'shifter'. That is to say, the word itself is empty of meaning and awaits various viewers to come along and occupy it. The 'I' is not any singular or individualised identity, but a constant series of shifts and substitutions, which can variously include the painter or even the viewer of the painting who must speak the word it addresses. It is thus both McCahon's 'I' but also yours and mine. It is in this way that McCahon's painting offers each of us some 'necessary protection' for our lives.





10.

Colin McCahon
Light Passing Through a Dark Landscape
synthetic polymer paint on paper
title inscribed, signed and dated Jan '72
and inscribed (B)
1090 x 725mm

Exhibited:
Colin McCahon: The Mystical Landscape,
National Art Gallery, Wellington, 12
December 1983 – 21 January 1984.

Reference:
Colin McCahon Database
(www.mccahon.co.nz) cm000356.

Provenance:
Private collection, Auckland. Purchased
from Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland
in 1995.

\$200 000 – \$300 000

Connected to the *Necessary Protection* series of over 50 works, *Light Passing Through a Dark Landscape* is one of three large works on paper made in January 1972 which were given this title, one of which is in the Christchurch Art Gallery collection. They are in a portrait format, more colourful than the rest of the series, and experiment with a bold motif – the big I shape that spans the width of the work – which can be read as either positive or negative space.

Having built a studio at Muriwai with the money from Anne's inheritance at the end of 1969, McCahon had started his fifth decade with renewed energy, and the desire to work on environmental themes. His four children were all adults who had left home, and were beginning their own families. With some trepidation about the financial viability of his decision, he resigned from teaching at the Elam School of Fine Arts at the beginning of 1971. By January 1972, he was experiencing the delight of his first New Year free from the gloom cast by the requirement to return to the university at the end of the summer.

In the most literal interpretation of the work, the dark form on the right represents the flat cliff top at Muriwai, matched by the pinnacle of rock on the left. Between these land forms falls a pure white light which pours down from the broad expanse of the sky above to illuminate the surface of the sea with a sudden brilliance akin to a spiritual insight. Roughly indicated by flicks of paint in the golden yellow of the sky are seabirds in flight, perhaps gannets, or even the critically-endangered fairy tern.

Having read Matire Kereama's *The Tail of the Fish*, and made the connection between Muriwai and Ahipara at the bottom end of 90-Mile Beach, McCahon understood the sacred

importance of this cliff for Maori as the place where spirits rest before making their final journey north to depart this life for the next. He observed how the land forms provided shelter for the avifauna, and saw in that a metaphor for any parent who has fledged chicks, explaining in a letter to his friend, the poet John Caselberg, "...the older terns teach the little ones to swim and catch their own food... You will notice the cliff overhangs and this provides the necessary protection to raise little birds as well as on the island rock."

The scuffs of paint enliven the space above, animating the surface just as the darker band at the bottom of the work is patterned with rough brushwork. As well as demonstrating the landscape referent in the work where the sky is reflected in the sea, these marks humanise the severity of the abstract shapes which dominate. They also suggest an infinite extension into space, an expression of the kind of freedom that McCahon himself was experiencing.

Just the previous year, McCahon had participated in the *Earth/Earth* exhibition of landscape paintings at Barry Lett Galleries in Auckland. There his statement in the catalogue reinforced a conservationist message: "I am not painting protest pictures", he wrote. "I am painting what is still there and what I can still see before the sky turns black with soot and the sea becomes a slowly heaving rubbish tip. I am painting what we have got now and will never get again." McCahon's work is prophetic – it is almost as if he foresaw the enormity of the problem of plastics in our oceans. Fifty years later, the fairy tern – the smallest and rarest of all the native terns, weighing just 70 grammes – is threatened with extinction with only 45 individuals and 12 breeding pairs left remaining. Despite the necessity of protection, its future hangs in the balance, like dark rectangles in this painting.

11.

Colin McCahon

Elias will he come will he come to save him

oil on canvas

signed and dated 30.7.59

1760 x 1190mm

Exhibited:

Colin McCahon: Recent Paintings,
Gallery 91, Christchurch, 6–18 October
1959.

A Question of Faith, Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 30
August – 10 November 2002 (touring City
Gallery, Wellington; Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tamaki; National Gallery of Victoria,
Australia; Art Gallery of New South
Wales, Australia, during 2002–2004)

Illustrated:

Marja Bloem and Martin Browne,
Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith
(Craig Potton, Nelson, 2002), p. 87.
Peter Simpson, *Colin McCahon: The
Titirangi Years, 1953–1959* (Auckland
University Press, 2007), plate 70, p. 146.
Peter Simpson, *There is Only One God,
Vol. 1 1919 - 1959* (Auckland University
Press, 2019), p. 309.

Literature:

Peter Simpson, *Colin McCahon: The
Titirangi Years, 1953–1959* (Auckland
University Press, 2007), pp. 64–65.

Reference:

Colin McCahon Database
(www.mccahon.co.nz) cm000142.

Provenance:

Collection of the artist's estate.
Private collection, Europe.

