

**Constituting the ‘Woman Artist’:
A Feminist Genealogy of Aotearoa
New Zealand’s Art History
1928 - 1989**

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A thesis submitted to
Victoria University of Wellington
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Victoria University of Wellington
December 2020

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Abstract

This thesis considers the ways in which the figure of the ‘woman artist’ has been constituted in published sources in Aotearoa New Zealand’s art history, between 1928 and 1989. Most of the texts dedicated specifically to women artists in this country were written in the latter half of the twentieth century, and were produced with the intention of writing women artists back in to the histories from which they had been excluded. This thesis operates from a different perspective. Rather than assuming a starting point of women’s absence from a national art history, it traces instead those written representations of the ‘woman artist’ as they exist in the published literature. Through the construction of a genealogy of such representation, this thesis examines the ideologies which are both embedded in, and perpetuated by them. In doing so it makes evident and interrogates the gendered power dynamics which have shaped the writing of Aotearoa New Zealand’s art history.

This thesis is structured chronologically, charting the formation and expansion of a coherent national arts discourse against shifting notions of national and cultural identity. The trajectory of this discourse was shaped by a canonical impulse, constructing an unfolding narrative which centres upon a succession of key artistic figures. This thesis argues that the structuring of this – largely male, Pākehā – narrative, acted to subsume gendered difference, rendering women increasingly peripheral within its pages. The model of subsumed difference is also apparent in feminist critiques of this dominant art history, which are critically interrogated in the latter half of this thesis. As women sought to challenge the relative exclusion of women artists from this dominant narrative, they also perpetuated their own exclusions, often in terms of culture or sexuality.

Through discursive analysis of both ‘mainstream’ art history, and the feminist writings which addressed it, this thesis presents two significant arguments. First, that stereotypical representations of women artists play a structural role – to marginalise women – within Aotearoa New Zealand’s art history. Secondly, that feminist interrogations of such histories failed to account for the multiplicity of women’s subjectivity. I conclude by instantiating and calling for an alternative approach that challenges the subsuming of such difference within a single, homogenous narrative. Such an approach will produce histories that interrogate, rather than perpetuate, the gendered and cultural power dynamics embedded within society.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I extend my warmest gratitude to my primary supervisor, Christina Barton. I am enormously grateful for the support and encouragement she has shown me throughout this process. Thank you, Tina, for trusting me enough to let me find my own way, yet always providing a guiding hand to right the ship when it strayed a little too far off course! Thank you, too, for always urging me to be ambitious, and for leading the way with your rigorous, critical approach to scholarship.

For too brief a time, I was fortunate to have Roger Blackley as my secondary supervisor. More than a supervisor, Roger was both a colleague and a friend. His encyclopaedic knowledge and thoughtful, heartfelt approach to the art history of this country will remain a constant source of inspiration. Thanks too, to Geoffrey Batchen, my *second* secondary supervisor, whose belief in both myself and this project means so much.

Much of this research was aided by the excellent staff at the Alexander Turnbull Library, particularly Linda Evans, and by the staff at Te Papa Tongarewa, particularly Victoria Boyack and Chelsea Nichols.

I have been fortunate, during the course of this project, to have participated in conversations with writers, artists and thinkers, too numerous to mention, who have enriched my thinking. Special thanks, however, must go to Fiona Clark and Priscilla Pitts.

I am deeply grateful for the entire department of Art History at Victoria University for providing a context of academic excellence within which to work. In addition to my three supervisors, I would also like to acknowledge the support of Peter Brunt, Raymond Spiteri and David Maskill. I was fortunate enough, during the course of my graduate research to tutor courses taught by each one of you. Doing so has taught me an inordinate amount, and strengthened my deep commitment to this discipline. Thanks too, to the irreplaceable Pippa Wisheart, who welcomed me into the department with enthusiasm and generosity.

Embarking upon this project has brought some remarkable people into my life. The friendships formed with Chloe Cull, Anna-Marie White, Milly Mitchell-Anyon and Lachlan

Taylor have transformed an isolated academic research project into a rich and stimulating experience.

Throughout this process, Andy Ching has been a constant source of support and encouragement. Without his unwavering belief in me, there is no way this PhD would have even begun, let alone been completed. Here's to our next chapter.

Finally, to all of those women artists past, present and future who make art with neither fear, nor regard for expectations, and to those thinkers and writers who continue to challenge assumptions by thinking and writing courageously. Thank you for helping me to be hopeful, and for showing me what it means to make work that matters.

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An Introduction

...the way the history of art has been studied and evaluated is not the exercise of neutral 'objective' scholarship, but an ideological practice. It is a particular way of seeing and interpreting in which the beliefs and assumptions of art historians, unconsciously reproducing the ideologies of our society, shape and limit the very picture of the history of art presented to us by art history.¹

Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock

This thesis traces the construction of the conceptual figure of the 'woman artist' through Aotearoa New Zealand's art history, from the 1920s to the 1980s.² This chronology spans a period which gave rise to the emergence of a published history of art, as well as a period of significant feminist criticism, written in direct response to this mainstream history. During the nascent period in this national art history, women artists were frequently referred to in terms which laid the foundations of those instantly-recognised stereotypes still so often attributed to them – the 'amateur painter,' 'the artist's wife,' and 'the unmarried eccentric'. Of course, the qualities and identities most frequently attributed to women artists were not created in an art-historical vacuum, but were transcribed directly from the patriarchal society that produced that art history. Discursive analysis sheds light on the manner in which such gendered tropes were formulated, repeated and reiterated. Such repetition acted to naturalise and authenticate these stereotypical beliefs about women artists, rendering them marginal within the national art historical narrative during the course of its construction. During these early decades of the writing of New Zealand's art history, women artists were certainly not invisible, nor were they erased from the narrative, as a contemporary standpoint might lead us to assume. What emerges from a considered analysis of the published literature is a more nuanced, yet equally damaging, trend. The critical reception which greeted women artists worked to ensure that the constituted figure was relegated to a marginal space within the discourse: a space which serves as a point of qualitative comparison to those artists whose assumed universality ensures they need no gendered prefix.

This analysis echoes the findings of Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, outlined in their 1981 book *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*. Here they argued:

¹ Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, 2nd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2013), xxix-xxx.

² Throughout this thesis I will refer to both New Zealand and Aotearoa. The name New Zealand indicates an understanding of the nation defined by colonial or European settler limitations. The usage of Aotearoa refers to engagements with nationhood which operate from a bicultural perspective, acknowledging both tangata whenua (people of the land / Māori) and tangata tiriti (people of the treaty, most frequently Pākehā).

Although the ‘feminine’ stereotype seems merely to be a way of excluding women from cultural history, it is in fact a crucial element in the construction of the current view of the history of art. Women’s place in art history, we argue, has been misrecognized; exposing the feminine stereotype allows us to realize the true significance of women in art history as a structuring category in its ideology.³

Like their book, my thesis addresses the relations between women, art and ideology, treating the specifics of art in New Zealand as a situated case study to reveal the ways women were categorised in order to be marginalised. My research turns specifically to the key documents of New Zealand’s art criticism and history, and focuses solely upon those published resources produced between the 1920s and 1980s. This thesis focuses upon the specific discourse which arose out of the self-conscious construction of an art world concerned with ‘high culture’. For this reason, practices considered to fall outside of these parameters – such as women’s craft-based arts, as well as customary Māori practice – are not directly addressed, except in those instances where they are discussed within this discourse. Within these parameters, a wide range of published literature is consulted, from widely distributed journals and major arts publications, to specialised texts aimed at a more limited readership. These documents are analysed in order to identify and map the linguistic and representational methods which have been utilised to establish reductive characterisations of the ‘woman artist,’ specific to the body of writing produced in this country.