\$1 000 000 – \$1 500 000

Although Colin McCahon once extravagantly claimed that there were than 100 *Elias* paintings, in actuality the number is much smaller, either twelve or fifteen, depending on precisely which works are included and whether *Elias triptych* is counted as one work or three (as it was originally exhibited). Within the series, *Elias will he come will he come to save him* is one of the largest – only *Let be, let be* and *Elias cannot save him now* are larger – and it is also somewhat untypical in one other respect; it is one of only two works in the series in which he uses the medium of oil paint on canvas.

Nearly all the others are painted in enamel housepaints (Solpah, Butex), sometimes mixed with sand, on hardboard. The difference in medium does make for some variations – the colouring is more subtle and muted than in some of the series, allowing for small gradations within the sombre over-all brown-and-white tonality. Furthermore, oil paint allows for greater figurative detail in the treatment of landscape (the upper hillside), of the central cross (the T or Tau form of cross which McCahon favoured), and of the pile of skulls at bottom left (evoking Golgotha, the biblical 'place of a skull'). There is also more colour variation in the lettering than in most others, with 'Elias' inscribed large in cursive script across the top of the painting, set apart by its largely white lettering, while the other words are in brown sometimes shaded with white.

The works in the *Elias* series were all painted at Titirangi in 1959, during the remarkable year that followed McCahon's four-month trip to the United States in 1958, a year which included *The Wake*, *Northland panels*, 35 *Northland* drawings, two sets of *Numerals* and much else. Most of this flood of new work, including all but one of the *Elias* paintings, was shown in *Recent Paintings* at Gallery 91 in Christchurch in October 1959 – arguably McCahon's greatest exhibition ever. According to the dates written on the backs of the paintings, he began the series in February 1959 with *Let be, let be*, added others in April and June and then completed these and all the rest in a burst of activity at the end of July and in August. *Elias will he come will he come to save him* is uniquely dated to a specific day: 30 July 1959,



Colin McCahon, *Crucifixion according to St. Mark* (1947). Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū.



though whether this date marks the beginning or completion of the painting is not known. It is not impossible that he began and finished it on the same day.

A full understanding of the implications of this painting and the series as a whole depends upon some knowledge of the Bible and in particular the accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. McCahon first explored this material in *Crucifixion according to St Mark* (1947) in which shortly before dying on the cross Jesus cries out in his native Aramaic language 'ELI ELI LAMA SABACHTHANI', words which translate into English as 'Lord, Lord, Why hast thou forsaken me'. Daringly, Christ's words are placed in a comic-like speech bubble. Meanwhile in other speech bubbles bystanders comment on Christ's words. One says 'LET ALONE / let us see whether / Elias will come / and take him / Down'. The significance of this is that it involves a misreading of Christ's words. The speaker mistakenly assumes that Christ is calling on Elias, another name for the Old Testament prophet Elijah.

In the *Elias* series painted a dozen years later McCahon returned to this extraordinary moment but shifted attention to Matthew's account which reads in part:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, 'This man calleth for Elias' ... The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

In the 1959 paintings McCahon never uses the phrase in Aramaic by which Christ utters his despair, focussing instead on the reactions of the bystanders and the misunderstandings they manifest. In some of the paintings the words recorded are close to the biblical originals; in others there are variations on the biblical phrases, as in the present work where repetition of the phrases 'will he' and 'come' adds urgent intensity to the overwhelming question of whether Christ is abandoned or saved. There is no question that in this series McCahon was dramatising his own existential doubts, as he admitted in 1972: 'I could never call myself a Christian, therefore these same doubts constantly assail me too.'

In these exceptional paintings McCahon brought together two strands in his work – the *Crucifixion* (eight surviving examples, 1947–52), and all-word paintings (such as *I Am* and *Let us possess one world*, 1954–55). The crucifixion was now addressed without figures, but with shapes, colours and words alone. Did McCahon see in America any precedent for such radically original pictures? The closest parallel was probably Robert Motherwell's series *Je t'aime* (1955–57), where the subject was different (love not death) but as in McCahon words were combined with abstract shapes and colours. However, McCahon is unlikely to have seen them. Not for the first time, nor for the last, the direction he was following was entirely his own.





12.

Colin McCahon
The First Bellini Madonna
enamel on board
signed and dated '61 - '62 and inscribed *Bellini I*
1219 x 906mm

Exhibited:
Hidden Treasures, Auckland City Art Gallery, June - September 1992.
Contemporary New Zealand Painting - 1961, Auckland City Art Gallery, November-December 1961.
Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith, Auckland City Art Gallery, 29 March - 15 June 2003.

Illustrated:
Marja Bloem and Martin Browne, *Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith* (Craig Potton, Nelson, 2002), p. 196.

Reference:
Colin McCahon Database
(www.mccahon.co.nz) cm000256.

Provenance:
Collection of Mr Ed Danziger. Purchased from the Ikon Gallery, Auckland in 1963 together with approximately twenty other paintings, including three other works from the *Bellini Madonna* series. Exhibited in Mr Danziger's Mayfair Hotel in London. Later gifted by Danziger to his sister in the United States. Private collection, Auckland. Purchased from Martin Browne in 1990.

\$350 000 - \$500 000

Giovanni Bellini (1430-1516), the Venetian Renaissance master, was one of McCahon's favourite painters, especially after he acquired in 1947 *Giovanni Bellini* by Philip Hendy & Ludwig Goldscheider (London, Phaidon Books, 1945). Gordon Brown records: 'After turning several pages [McCahon] came to the colour plate showing *The Pietà with St John*. Its impact was immediate and so moved him emotionally that he had to slam the book shut until he could recover his composure' (Brown, 1983, p. 35).

McCahon's most explicit 'after Bellini' painting prior to the *Bellini Madonnas* was *Christ Supported by Angels* (1951), one of the last of the figurative Biblical paintings which occupied him between 1946 and 1952. The title echoes Bellini's *The Dead Christ Supported by Two Angels* (National Gallery, London) and McCahon's friend Charles Brasch referred to it as developed from 'an after Bellini pieta' (Simpson, *There is Only One Direction*, 2019, p. 168).

After his return from America in 1958, McCahon looked for ways to reintroduce religious themes to his painting without reverting to figurative narrative. His first device, in the *Elias* paintings of 1959, was to focus on Biblical texts associated with Christ's crucifixion and resurrection in combination with abstract colour and form. In 1961 McCahon adopted an pared back, geometrical style of abstraction in the *Gate* series, but soon felt driven to supplement the language of

pure abstraction either by the introduction of text (as in *The Second Gate Series* of 1962) or by utilising art historical reference and symbolism as in the *Bellini Madonna* series of 1961-62. He wanted, in a famous phrase 'not more "masking-tape" but more involvement in the human situation'.

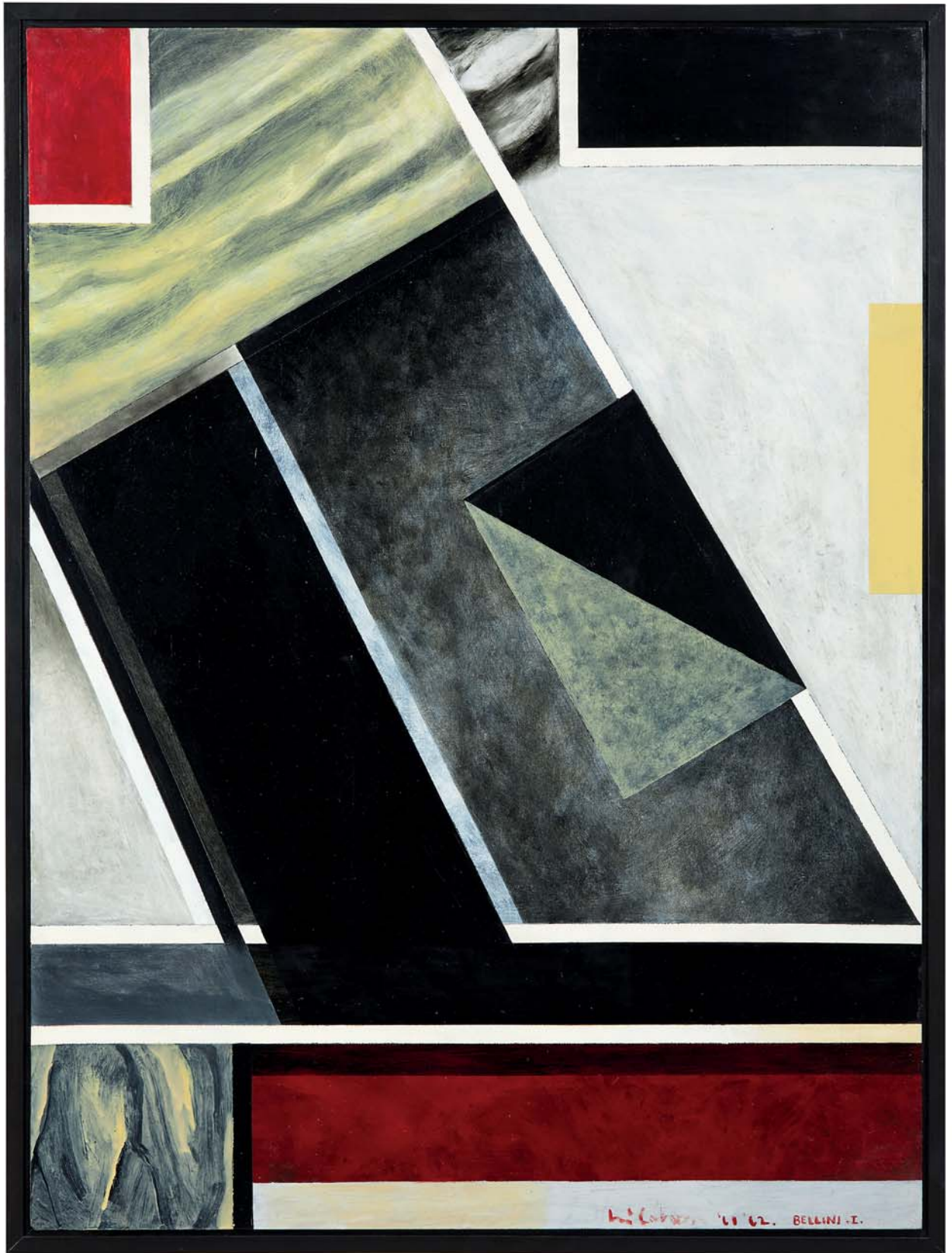
The *Bellini Madonnas*, of which there are four known examples, are closely related to the *Gate* series both in date and imagery, and by the titular reference to Bellini's Madonnas and by structural and colouristic reference to these famous Renaissance predecessors, McCahon was attempting as it were to 'Christianise' the language of the *Gate* series and extend the connotations of their abstract idiom. The *Bellini Madonnas* were among about 20 McCahon works purchased by an American entrepreneur, Edward Danziger, and taken off-shore, though years later the *Madonnas* found their way back to New Zealand collections.