Chapters One and Two of this thesis are concerned with tracing the way that the figure of the woman artist was constructed within the early phase of New Zealand’s art history. The period covered here broadly spans the mid-part of the twentieth century, and charts the growth of art writing – both criticism and history – as a widely recognised discipline in New Zealand. Chapter One takes as its chronological starting point the first publication, in 1928, of the long-running journal *Art in New Zealand*. At the time of its first appearance in September of 1928, through to its final issue in 1946, *Art in New Zealand* was the only consistently published journal dedicated to the arts in New Zealand. From the outset, it placed a strong emphasis on the visual arts. The inclusion of a selected number of colour plates, and a larger number of black and white reproductions, ensured artists’ work began to reach a far wider audience than previously. The foundational work done by *Art in New Zealand* was solidified and clarified by E. H. McCormick in the writing of his 1940 book, *Letters and Art in New*

³ Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses*, xxx.

Zealand. In fact, McCormick, a regular contributor to *Art in New Zealand*, acknowledged the central position the journal occupied during his research process:

Literary sources are few... The main printed source is *Art in New Zealand* (Wellington, 1928-), published by its founder, H. H. Tombs. The twelve volumes of this quarterly with their many illustrations now constitute a most valuable record of New Zealand art, contemporary and past.⁴

Whilst McCormick's book was predominantly focused on literature, his brief dealings with the visual arts ensured his account remained the key resource on New Zealand art until the late 1960s.

Chapter Two is concerned with the 1950s and 1960s, and continues to map the complex nexus of representations constituting the woman artist. Framed by wider debates regarding nationalism and cultural identity, the writings of this period were foundational in constructing a canonical narrative of New Zealand art. The beliefs, concerns and biases which shape the foundational texts of the 1930s and 1940s resurface again in the first survey book relating directly to New Zealand painting, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1836-1967*.⁵ Written by Gordon H. Brown and Hamish Keith, the publication of this book in 1969 marks the chronological end-point of Chapter Two. Brown and Keith's introduction positions the book as a continuation of the scholarship of previous decades. It opens with the following sentence: 'Since the appearance, some thirty years ago, of Dr E. H. McCormick's book *Letters and Art in New Zealand* there has been no substantial work published on New Zealand painting.'⁶ Situating themselves as the first voices to tell the story of New Zealand painting in three decades, Brown and Keith present a trajectory for painting in New Zealand which traces the same historical origins as those pinpointed by McCormick. There is significant overlap in the artists identified as important: all are painters, most often working with landscape as subject matter. They are also predominantly men, all are of European descent. As a result, their construction of a national artistic identity was, in fact, a very narrow one. This is reflected simply in the contents page of Brown and Keith's book, in which the fourteen chapter titles betray a clear patriarchal bias. Of the nine chapters devoted

⁴ E. H. McCormick, *Letters and Art in New Zealand* (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1940), 202.

⁵ This book is also commonly known as *New Zealand Painting: An Introduction*. For the purposes of accuracy I have referred to it by the title format used within the publication's front matter, as this is how it is catalogued in most library systems.

⁶ Gordon H. Brown and Hamish Keith, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1967* (Auckland: Collins Bros & Co Ltd, 1969), 9.

to individual artists, all are focused on men. The remaining five chapters are dedicated to chronological or thematic overviews. Within these chapters, many women artists are mentioned, but they are not held up as pivotal figures in the same way as the nine titular male painters.

The purpose for discussing the foundation of art writing in New Zealand in relative detail at this early juncture is twofold. Initially, the brief mapping of the scope and concerns of these documents allows a picture to be drawn of the types of art and artist that were deemed worthy, not only of inclusion, but also significant attention. Secondly, the acknowledgement of indebtedness made by the authors to the texts which had come before demonstrates the interconnectedness of this early stage of written art discourse. *Art in New Zealand's* wide-reaching project formed the basis of McCormick's research; both subsequently went on to form the foundation of Brown and Keith's. Even those who were critical of the ideological project forwarded by Brown and Keith acknowledge its importance. Consider the stance taken by Francis Pound in relation to the 1982 edition of *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting*:

This book's usefulness, and the very real need it answers, are clearly testified to by its repeated reprintings. Its importance in forming a picture of New Zealand painting, from 1969, the date of its first publication, until 1982, its most recent edition, can hardly be overestimated. It is itself now an item of art history. However, several aspects of the theoretical stance of *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting* are open to criticism, as this essay will try to show. The extended discussion which follows – necessitated as it is by my generation's fundamental disagreement with the underlying theoretical stance of Brown and Keith's book – may itself be seen as a tribute to the influential character of their book.⁷

Not only does this response demonstrate the central position that Keith and Brown's book had come to occupy since its publication, but it also points clearly to the dialogic nature of art writing. In this instance, and in his 1983 book *Frames on the Land*, Pound is responding directly to the work that had come before. Whilst the dialogue between McCormick, Brown and Keith can be seen as one of continuation and expansion, Pound's subsequent incursions into their discursive realm are quite different. Rather than reiterating and solidifying their findings, he instead addresses them from a point of opposition. This 'talking back' to the mainstream texts of art history was to become an increasingly common feature in the latter

⁷ Francis Pound, 'The Real & the Unreal in New Zealand Painting: A Discussion Prompted by a New Edition of an Introduction to New Zealand Painting,' *Art New Zealand* 25 (1982), 42.

half of the twentieth century. Whilst Pound may have fundamentally disagreed with the thesis of *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting*, to an entire group of writers and critics his project was more ideologically aligned with Brown and Keith than it would initially appear. For feminist critics of their work, the entire debate surrounding the relevance of national identity to painting was moot if the only voices allowed to participate were those of men.

Chapter Three offers an analysis of the artistic and socio-political developments of the 1970s. During this period art writing underwent significant development as a result of the work of art historians, art critics and arts institutions. Importantly, this period also gave rise to the emergence of second-wave feminist politics in New Zealand, evinced by the introduction of a number of specifically feminist publications. *Broadsheet* magazine, established in 1972, was the most prolific of these and played an important role in the widespread dissemination of feminist thought and debate throughout the country. However, it was not until 1980 that the issue of the visibility of women artists within New Zealand's art history was first raised in print. Janet Paul's essay, 'Women Artists in New Zealand', was included as a chapter in the 1980 book *Women in New Zealand Society*, and took a largely biographical, consciousness-raising approach. Essentially, her project presented women who she felt should have been included – or discussed more prominently – in the various texts which had done the work of establishing a canon of New Zealand artists.

Chapters Four, Five and Six of this thesis all turn their focus to the 1980s, the decade in which significant feminist criticism was brought to bear on the art world in New Zealand. During the 1980s, an increasing number of women directly addressed the perceived lack of female representation in mainstream accounts of art in the country. Through rigorous analysis of the feminist-informed writings of this period, I identify the manner in which these women mounted a critique of the male-centric writing which had come before. Whilst compiling and historicising this body of writing is central to this project, it is not the primary aim. My purpose is in fact to examine critically the ideologies embedded in these feminist writings in order to ascertain their impact on the discourse of art writing. By articulating and analysing various feminist positions as they emerged in relation to New Zealand's art history, I trace the alternative figure of the 'woman artist' produced by feminist writers. The woman artist constituted in this body of writing is one similarly determined by ideology and power. The feminist project of recovery which aimed to place female artists within the canon that had excluded them is characterised by its own blind spots and omissions. For this purpose, I

examine the manner in which this revisionist art history struggled to account comprehensively for elements of marginalisation, such as race, class and sexuality. By mapping the exclusionary nature of this revisionist approach, I will produce the first critical historiography of New Zealand's feminist art history.

Chapter Four analyses those interventions into art history mounted by women in the 1980s, which were largely driven by a desire to situate women artists within the existing male-dominated narrative. In the introduction to her 1986 book, *New Zealand Women Artists: A Survey of 150 Years*, Anne Kirker writes:

A number of books have been published overseas in the last decade which make accessible the names and works of women artists from all periods in the history of art. This present study aims to build on that solid foundation to produce an analysis of women who have been creative in the visual arts in this country, from the early colonial period to the present.⁸

Projects like this brought attention to the fact that the mainstream art historical narrative in New Zealand had been one which privileged both the male artist and writer. Numerous women actively challenged this bias throughout the 1980s by bringing to the centre – and celebrating – the work of women artists. Kirker clearly identifies gendered bias in art history, declaring that ‘until recently art criticism was largely seen as the province of men.’⁹

Chapter Five considers the influence of the theoretical turn upon the development of feminist thought within New Zealand, paying particular attention to those efforts to deconstruct monolithic representations of the ‘woman’ artist. Although stereotypical representations were criticised through the mainstream feminist literature of the 1980s, the notion of the ‘woman artist’ herself largely remained a universal category defined solely through gendered difference. By re-articulating a critical engagement with the theoretically engaged art discourse of the 1980s, Chapter Five challenges the parameters of much of the mainstream art writing of this period.

Chapter Six examines the assertion that all feminist criticism often arrives laden with its own implicit bias. For instance, in her introduction to *New Zealand Women Artists* Kirker

⁸ Anne Kirker, *New Zealand Women Artists: A Survey of 150 Years*, 2nd ed. (Tortola: Craftsman House BVI Ltd., 1993), 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

acknowledges her own cultural subjectivity: ‘Writing within the limitations of a Pakeha perspective, I have only partially discussed the art of Maori women evolving within their own tradition, believing that there are more appropriate authors to do this.’¹⁰ Kirker’s position appears to be genuine and based on respect – there is certainly a danger inherent in speaking across cultural lines. However, this statement betrays the manner in which cultural division has been naturalised or normalised. What does it mean that Māori women artists are expected to work ‘within their own tradition’ in this context? The implied division between ‘Art’ and ‘Māori Art’ is, of course, an oversimplification. Whilst the recognition that Pākehā subjectivity could distort an engagement with Māori artists is a valid one, what Kirker actually achieves – albeit unintentionally – by prioritising the work of Pākehā women, is the elevation of a set of cultural values from which Māori artists are excluded.

Through an analysis of artworks and exhibitions which did not figure predominantly in the decade’s feminist writings, this chapter functions as an exercise of discursive reconfiguration. Rather than attempting to subsume differences of race and sexuality into the unified figure of ‘woman,’ an interrogation of woman’s subjective multiplicity will challenge both patriarchal power structures and monolithic feminist conceptions of female subjectivity.

Methodology

My methodological approach is anchored in an understanding of discourse and genealogy as conceived by Michel Foucault, following his assertion that discourse is made up of the culturally specific practices which produce our understandings of knowledge and truth. His genealogical approach to historical analysis was based on an interrogation of patterns of discourse. Foucault examined the manner in which specific discursive utterances – such as speech, writing, and regulatory forces – worked in negotiation with each other to form a network of knowledge and power that made normative certain beliefs or behaviours. Rather than providing a fixed definition of his methodological terms, Foucault was often more concerned with demonstrating their efficacy through use. Foucault takes subjects, which are assumed to exist in a natural or logical state, and builds a picture of the way discourse has actually constituted our definitions and understandings of them.

¹⁰ Ibid., 13.

Foucault makes such patterns of discourse comprehensible by demonstrating the complex web of power relations that form and perpetuate them. He explains his approach as being concerned less with moving ‘toward a “theory” ... than ... an “analytics” of power: that is, toward a definition of the specific domain formed by relations of power’.¹¹ Key here is the idea that an analytics of power can be turned with focused clarity on a wide range of subjects. The notion of specificity is anchored to the subject of analysis, rather than to the method by which that analysis is undertaken: Foucault uses similar methodological strategies to analyse the power relations at work within social constructions of both sexuality and the prison system, for instance. However, the discursive network he uncovers and analyses in relation to each of these subjects is utterly specific. Although each of his analyses functions independently as documents of historical philosophy, the analytical through-line evident in his work enables us to extrapolate a methodological framework from the body of his writings. This framework is not laid out as an explicit set of instructions. Rather, his methodology is demonstratively worked through in relation to various and disparate subjects, be it madness, sexuality, discipline, or knowledge.

Foucault himself alludes to this in his most explicitly methodological work, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Here he looks back on previous works in order to articulate his complex set of methods. He described the project as ‘an attempt to formulate, in general terms (and not without a great deal of rectification and elaboration), the tools that these studies have used or forged for themselves in the course of their work.’¹² So, whilst the content of the studies he refers to here – specifically *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The Order of Things* – retain their individual value, they can also be read as the process through which this general set of tools was developed. Colin Koopman argues:

... the strengths of Foucault’s concepts (discipline, biopower, self-care, etc.) depend in large part on his methodological ensemble (genealogy, archaeology, problematization, etc.). If we detach those concepts from the methods in which they function, they often lose their critical grip, and quite often they lose it rather quickly. By contrast, the methods, construed as analytical and diagnostic equipment, can be made to travel well without the concepts that specific inquiries have uncovered. This means that we can redeploy genealogical method to

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge Volume I*, trans. Robert Hurley, 5th ed. (Australia: Penguin Group, 2008), 82.

¹² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 16.

facilitate inquiries into the problematic aspects of our contemporary condition that Foucault himself could hardly have anticipated.¹³

I engage with Foucault's approach in these terms. Rather than occupying a purely theoretical space, there is a practical scholarly applicability embodied in the 'analytical and diagnostic' nature of his work.

How, though, can an adaptation of Foucault's analytical methodology be brought to bear upon the specific network of documents and cultural beliefs which make up the discourse on women artists in New Zealand? I use Foucault's analytical method by utilising two key concepts: genealogy and archaeology. Foucault outlines these as follows:

Compared to the attempt to inscribe knowledges in the power-hierarchy typical of science, genealogy is, then, a sort of attempt to desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free, or in other words to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal and scientific theoretical discourse. ... To put it in a nutshell: Archaeology is the method specific to the analysis of local discursivities, and genealogy is the tactic which, once it has described these local discursivities, brings into play the desubjugated knowledges that have been released from them. That just about sums up the overall project.¹⁴

This methodological approach operates on two fronts. Archaeology in the first instance is described as 'the analysis of local discursivities'. By mapping the specific, yet extensive, set of documents which addressed women artists in New Zealand, I delineate a set of local discursivities that give rise to the figure of the woman artist. I track their emergence across an array of literary and critical genres; these range from the scholarly texts of art history, to journals and magazines dedicated to the arts, through to those documents of culture – such as women's magazines and feminist publications – which served to shape our cultural perspectives. Reading these apparently divergent sources in relation to each other will make visible a comprehensive network of locally specific ideology. The interrelation of these various forms of discourse, and the manner in which their ideologies can be seen to reinforce or contradict each other, will shed light on the complex manner in which the figure of the woman artist has been continually negotiated and situated. Not only will this demonstrate the positionality of this figure within a written discourse, but it will also make evident the

¹³ Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 7.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège De France*, trans. David Macey, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 11.

connection between women's discursive and societal marginalisation. For, as Foucault makes clear, discourse does not simply describe the state of things from a benign position of neutrality. Rather, 'discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it'.¹⁵ The complex discursive network which has inscribed meaning upon the figure of the woman artist in New Zealand is such an example. Through the archaeological uncovering and analysis of this network this thesis makes evident the specific gendered power relations it embodies. It demonstrates the methods by which they have been produced and reinforced, not only within those writings, but in wider social practice.

Once this process has rendered the broader discourse comprehensible, a genealogical methodology will then bring 'into play the desubjugated knowledges that have been released from them'. Charting the manner in which discourse – both art historical and feminist – has constituted the woman artist is valuable insofar as it draws attention to the artifice of the unitary and cohesive definition attributed to the female subject through that discourse. Having exposed this selective constructivism, we can then work actively to refute it: to propose something other in its place.