So far as the *Bellini Madonnas* have a single source it is most likely Bellini's *Alzano Madonna/Madonna with a Pear* c. 1485 (Bergamo, Galleria dell' Accademia Carrera). In this sublime work a naked Christ-child sits on the knee of a blue-robed Madonna, the pair constituting a triangular-shaped mass at the picture's centre. The Madonna is placed behind a low horizontal parapet stretching from edge to edge on which appears a single pear; behind the figures is a double rectangular screen extending to the top of the picture; narrow scenes of town and country are seen at left and right edges.

McCahon's *First Bellini Madonna* is anything but a simple translation of this image into abstract form - McCahon's art historical borrowings or allusions are seldom obvious or direct - but certain features of the Bellini painting are referenced, as in the pattern of horizontal, vertical and diagonal forms of which the latter broadly correspond to the placement of mother and child. The small diagonally divided black/grey rectangle placed against larger diagonal black and grey forms at the picture's centre may signify abstractly child and mother respectively. The strong horizontals at the bottom relate to the parapet in Bellini's, while patches of marbled texture echo the textural patterns of the screens and parapet. There is much greater variety of texture and colour (red, yellow, ochre, brown, black, white, grey) in McCahon's painting than in the restricted palette of the *Gate* paintings. This majestic, beautiful, complex and subtle picture, painted with supreme confidence and authority, is one of the undoubted masterpieces of McCahon's middle years.



Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna and Child (Alzano Madonna)* c.1488.



Colin McCahon

South Canterbury Landscape
synthetic polymer paint on board
signed and dated '68 and inscribed
Canterbury; title inscribed, signed and
dated verso
446 x 558mm

Exhibited:

Colin McCahon, Barry Lett Galleries,
Auckland, 14–25 October, 1968.
*Hit Parade – Contemporary Art from
the Paris Family Collection*, City Gallery,
Wellington, 13 December 1992 – 28
February 1993.

Illustrated:

Art New Zealand, No. 4, February –
March 1977, p.20, 21.
Gordon H. Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist*
(Auckland, 1984), plate 100.

Literature:

Jim Barr, 'The Les and Milly Paris Family
Collection', in *Art New Zealand*, No. 4,
February–March 1977, p. 21.
Gordon H. Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist*
(Auckland, 1984), p. 195.

Reference:

Colin McCahon Database (www.mccahon.co.nz) cm001090.

Provenance:

Collection of Les and Milly Paris, Wellington.
Private collection, Auckland. Purchased from
Gow Langsford Gallery in 2003.

\$300 000 – \$400 000

In 1977 Jim Barr writes that Colin McCahon's *South Canterbury Landscape* (1968) is "almost iconographic in its interpretation of the land." Forty two years later, McCahon's painting now has a longer history of owners, exhibitions and publications, but this same statement rings true. Looking to the history of the Canterbury landscape tradition, its abstract rendering questions our relationship to the physical world. Previous owners of the painting, all-consuming and prominent art collectors Les and Milly Paris, described it 'the quintessence of landscape...the landscape down to its bare bones'. It is exhibited in *Hit Parade: Contemporary Art from the Paris Family Collection* at City Gallery Wellington in 1992-1993, within its family of other collected artworks.

In the 1960s McCahon is interested in the human condition and by breaking up paintings into panels or sections. In *South Canterbury Landscape* McCahon divides the painting in half horizontally, separating land and sky. The sky is emerald green with a mustard yellow eye-shaped sun, outlined in jet black. Underneath the sun and above the horizon line is a translucent wash of blue paint, perhaps a mirage from the heat or the ocean in the far distance.