It is between these points of dissection and reconstitution that an engagement with the intersection of feminist and Foucauldian scholarship will be valuable. Nevertheless, feminist scholar Toril Moi advises caution in following Foucault's method:

Alluring as they may seem ... the apparent parallels between Foucault's work and feminism ought not to deceive us. Feminists ought to resist his seductive ploys since ... the price for giving in to his powerful discourse is nothing less than the depoliticisation of feminism. If we capitulate to Foucault's analysis, we will find ourselves caught up in a sado-masochistic spiral of power and resistance...¹⁶

My strategy is instead informed by feminist scholars such as Jana Sawicki, who has attempted to 'lay out the basic features of a Foucauldian feminism that is compatible with feminism as a pluralistic and *emancipatory* radical politics'.¹⁷ The conception of a Foucauldian-influenced feminism which is based on plurality and emancipation is of direct relevance to this thesis. If the central charge levelled at both mainstream art history and the

¹⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 100.

¹⁶ Toril Moi, 'Power, Sex and Subjectivity: Feminist Reflections of Foucault,' *Paragraph* 5 (1985): 95-102, accessed 17 August 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43152603>, 95.

¹⁷ Jana Sawicki, 'Personal Reflections,' *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 8.

feminist criticisms of that discourse is that they perpetuated a unitary – and therefore exclusionary – definition of woman, then finding a theoretical framework which allows for plurality is key. As Caroline Ramazanoğlu states: ‘Foucault’s work is useful in pointing out that theories of emancipation tend to be blind to their own dominating tendencies, and feminism is not innocent of power.’¹⁸ Through a genealogical analysis of the feminist literature which emerged in response to the stereotypical representation of women artists in New Zealand, I demonstrate that this feminist discourse was indeed ‘not innocent of power’. If a largely male-centric discourse worked to assert gendered difference as a marker of qualitative distinction, then the largely Pākehā feminist response demonstrated its own dominating tendencies. By failing to account comprehensively for elements of marginalisation other than gender, feminist challenges to hegemonic discourse were themselves guilty of enacting oppression on those whose voices they failed to represent.

If the unifying notion of gender proved an insufficient basis for the longevity of feminist criticism, it is in great part due to a failure to recognise difference within female subjectivity. Sawicki’s elaboration of Foucauldian scholarship is of direct relevance here in that it allows us to challenge, not only the dominant voice of the art historical mainstream, but also those feminist interventions that worked in opposition to it:

I have called Foucault’s politics a politics of difference because it does not assume that difference must be an obstacle to effective resistance. Indeed, in a politics of difference, difference can be a resource insofar as it enables us to multiply the sources of resistance to particular forms of domination and to discover distortions in our understandings of each other and the world.¹⁹

By pursuing a politics of difference, Sawicki argues for a reorientation of the effect of difference. Rather than being a force for opposition or fragmentation, she argues that it be harnessed as a tool for further understanding. By making visible the networks of representation that have shaped the feminist response to a patriarchal art history, this thesis draws attention to the wide range of voices that actually shaped this discourse. The increasing factionalism of the 1970s and 1980s – theoretical, essential, lesbian, Māori – not only splintered the feminist challenge to a male-centric art-historical narrative in New Zealand, but essentially effected its own dissolution. However, the application of Foucault’s genealogical

¹⁸ Caroline Ramazanoğlu, ‘Introduction,’ *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of some tensions between Foucault and feminism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 3.

¹⁹ Sawicki, 28.

methodology allows those feminist voices that worked in opposition to each other to exist simultaneously within a discourse that continually renegotiates meaning. Through the act of articulating these subjugated knowledges, it is possible to map multiple and contradictory representations of women artists. In doing so, we point to the artifice of the unitary coherence given to the figure of the woman artist within mainstream art history. Rather than attempting to corral the documents of this wider art-historical discourse in a quest for an alternative unitary coherence, this thesis instead sees difference as Sawiki does: as a resource, rather than an obstacle. It positions difference within a pluralistic network, one that is constantly in flux rather than fixed or limited in its definitions.

Women's Suffrage in New Zealand: A Model of Subsumed Difference

In order to turn critical focus on the formation of New Zealand's arts-specific discourse, it is important, first, to understand the social and cultural foundation upon which its exclusions and prejudices were instated. To build such a genealogy, I turn first to a significant period which played a central role in the cultural formation of our perception of 'woman' in New Zealand. New Zealand attaches much symbolic importance to the fact that it was the first nation to give women the vote. Achieved some 35 years prior to the beginning of the period examined in this thesis, the importance of women's suffrage in laying the foundation for our societal beliefs about gender cannot be overstated. Can the pioneering enfranchisement of women actually be equated with an early effort to spearhead a move towards gender equality? To close this chapter, I propose a more complex reading of the enfranchise movement in this country: one in which the issues of gendered, cultural and class-based exclusion that run throughout this thesis are clearly identified as existing within this celebrated feminist moment.

In his 1905 account, *Outlines of the Women's Franchise Movement in New Zealand*, W. Sidney Smith makes the claim that women in New Zealand waged a significant and prolonged campaign in order to be granted the right to vote. There were, he argued, 'incessant and long continued efforts made by women in almost every part of the Colony to gain public sympathy for this great reform, and to bring pressure to bear on members of parliament'.²⁰ The publication of Smith's treatise was provoked in part by reports arguing that women had been freely granted the vote, without having to agitate for the change. 'How utterly at

²⁰ W. Sidney Smith, *Outlines of the Women's Franchise Movement in New Zealand* (Christchurch, Dunedin, Wellington: Whitcombe and Tombs, Limited, 1905), II-III.

variance with the real facts these statements are, the readers of this book will be able to judge'.²¹ There were, in fact, 'years of the most strenuous agitation in favour of the franchise'.²² This agitation, however, did not parallel the levels of aggression and disruption associated with the Women's Social and Political Union in England, 'a militant branch of the suffrage movement,' made famous by Emmeline Pankhurst.²³

Developments in New Zealand were linked directly to a movement which was occurring internationally. For instance, in 1885 Mary Clement Leavitt arrived in New Zealand as a 'travelling envoy for the Women's Christian Temperance Union of the United States of America'.²⁴ Leavitt essentially acted as a missionary, spreading the message of temperance, with women's enfranchisement put forward as the most powerful tool available for achieving this end. Prompted by her visit in 1885, 'ten branches of her society were founded between February and August, and an estimated six hundred women had joined its ranks by early 1886'.²⁵ While this points to an international exchange of ideas, it is important to avoid the urge to conflate suffrage movements across international borders. The societal developments leading to the enfranchisement of women in New Zealand are both geographically and culturally specific.

Fervent public acts and demonstrations – such as those undertaken by the Women's Social and Political Union in England – may not have played a part in the suffrage movement as it unfolded in New Zealand. However, a prolonged campaign nevertheless occurred. The organisational basis of this campaign is worth examining, as it highlights the centrality of a particular socio-economic demographic, and the core beliefs of that group, within the earliest days of organisations advocating for gender equality in New Zealand.

The Women's Christian Temperance Movement (WCTU) was one of the main driving forces in the campaign for women's enfranchisement. Much of the work the WCTU undertook concerned the administering of practical help to those more unfortunate than themselves:

... the women raised funds to provide the homeless with a night's shelter, while they and the Dunedin branch both ran soup kitchens. Most Unions concerned

²¹ Ibid, III.

²² Ibid, II.

²³ Patricia Grimshaw, *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1972), xvi.

²⁴ Ibid, 27.

²⁵ Ibid, 28.

themselves with the so-called ‘fallen women’, organizing coffee meetings for them, and helping the genuinely unfortunate to find homes and other employment.²⁶

While this type of work clearly has a social value, its necessity also makes evident social divisions between the women who receive such assistance, and those in a position to offer it. Many of the women who were responsible for organising and mobilising within the WCTU were well educated and financially secure. The purpose of the organisation was to challenge directly the legislative status quo perpetuated by the governing parliamentarians. The women who took on such roles had, not only the confidence to do so, but also a level of knowledge and understanding that enabled them to undertake that work in an organised and systematic manner. As Grimshaw points out, ‘these were the women who had time to undertake such work. Few needed to earn money, and indeed, most of them could afford domestic help’.²⁷

Evidently there are utilitarian reasons behind the prevalence of women who were both financially secure and well educated within the ranks of the WCTU. That fact, however, does not alter the reality that their dominance lent the organisation – and the wider suffrage movement – a certain degree of social privilege. The contribution of working-class women in the movement is largely described as a swelling of numbers. Rather than being instrumental in the formation of the Unions since their initial establishment in 1885, working-class women were largely represented as signatories on the petitions of 1891 and 1892:

By signing the suffrage petition in considerable numbers, working class women at last made this awakening to the need of the suffrage, as expressed by their leader, a real force in the movement. In shops and factories, therefore, as well as in the homes, petitions were circulated, and the weight of the workers behind it is suggested by a distinct correlation between the number of signatures obtained in an area and the strength of the local women’s trade union.²⁸

Here, then, we are presented with middle-class women as the architects of the movement which eventually resulted in the enfranchisement of all women. The women whose position in society drove them to work in shops and factories, on the other hand, coalesce into a weight of numbers, made aware by those in leadership positions of the importance of playing their small role in the fight. This division between those who led and those who followed is an important one. The fact that this is the way in which the movement was characterised, 80

²⁶ Ibid, 32.

²⁷ Ibid, 30.

²⁸ Ibid, 49.

years after the vote was won by women, demonstrates that a class-based hierarchy is deeply embedded within the narrative of women's suffrage in New Zealand.

This underlying societal elitism within the suffrage movement can be seen to stretch back as far as 1869, when Mary Ann Müller's 'An Appeal to the Men of New Zealand' first appeared in the *Nelson Examiner*, under the pseudonym 'Femina'. A significant part of her argument rests on the fact that, in her opinion, there were many women better qualified by means of education and status than many men:

Why has a woman no power to vote, no right to vote, when she happens to possess all the requisites which legally qualify a man for that right? She may be a householder, have large possessions, and pay her share of taxes towards the public revenue; but sex disqualifies her. Were it a question of general knowledge and intelligence as compared with men, women might submit uncomplainingly; but this is not the case. The point is, is she as capable as our bullock-drivers, labourers, and mechanics?²⁹

The logic proposed within this argument rests on the supposition that a well-educated woman ought to occupy a higher social standing than a man lacking the same level of education. The parameters for value within this conversation are set firmly by European standards. If class stratification is identified within the context of this argument, so too is a division based upon cultural heritage. There is evident in Femina's argument an unspoken assumption that the colonial male experience is the New Zealand male experience.

Temperance had been the banner under which predominantly European women lobbied for the enfranchisement of women. For many Māori women, it was the urgent need to address legislation relating to the private ownership of tribal lands that saw them seek the vote.

By 1890 after over fifty years of European settlement, Māori were left with only 40 percent of the land in the North Island and in the South Island only a few reserves remained. In the first years of the decade, as the Government worked to provide for a growing number of settlers, legislation was passed which put increasing pressure on Māori to sell their land. One of the ways in which Māori women responded was by seeking an independent voice in political institutions. They wanted and needed the vote.³⁰

²⁹ Mary Ann Müller, 'An Appeal to the Men of New Zealand' in Charlotte MacDonald, *The Vote, the Pill and the Demon Drink: A History of Feminist Writing in New Zealand, 1869-1993* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Limited, 1993), 18.

³⁰ Tania Rei, *Māori Women and the Vote* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 1993), 14.

As we can see, European women were not the only people excluded from the vote in the closing decades of the nineteenth century: Māori women were also excluded, whilst Māori men were under-represented. The relationship of tangata whenua to New Zealand's newly formed legislative practices at this time was both complex and fraught. The material circumstances of colonial rule had drastically affected the lived experience of all Māori throughout the nineteenth century. The establishment of the Kīngitanga in 1858 provides evidence that not all Māori felt validated by – or indeed a desire to be included in – the European political structure. While some attempted to operate outside of colonial structures of power, many Māori agitated for stronger representation in order to engage directly with the system of governance established by the Crown. On one hand, this can be seen in the examples of Māori who voted in parliamentary elections, which they could technically do from 1852. However, the communal nature of tribal land ownership ensured that very few Māori men satisfied the land-ownership criteria which would enable them to vote. Legislatively, the situation may have allowed universal male suffrage, but the reality was that Māori were hugely under-represented due to an exploitation of cultural difference. The passage of the Māori Representation Act of 1867 allowed all Māori men over the age of 21, regardless of their status as land-owners, to vote for one of the four, newly established, geographically allocated, Māori electoral seats. Again, this would suggest that Māori were fairly represented within the parliamentary system. However, the discrepancy in numbers between Māori and European seats – four Māori to 72 European – was not representative of the wider population, again leaving Māori significantly under-represented. As Barbara Brookes points out, 'the four Māori members were heavily outnumbered in the House, and effectively powerless to implement change and reverse the loss of land'.³¹

The establishment of Te Kotahitanga in 1892 can be viewed as an example of the ways in which Māori fought for self-determination in relation to their political situation. Rather than existing in opposition to the Crown, the Māori Parliament, as it was often known, was formed in order to 'present tribal and inter-tribal grievances to the Government. Their aim was to achieve protection of their rights under the Treaty of Waitangi'.³² Whilst women who had been granted authority could speak within Te Kotahitanga, they could neither vote, nor stand as members. Māori women, then, were doubly excluded: firstly from the right to vote in New

³¹ Barbara Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2016), 133.

³² *Ibid*, 15.

Zealand's parliamentary system, and again from the Māori organisation that had arisen in opposition to their cultural exclusion.

Māori women who actively sought the right to vote were fighting for inclusion both within Te Kotahitanga and the European Parliament. However, it would be a falsification to argue that these campaigns were waged on isolated fronts. It is often within the overlapping spaces of exclusion that socio-cultural ideologies can both burgeon and expand. The cross-cultural engagement between Pākehā women campaigning for suffrage, and Māori women who also sought to secure the vote, was at times complex. For instance, any Māori woman who wished to join the WCTU had to take a Temperance Pledge, which translates thus: 'I agree by this pledge, not to smoke tobacco, not to drink any beverages that are intoxicating, and also not to take the tā moko. May God help me'.³³ While on the surface it is unsurprising that a temperance society would implement a ban on alcohol, a clear cultural hierarchy is being established here. The invocation of a singular God enforces the Western Christian worldview upon which the WCTU was established, and points to the moralistic tone of much of their campaigning. By regulating certain behaviours that were deemed either amoral or politically subversive, the WCTU appears to be acting to assimilate Māori women into a European moral frame. Enforcing the abandonment of tā moko – ostensibly for health reasons – acted to position European values as morally superior to those of Māori cultural practices.³⁴ The efforts made by the WCTU to include Māori women in their campaign echo their desire to include 'working women'. While these previously marginalised women were certainly offered inclusion within the Union, it could only come about through the moderation of certain behaviours. The division between the well-educated core of the movement, and those others that they engaged with, is clear.

When women were granted the right to vote in parliamentary elections in 1883, many subtle interactions and compromises had occurred between the women who ultimately won the vote. By characterising the suffrage campaign simply as an early manifestation of feminist activism in New Zealand, we render inconsequential the class-based and cultural discord which served to establish one set of beliefs as dominant. The voices of Māori women, the poor, the less-educated women who worked out of necessity rather than desire; these were the women

³³ Temperance Pledge translation printed in *White Ribbon*, November 1898. Reprinted in Rei, *Māori Women and the Vote*, 40.