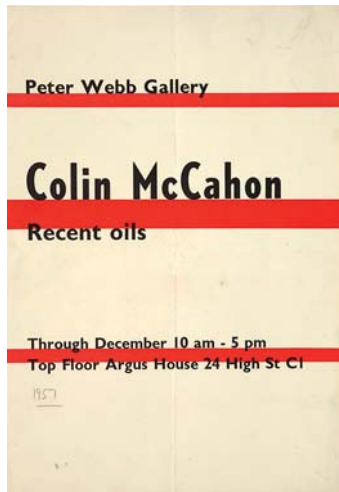
The lower half depicts the land painted in the same mustard tone as the sun, complete with rolling hills and land boundaries. The slightly off-straight black line on the left reads as a both a way to divide the painting, but also a boundary marker, a fence on a farm, a naturally occurring line of different shades of land, or the fault line. This element is also present in McCahon's *The Fourteen Stations of the Cross* painted just two years earlier, in which the slightly-diagonal line is present in the majority of its panels. A hilly mound dominates the lower right corner. Through it strikes another line and the right hand side is washed with muddy brown paint over the yellow radiating beneath. The mound and its sections again reference the boundaries of the landscape, and the shades and perspectives of a rolling hill seen in different lights.

In 1968 *South Canterbury Landscape* was exhibited for the first time at Barry Lett Galleries for just 11 days. Alongside the painting are other enquiries into the Canterbury landscape painted in the same year, in variations such as: *South Canterbury: rain* and *South Canterbury before a storm*. It is exhibited alongside a range of Helensville landscape paintings and his *Visible Mysteries* series. *South Canterbury Landscape* is beautiful and serene in its humble simplicity. It is both obvious and familiar as a New Zealand landscape, yet acutely abstract. The yellow of the sun mimics the yellow of the landscape and it is instantly recognizable to New Zealanders and Cantabrians alike that we are looking at the Canterbury plains, drought ridden and burnt by the nor-wester. The plush rich green of the sky sits as a direct comparison to the barren land.

In 1968 McCahon is living in Grey Lynn, yet he is still captivated by the Canterbury environment. In this painting, McCahon harks back to the Canterbury school of landscape painting that is so iconic as part of New Zealand's art history, and many of his contemporaries the quest to paint the vast plains and mountainous backdrop. Yet elements of the painting, such as the simple forms, sectioning of the painting and divisive lines in paint, look forward beyond 1968 to what we now label as 'iconic McCahon'.

At only 446 x 558mm, *South Canterbury Landscape* is a relatively small work of McCahon's, compared to his well-known *Northland Panels* (1958) or *The Fourteen Stations of the Cross* (1966). The vast expanse and history of the South Canterbury landscape is reduced to a small scale. Exploring the power of the landscape, the intimacy of size reminds us that while the landscape can be recognisable to all, our relationship to it still remains deeply personal.





14.

Colin McCahon
Kauri Tree Tops
 oil on board
 signed and dated May – June '57 and inscribed
Titirangi
 605 x 430mm

Exhibited:
Colin McCahon: Recent Oils, Peter Webb
 Gallery, Auckland, 2 December – 10 December
 1957.

Illustrated:
 Peter Simpson, *Colin McCahon: The Titirangi
 Years, 1953 – 1959* (Auckland University Press,
 2007), plate 44, p.118.
 Peter Simpson, *There is Only One God, Vol. I
 1919–1959* (Auckland University Press, 2019),
 p. 220.

Reference:
 Colin McCahon database
 (www.mccahon.co.nz) cm000507.

Provenance:
 Private collection, Auckland.

\$250 000 – \$350 000

The closest Colin McCahon ever came to a free-wheeling, improvisatory painterly manner was during the years following his shift north in 1953 to take up a job at the Auckland Art Gallery. While the earlier landscapes and religious paintings manifestly bore the weight of his theological inclinations, the works produced in Titirangi/French Bay cast off into territories of pure optical experience, with a heady dash of nature-mysticism gleaned from the Romantic poetry he kept close to his heart throughout his life.

In Titirangi, as elsewhere, McCahon's relationship to his immediate surroundings was fundamental and radicalising. With the paintings of Cezanne and the Cubists also in mind, McCahon moved into a phase of unprecedented colouristic and formal experimentation. Imagine Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* taken a short distance up a bush track in the Waitakeres, moments after rainfall. In *Kauri Tree Tops*, the natural world has been fragmented and atomised—it has become a realm of unfettered, energetic creation.

In *Colin McCahon: There is One Direction*, Peter Simpson quotes Charles Brasch's account of the artist's formative time in Titirangi, during which 'he began asking himself, "What is it like to see?" (without intellectualising etc.). In the morning he would dash out of bed and look... Conventional perspective vanished...' Resulting works, like *Kauri Tree Tops*, are characterised by lightness and translucence. It is almost as if the artist believed, for a moment, that the act of seeing might in itself offer some kind of redemption.

The slanting, patchwork net of McCahon's brushwork tremors with rustling movement, shifting light and changeable weather. Refracted light congeals in small parcels of colour which dance before the viewer's eyes. Like church window arches, the rounded tree forms at the base of the image offer a formal counterpoint to these floating rectangles of colour. The arboreal forms also anticipate McCahon's reductive landscapes of the 1960s and his stylised waterfall paintings.