³⁴ Tā moko is the Māori custom of tattooing in which hand-tools, most notably toothed combs (uhi) and hammers (tā), are used to mark the skin of the wearer, most significantly on the face.

whose experiences and voices were rendered peripheral. The dominant narrative is one which claims that ‘scattered here and there throughout the Colony were a few brave spirits who felt that freedom was a priceless possession to be worked and fought for’.³⁵

With the vote ultimately secured for all women – Pākehā and Māori – in 1893, the causal purpose through which these women had navigated a tentative sort of unity soon dissipated. The standard narrative told of the 1890s suffrage movement is one characterised as a triumph of equality: ‘New Zealand’s world leadership in women’s suffrage became a central part of our image as a trail-blazing ‘social laboratory’.³⁶ This utopian version renders invisible the stratification at work within this period. By drawing out these threads of division and hierarchy amongst a women’s movement typically perceived as heroic, the representational frame which forces woman into a monolithic, unitary identification is splintered.

The dominance of a European framework was not specific to the suffrage movement. As New Zealand was settled as a British colony, its burgeoning arts landscape was also built upon imported European models. While early voyages had brought draughtsmen and official artists to the country’s shores, it was not until the Colonial period of settlement – stretching roughly from the 1860s to the 1900s – that the establishment of a nascent arts infrastructure took place. The provincial or regional Arts Society was a particularly successful European framework which continued to dominate the country’s arts landscape through the early twentieth century. Coming to prominence at the close of the nineteenth century, these societies were based on existing European models, typified by the rules and regulations of Victorian England. The earliest established of these was the Otago Art Society, founded in 1876. It was swiftly followed by numerous others across the country, including the Canterbury Society of Arts in 1880; the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington in 1882 and Nelson’s Suter Art Society in 1889. The establishment of New Zealand’s first art schools also occurred during this period, with Dunedin once again leading the way in 1870, closely followed by Christchurch in 1882. Art Schools, like the Arts Societies, were dominated by an imported set of, predominantly English, artistic beliefs, with examination by the Art Department of the South Kensington School of Science a highly sought-after achievement. It is important to acknowledge the fact that women were welcome within the

³⁵ Smith, 28.

³⁶ Ministry for Culture and Heritage, ‘New Zealand women and the vote’, accessed 28 September 2017, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/womens-suffrage>.

spaces of this burgeoning artistic infrastructure from the outset. This was dependent, of course, upon their financial situation, resulting in the inclusion of numerous middle-class, well educated European women in New Zealand's art world from its earliest days.

The discourse of art writing that grew out of this developing arts landscape was very much the inheritor of the model of subsumed difference identified in the nation's suffrage narrative. On a superficial level, the social space occupied by women appeared to be based on equality and fairness. Dig beneath this, though, and the complex range of positionalities identified within the term 'woman' comes to light. These cultural and social ideologies existed in continual negotiation with each other, constantly attempting to redefine power relations, not only between women and society, but within the heterogeneous cluster of identities which make up the single category 'woman'. Acknowledging this from the outset is key to tracing a feminist genealogy of art writing in New Zealand. The model of subsumed difference that was laid during the women's suffrage movement of the 1890s was one which, as we shall see, established the paradigm for constituting women artists within New Zealand's art history.

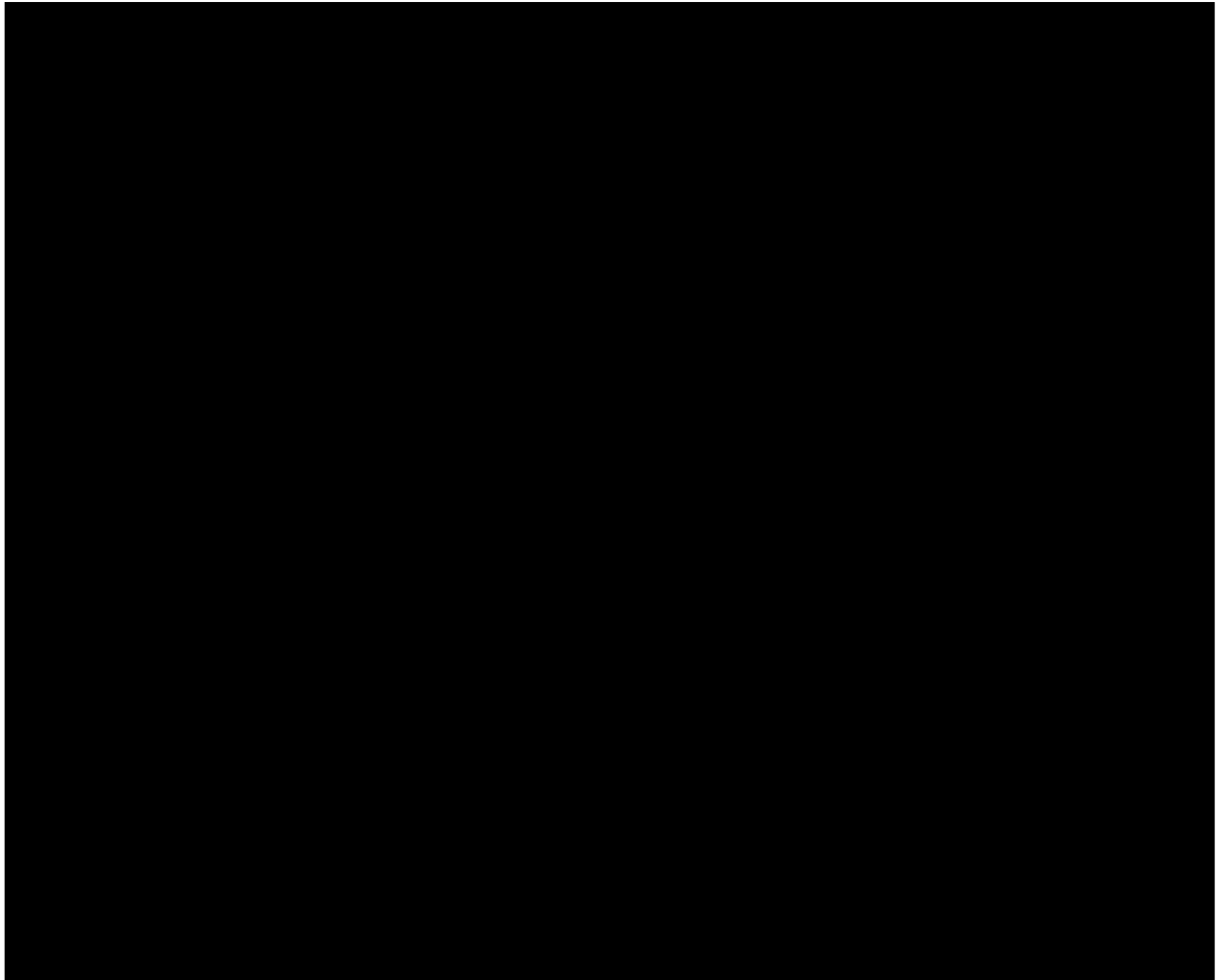


Figure 0.1: Rhona Haszard, *Morning calm, Camaret*, oil on canvas, 1926
(Te Papa Tongarewa)

Chapter One

The 1930s and 1940s: The Establishment of an Arts Discourse

Despite the celebratory narrative which coalesced around women's suffrage, it was to be another four decades until New Zealand would vote a woman into parliament. Elizabeth McCombs entered Parliament in 1933, and considered her appointment 'a step forward in the women's movement'.³⁷ She firmly believed that women's voices should be heard within a legislative, socio-political framework. McCombs' political position was aligned with that of the Labour Party. She 'committed herself to serving the welfare of all, and used her maiden speech to highlight the plight of unemployed youths and women'.³⁸ That McCombs was a Labour Party activist is indicative of the paradigmatic shift in New Zealand's governance which occurred during the 1930s and 1940s.