Peter Simpson has noted that throughout the artist's Titirangi period there was 'a constant push-pull between "realism" at one extreme and total "abstraction" at the other...' Equidistant from both polarities, McCahon's Titirangi works configure as a very eventful intermission in his career, dividing the darker, existentially loaded early and late paintings.

In *Kauri tree tops*, Colin McCahon offers a poetic reverie on the profusion and disorder of his immediate environment, while also registering the finely tuned, crystalline forms and patterns of nature. It is an early morning in winter—May, June 1957, Titirangi, Auckland—and there is both spiritual nourishment and delight to be had in the fall of rain on a pane of glass, and in the world as seen through condensation on the window of a house or a bus heading city-wards.



15.

Colin McCahon
Red Titirangi
oil on card
signed with artist's initials C. M and
dated July '57
750 x 530mm

Exhibited:

Colin McCahon: Recent Oils, Peter Webb Gallery, Auckland, 2 December – 10 December 1957.

Recent Paintings by Colin McCahon, Dunedin Public Library, Dunedin, 8–18 April 1958.

Eight New Zealand Painters III, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1959.

A Retrospective Exhibition: M.

T Woollaston – Colin McCahon, Auckland Art Gallery, 20 May – 4 June 1963.

Colin McCahon: A Survey Exhibition, Auckland City Art Gallery, 7 March – 23 April 1972.

Illustrated:

Peter Simpson, *Colin McCahon: The Titirangi Years, 1953–1959* (Auckland University Press, 2007), plate 43, p. 117.

Peter Simpson, *There is Only One God, Vol. I 1919–1959* (Auckland University Press, 2019), p. 257.

Literature:

Peter Simpson, *Colin McCahon: The Titirangi Years, 1953–1959* (Auckland University Press, 2007), p. 37.

Reference:

Colin McCahon database
(www.mccahon.co.nz) cm001580.

Provenance:

Private collection, Auckland.

\$140 000 – \$200 000

The McCahon family's move to Auckland in 1953, following a possible offer of employment for Colin at Auckland Art Gallery, would eventually lead to a period of increased financial stability. They were able to acquire the modest house in Otitori Bay Road, which gave them a solid base, yet it must have held its challenges for a growing family; the lush bush surroundings provided much inspiration for an artist, but the long winters were bitterly cold and damp.

McCahon wrote "*We came to Auckland in 1953 and lived in Titirangi at a tiny house in French Bay. It rained almost solidly during May, June, July and August. For the first month we lived almost entirely on a diet of potatoes, parsley and bags of rock-cake given by a kind and ancient aunt ... At this time the bush and the harbor were of prime importance as subjects – so was the whole magnificent spread of Auckland seen from Titirangi Road on the endless journeys into town every morning. The November light for that first year was a miracle. It remains an obsession ...*"

The magnificent Kauri, tall and straight, with trunks that towered through the bush would become a key focus for McCahon over the coming years. Sacred to Maori and unique to New Zealand it is hardly surprising that they came to fascinate him during his time there. Frequently appearing as details or snapshots, the paintings from this period often appear as a view through a window, or a detail of what appeared in his view, with different plays of light and a sense of seasonal change. Important not only for their depiction of the local environment McCahon found himself in at the time, these paintings also helped to facilitate the push towards abstraction that was occurring in his work at the time.

When *Red Titirangi* was painted in 1957, the transition to abstraction was very clear. While we can still discern a landscape, with glimpses of sky, cloud, earth and the peaks of the forest, the physical resemblance to the kauri as we know it has been removed. Our interpretation is formed through a skilful combination of diamond shapes and square forms, with intersecting lines that create the illusion. As to the strong use of earthy red pigment, there are a myriad of reasons why he might have chosen to paint a *red Titirangi*; the famous West Coast sunset may well have been a factor, but the colour of *Red Titirangi* is also strongly reminiscent of the little ochre-red house he was living in at the time, the place where he would make some of the most significant artworks of his career. Perhaps we may view this painting as the artist's tribute to his own home in the sacred bush.



16.

Colin McCahon
Rosegarden
synthetic polymer paint
on card, circa 1974
195 x 140mm

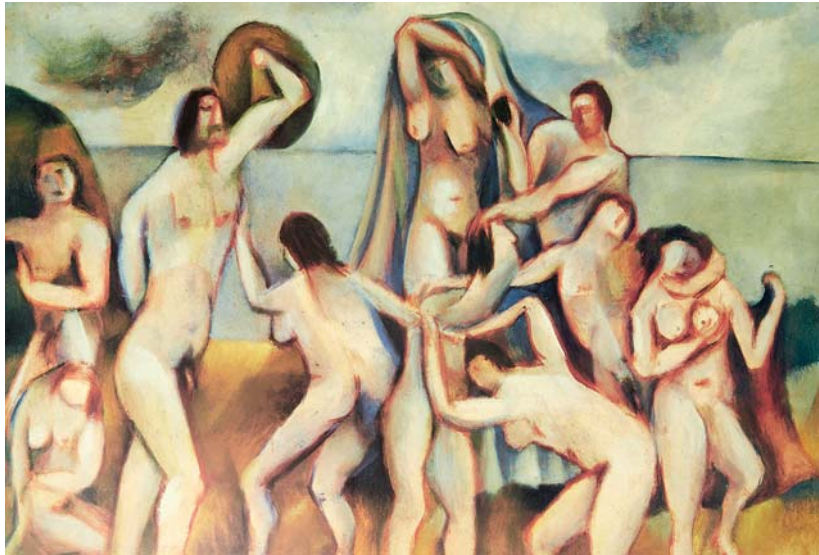
Provenance:
Gift of the artist. Private
collection, Wellington.

\$20 000 - \$30 000



18.

Colin McCahon
Bathers
limited edition silkscreen print
430 x 625mm
\$1500 - \$2500



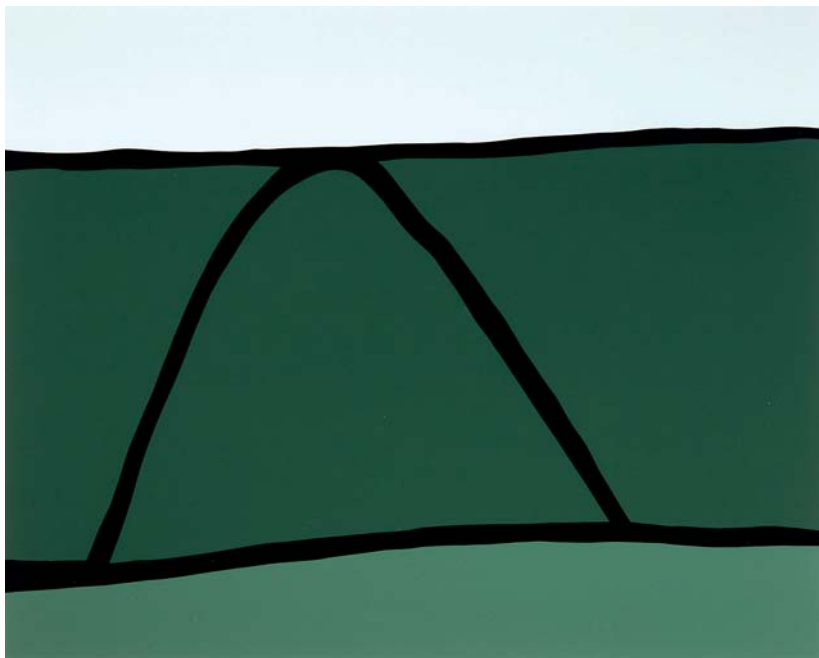
19.

Colin McCahon
North Otago Landscape
silkscreen print from the Barry
Lett Gallery Multiples series,
produced by Mervyn Williams
in 1969
446 x 558mm

Reference:
Colin McCahon Database
(www.mccahon.co.nz)
cm001344.

Provenance:
Private collection, Auckland.

\$4000 - \$6000



20.

Colin McCahon
*Tomorrow will be the same but
not as this*
silkscreen print published
by McCahon House to mark
centenary year of McCahon's
birth (2019)
inscribed 45/100; McCahon
House chop mark to paper
margin
1150 x 695mm

\$5500 - \$8000



21.

A private reference library of books, exhibition catalogues, pamphlets and posters pertaining to Colin McCahon. Foremost among these publications is a very rare pre-print copy of *Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith* published for the Stedelijk Museum exhibition in Amsterdam. Also included is: *Institute for Advancing McCahon (A Division of Cubistics, Wellington)*; *Art New Zealand No. 8* (McCahon focus); *Colin McCahon: 'Religious' Works 1946-1952* (1975); *Colin McCahon: A Survey Exhibition* (1972); *A Retrospective Exhibition: M.T. Woollaston and Colin McCahon* (1963); *McCahon's "Necessary Protection"* (1977); *James K. Baxter Festival: 1973 - Four Plays*; *Colin McCahon: The Last Painting* (Peter Webb Galleries, 1993); *A Tribute to McCahon 1919-87* (Hocken Library, 1987); *Colin McCahon at the Dowse Art Gallery* (1980). There are further more modern publications also.

\$500 - \$1000



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Please note: it is assumed that all bidders at auction have read and agreed to the conditions described on this page. Art+Object directors are available during the auction viewing to clarify any questions you may have.