The economic depression of the early 1930s gave significant impetus to New Zealand's transformation into a welfare state. The Wall Street collapse of 1929 demonstrated the extent to which the country's economic stability was dependent on the whims of the global economic market. A sudden and dramatic drop in prices for exported goods – upon which New Zealand's economy was heavily dependent – along with a reduction in borrowed equity from overseas, plunged the country into a crippling depression which saw slashed wage rates and skyrocketing unemployment. The Depression made starkly evident the insufficiency of government assistance available for those who found themselves struggling financially in such a precarious economic climate. The Labour Party, campaigning on a platform of welfare reform, were voted into power for the first time in 1935, and would continue to govern until 1949. During this fourteen-year period they undertook a wide range of progressive social reforms, ushering in New Zealand's welfare state. As Barbara Brookes observes:

Labour's promises to introduce a decent standard of living for all through the redistribution of resources meant that the 1935 election generated great excitement throughout the country. The promise of an income sufficient to provide a man and his family with everything necessary to make a "home" and "home life" in the best sense of the meaning of those terms, spoke to Labour's commitment to the Pākehā nuclear family.³⁹

³⁷ Elizabeth McCombs in: Barbara Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Ltd, 2016), 212.

³⁸ Brookes, 213.

³⁹ Brookes, 214–15.

Through the introduction of legislation such as the Pension Amendment Act 1936 and the Social Security Act 1938, Labour sought to provide a universal economic safety net. However, in reality, their project was constructed upon the foundation of the Pākehā nuclear family: its universality was illusory. Although unmarried women were entitled to unemployment benefit, married women were not; ‘instead, unemployed married men received additional sums for their wives and children’.⁴⁰ In legislative terms, then, women were defined as dependents, existing in direct relation to their husbands. This perception was deeply entrenched, not only in legislative systems, but also in broader social and cultural terms.

Ever-popular, *The New Zealand Woman's Weekly* launched in 1932 and remains in print today (fig. 1). This magazine demonstrates the role played by popular media in establishing and maintaining expectations relating to the role of women in society; its mass circulation ensuring the broad dissemination of such expectations. The magazine's inaugural editorial outlined the publication's aims:

The New Zealand Woman's Weekly is born with a definite mission and a definite objective. It is to go forth among New Zealand women – rich and poor, young and old – and preach the gospel of usefulness, cheerfulness and happiness.⁴¹

That women from all walks of life – ‘rich and poor, young and old’ – were deemed necessary recipients of such a ‘gospel’ is illuminating. Thanks to the publication's missionary zeal, all women were offered hints and tips that would assist them in becoming their most cheerful and useful selves. Such usefulness existed in direct correlation with a woman's success as a wife. Marital status dictated the concerns of women, with every stage of the journey towards marriage fraught with its own unique tensions. *The New Zealand Woman's Weekly* sought to equip women with the knowledge to navigate each step in the correct manner. ‘Will There Be a Husband Shortage?’ asks one wartime article.⁴² ‘What gifts should a girl accept from a man to who she is not engaged?’ ponders another.⁴³ From beauty tips designed to assist in the search for a husband, to household hints ensuring you become the best wife possible, help was at hand. It is this latter element that is perhaps the most useful of all. A woman's pursuit

⁴⁰ Brookes, 217.

⁴¹ Editorial, *The New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, December 1932 in: Janet Blackwell (ed.), *NZ Woman's Weekly: The First 60 Years 1932 – 1992* (Auckland: Moa Beckett Publishers Ltd, 1992), 7.

⁴² Headline of article printed 12 Nov 1943, reproduced in *ibid*, 32.

⁴³ ‘Etiquette: What to Do and What Not to Do,’ in *ibid*, 15.

of ‘usefulness, happiness and cheerfulness’ was in direct service to her ability to be a wife; a wife who ultimately ensures the happiness of her husband.

The belief in a woman’s trajectory being shaped by marriage was so entrenched, that it delineated the imagined parameters of her life. In her 1940 book *The Women of New Zealand*, one of the Centennial Surveys series of books commissioned by the New Zealand Government, Helen Simpson writes under the weight of such beliefs. Simpson, ‘one of the first New Zealand women to gain a PhD in English literature, represented a new generation of working women’.⁴⁴ The successful pursuit of such an achievement, however, proved insufficient to challenge the pervasiveness of the woman / wife / mother trio. In a chapter entitled ‘The Early Home-makers,’ Simpson recounts the details of the life of women in the first wave of colonial settlement:

... parties of men and women were pushing their way through every kind of obstacle further and further into the back country. ... But can we at all adequately picture the life of the women, small settlers’ wives, whose lot was cast in some country district away from any of the main settlements? It really does not seem possible. Its broad outlines were perhaps the same as those of the average married woman’s life in New Zealand to-day – home-making and tending, the bearing and rearing of children, with all that these things involve – but the details were so different that imagination is baffled at every turn.⁴⁵

While the imagination may have been baffled when confronted by the minutiae of day-to-day rural settler life, a set of fundamental assumptions underpinned even this difference. For all women of the settler classes – as distinct from those they displaced, or those employed by them – marriage and motherhood were the norms from which only the deviant strayed. The pervasive coherence of the woman, wife, mother narrative during the social formation of New Zealand as a settler colony, is a persuasive one. One need only take note of the content and tone of *The New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* to observe the societally idealised version of early-twentieth-century woman in New Zealand.

From the wide-sweeping domesticity of *The New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* readership, the thread of such representations can be traced into arts-specific publications of the time. In the first decades of the twentieth century, newspapers and arts society newsletters were the only published resources available for the dissemination of information and opinion regarding the

⁴⁴ Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women*, 257.

⁴⁵ Helen M. Simpson, *The Women of New Zealand*, 2nd ed. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962), 105.

arts in the country. Although appearing to stand in stark contrast to the populism of New Zealand's first woman's magazine, and aimed at a distinct and limited readership, the *Bulletin of the National Art Association of New Zealand* was to serve as 'a record of information for members'.⁴⁶ Designed as an objective record of Association events to be disseminated amongst members, the *Bulletin* can be seen to present a similar ideal of womanhood as that discerned in the *Woman's Weekly*. Consider, for example, this excerpt from a brief obituary for the artist Jessie Whitelaw Newton, printed in the *Bulletin*: 'By her death this old grey world loses one of those bright and cheerful souls who help to beautify it as flowers do the landscape'.⁴⁷ Bright, cheerful and praised for her ability to beautify – an artist such as Newton does not seem far removed from those ideals of usefulness, cheerfulness and happiness espoused by *The New Zealand Woman's Weekly*.

The similarity of these representations of womanhood is indicative of the wider network of representative descriptions of women. The widely held societal beliefs and expectations regarding women are reflected in the diverse writings that society produces. However, these written documents are not merely the archived remnants of a historically specific set of beliefs. To consider them as such is to minimise their discursive power. Rather, we must recognise the role such writings played at the time of their publication, within a complex process of interpellation. Women do not exist in a state of passive stasis in order to be described by written language. Rather, the exercise of writing about women is an active process which works to bring the concept – or reality – of 'woman' into being. Michel Foucault writes:

... I would like to show that discourse is not a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language (*langue*), the intrication of a lexicon and an experience; I would like to show with precise examples that in analysing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. ... 'Words and things' is the entirely serious title of a problem; it is the ironic title of a work that modifies its own form, displaces its own data, and reveals, at the end of the day, a quite different task. A task that consists of not – or no longer – treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or

⁴⁶ This phrase served as the publication's subtitle.

⁴⁷ 'Jessie Whitelaw Newton', *Bulletin of the National Art Association of New Zealand*, no. 17, 18, 19 and 20 (May 1926), 75.

representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.⁴⁸

If we take woman as the object of which our discourse speaks – after all, it is not such a stretch to treat her as object – Foucault’s assertion here is powerful. By relinquishing the belief that language and reality are discrete, independently functioning concepts, language can be freed from its servitude to reality. Language does not simply describe a reality which exists independently of the linguistic realm. Rather, language itself, when conceived as a Foucauldian discursive practice, plays a fundamental role in constituting those objects, beliefs and practices which are collectively understood as reality.

Translating this conceptual distinction into my methodological approach offers a powerful tool to assist in the complex unpacking of the relationship between the documents of art history and social perceptions regarding women artists. The discourse formed by publications such as *The New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* and the *Bulletin* is not simply descriptive. Functioning at a deeper level, these written descriptions of ‘woman’, fragmentary as they initially appear, function together in order to ‘systematically form the objects of which they speak’. Woman is not simply seen through the frame of linguistic representation; she is formed within it.