1. **Registration:** Only registered bidders may bid at auction. You are required to complete a bidding card or absentee bidding form prior to the auction giving your correct name, address and telephone contact and supplementary information such as email addresses that you may wish to supply to Art+Object.
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3. **Reserve:** Lots are offered and sold subject to the vendor's reserve price being met.
4. **Lots offered and sold as described and viewed:** Art+Object makes all attempts to accurately describe and catalogue lots offered for sale. Notwithstanding this neither the vendor nor Art+Object accepts any liability for errors of description or faults and imperfections whether described in writing or verbally. This applies to questions of authenticity and quality of the item. Buyers are deemed to have inspected the item thoroughly and proceed on their own judgment. The act of bidding is agreed by the buyer to be an indication that they are satisfied on all counts regarding condition and authenticity.
5. **Buyers premium:** The purchaser by bidding acknowledges their acceptance of a buyers premium of 17.5% + GST to be added to the hammer price in the event of a successful sale at auction.
6. **Art+Object is an agent for a vendor:** A+O has the right to conduct the sale of an item on behalf of a vendor. This may include withdrawing an item from sale for any reason.
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8. **Failure to make payment:** If a purchaser fails to make payment as outlined in point 7 above Art+Object may without any advice to the purchaser exercise its right to: a) rescind or stop the sale, b) re offer the lot for sale to an underbidder or at auction. Art+Object reserves the right to pursue the purchaser for any difference in sale proceeds if this course of action is chosen, c) to pursue legal remedy for breach of contract.
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10. **Bidders obligations:** The act of bidding means all bidders acknowledge that they are personally responsible for payment if they are the successful bidder. This includes all registered absentee or telephone bidders. Bidders acting as an agent for a third party must obtain written authority from Art+Object and provide written instructions from any represented party and their express commitment to pay all funds relating to a successful bid by their nominated agent.
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The following information does not form part of the conditions of sale, however buyers, particularly first time bidders are recommended to read these notes.

A. **Bidding at auction:** Please ensure your instructions to the auctioneer are clear and easily understood. It is well to understand that during a busy sale with multiple bidders the auctioneer may not be able to see all bids at all times. It is recommended that you raise your bidding number clearly and without hesitation. If your bid is made in error or you have misunderstood the bidding level please advise the auctioneer immediately of your error – prior to the hammer falling. Please note that if you have made a bid and the hammer has fallen and you are the highest bidder you have entered a binding contract to purchase an item at the bid price. New bidders in particular are advised to make themselves known to the sale auctioneer who will assist you with any questions about the conduct of the auction.

B. **Absentee bidding:** Art+Object welcomes absentee bids once the necessary authority has been completed and lodged with Art+Object. A+O will do all it can to ensure bids are lodged on your behalf but accepts no liability for failure to carry out these bids. See the Absentee bidding form in this catalogue for information on lodging absentee bids. These are accepted up to 2 hours prior to the published auction commencement.

C. **Telephone bids:** The same conditions apply to telephone bids. It is highly preferable to bid over a landline as the vagaries of cellphone connections may result in disappointment. You will be telephoned prior to your indicated lot arising in the catalogue order. If the phone is engaged or connection impossible the sale will proceed without your bidding. At times during an auction the bidding can be frenetic so you need to be sure you give clear instructions to the person executing your bids. The auctioneer will endeavour to cater to the requirements of phone bidders but cannot wait for a phone bid so your prompt participation is requested.

D. **New Zealand dollars:** All estimates in this catalogue are in New Zealand dollars. The amount to be paid by successful bidders on the payment date is the New Zealand dollar amount stated on the purchaser invoice. Exchange rate variations are at the risk of the purchaser.

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This completed and signed form authorises Art+Object to bid on my behalf at the above mentioned auction for the following lots up to prices indicated below. These bids are to be executed at the lowest price levels possible.

Auction No. 145
 Celebrating Colin McCahon: an auction event
 Tuesday 5 November 2019 at 7.00pm

I understand that if successful I will purchase the lot or lots at or below the prices listed on this form and the listed buyers premium for this sale (17.5%) and GST on the buyers premium. I warrant also that I have read and understood and agree to comply with the conditions of sale as printed in the catalogue.

Lot no.	Lot Description	Bid maximum in New Zealand dollars (for absentee bids only)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Payment and Delivery: Art+Object will advise me as soon as is practical that I am the successful bidder of the lot or lots described above. I agree to pay immediately on receipt of this advice. Payment will be by Eftpos, cash (under \$5000.00) or direct credit. I understand that there is a 2.5% surcharge for payment by Visa or MasterCard credit cards. I understand that payments over \$10,000.00 must be made by direct credit to Art+Object's bank account as shown on the invoice.

I will arrange for collection or dispatch of my purchases. If Art+Object is instructed by me to arrange for packing and dispatch of goods I agree to pay any costs incurred by Art+Object. Note: Art+Object requests that these shipping arrangements are made prior to the auction date to ensure prompt delivery processing.

Please indicate as appropriate by ticking the box: PHONE BID ABSENTEE BID

MR/MRS/MS:

FIRST NAME: _____ SURNAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

HOME PHONE: _____ MOBILE: _____

BUSINESS PHONE: _____ EMAIL: _____

Signed as agreed: _____

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1. Email a printed, signed and scanned form to Art+Object: info@artandobject.co.nz
2. Fax a completed form to Art+Object: +64 9 354 4645
3. Post a form to Art+Object, PO Box 68345 Wellesley Street, Auckland 1141, New Zealand

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