The recognition that societal ideologies and written discourse operate in a continual state of interplay and exchange is central to this thesis. This chapter identifies the ways in which such prevailing ideologies – specifically those relating to gender, cultural identity and class – were made manifest, naturalised and perpetuated within the national art history which began to coalesce in the 1930s and 1940s. It is important to recognise that such gendered ideologies were being formulated against the backdrop of a strengthening sense of cultural nationalism. During the 1930s and 1940s, the self-conscious desire to establish an avant-garde, free from the constraints of British tradition, gained increasing traction. As Francis Pound writes of the period: ‘New Zealand art in the 1930s shows a new self-consciousness of itself *as* New Zealand art... it is then that the participants in a new movement themselves proclaim that something new has begun’.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc, 2010), 48–49.

⁴⁹ Francis Pound, *The Invention of New Zealand: Art & National Identity, 1930-1970* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009), 1.

The period between 1928 and 1934 saw the establishment of a number of important literary endeavours devoted to the construction of a national arts discourse, beginning with the inaugural publication of the visual arts journal *Art in New Zealand* in 1928. This was followed by the first publication of the literary journal *The Phoenix* and the establishment of the Caxton Press in 1932, both of which were to play a pivotal role in promoting the writing of key nationalist writers and poets such as Charles Brasch, Allen Curnow and R.A.K. Mason. The project of cultural nationalism was characterised by a self-conscious and earnest approach to the question of New Zealand-ness, and was framed by an unfolding sense of nationhood.

The British sociologist Anthony D. Smith has argued that nationalism ‘seeks to fashion a future in the image of the past. Not any past, of course, only an authentic past, the genuine past of a people in its homeland’.⁵⁰ For a colonial nation which was self-consciously beginning to develop a distinctive national arts scene, this historicising impulse was particularly evident. The emerging network of arts-specific publications of the 1930s and 40s both looked to the past to contextualise an unfolding artistic evolution and sought to document the present in order to extend that narrative momentum. However, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith has compellingly argued:

History is also about power. In fact history is mostly about power. It is the story of the powerful and how they became powerful, and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they can continue to dominate others.⁵¹

The writing of history, is then, an act both of construction, and of exclusion. Cultural histories are powerful in reinforcing and perpetuating the dominant view of a nation’s development. They are powerful too as a means of endorsing key individuals as the drivers of that development. In the context of New Zealand’s nascent art history, the artists and writers included were European settlers and their descendants, rather than Māori. Such histories act to legitimise and naturalise the centrality of the white European male within the national fabric. We must, then, ask the question posed by Gayatri Spivak:

⁵⁰ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 112.

⁵¹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London and New York; Dunedin: Zed Books Ltd; University of Otago Press, 1999), 34.

How are historical narratives put together? In order to get to something like an answer to that question, I will make use of the notions of writing and reading in the most general sense. We produce historical narratives and historical explanations by transforming the socius, upon which our production is *written* into more or less continuous and controllable bits that are *readable*. How these readings emerge and which ones get sanctioned have political implications on every possible level.⁵²

How, then, is the historical narrative accounting for the early development of art in New Zealand put together? Despite the existence of publications such as the *Bulletin of the National Art Association of New Zealand*, and newspaper reviews of regional Arts Society exhibitions, it was the sustained publication of *Art in New Zealand* that played a central role in this act of construction, bringing a sense of continuity and development to the field of arts criticism. The journal's inaugural publication in September 1928 marks the starting point of this published discourse, and the writings within its pages provide a literary through-line within this chapter. Appearing quarterly until 1944, it was reissued under the title *The Arts in New Zealand* for its final six bi-monthly issues. As its editors decreed: 'It is a great cause we have espoused – an emprise born of a clear-cut idealism. Those ideals will be realised if we are vouchsafed the practical sympathy and support of those interested in artistic thought and endeavour'.⁵³

Prior to the publication of New Zealand's first journal dedicated to the visual arts, there were limited opportunities for the public to either view artworks or to read informed critical responses to them at a national level. The art-society exhibitions which were the dominant contexts for the public presentation of art at the turn of the century, and the newspaper columns which reviewed them, were regional in nature and operated as isolated events. *Art in New Zealand* was conceptualised as an antidote to this atomisation.

At last our artists and writers have a journal they can justly call their own. In especial, the artists. Heretofore they have had to content themselves for reward with what publicity exhibition time afforded them. Their canvases were hung conspicuously or not so conspicuously for the public to see – or not to see. Then there were the newspapers. In this country, newspaper art notices are for the most part more kindly than constructively critical. They spread praise lavishly, and dispraise is a rarity. This may be due to an excess of charity.⁵⁴

⁵² Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, 'Who Claims Alterity?', in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, 2nd ed. (USA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2003), 1093.

⁵³ 'Ourselves,' *Art in New Zealand* 1, no. 1 (September 1928), 5.

⁵⁴ 'Ourselves,' 5.

The journal was thus founded with the related objectives of increasing the visibility of artworks through reproduction, and the establishment of a ‘constructively critical’ space in which to stimulate their critical discussion. Harry H. Tombs, in his role as Director, and Charles A. Marris as Literary Editor, embarked upon a project which purposefully attempted to construct a continuous and enduring narrative of art in New Zealand. The consistent nature of their contribution to the public record, and the lack of any significant competition during the journal’s publication has ensured that the 70 issues that were published over an 18-year period have become the primary record of art in this emergent period of New Zealand’s art history. Providing a sustained platform for individual writers such as A. R. D. Fairburn and E. H. McCormick, *Art in New Zealand* created a forum in which they could begin to develop and express a coherent critical position.

After its appearance, a wider literary discourse began to take shape, with several key figures appearing with relative frequency across different publications. The annually published *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand*, produced, like *Art in New Zealand*, by Harry H. Tombs, first appeared in 1945 and spanned the remainder of the decade, publishing its last issue in 1951. Many of the contributing writers who had become familiar to readers of *Art in New Zealand* were to appear in its pages. Essays were published by writers such as R. J. Waghorn and R. N. Field, while A. R. D. Fairburn and E. H. McCormick, frequent contributors to *Art in New Zealand*, retained their published presence through essays in the *Year Book*. More so than any other writer who turned their attention to the visual arts during this period, E. H. McCormick was particularly prominent. He was responsible for the production of the first single-authored volume dedicated to constructing a history of the visual arts in New Zealand. The publication in 1940 of his book *Letters and Art in New Zealand* worked to consolidate his critical position in relation to a national art history.⁵⁵

In this chapter, I closely examine the ways in which *Art in New Zealand*, when read alongside contemporary published writings, worked to establish the foundational ideologies of New Zealand’s art history. By examining the ways in which artists – both male and female – were represented within the pages of *Art in New Zealand*, it will be possible to analyse the manner

⁵⁵ He also played an instrumental role in establishing the position of Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand’s art history, publishing two books dedicated to her work – *The Expatriate* and *Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand* – in 1954. This scholarship will be considered in the following chapter.

in which culturally formulated gendered perceptions are made manifest in relation to the critical consumption of art-making.

Art in New Zealand published the work of many authors within its pages, each with their own personal viewpoints. Looking back over its 18 year run, the question of national identity is a frequent concern. There is a sense of unresolved tension regarding this identity, despite the strong emphasis on building a coherent idea of New Zealand art. The relationship between 'Home' and 'Dominion' which emerges in the journal is one characterised by contradiction and negotiation. The spectre of 'Home' – which can be read as Europe, or, more specifically, England – hovers continuously over the various debates addressing the role of the arts in such a newly colonised nation. The relationship between New Zealand and England reflected within the journal constantly vacillates between a desire for artistic independence, on the one hand, and a need for validation from afar, on the other. Take, for example, the opinion expressed by Arthur Hirst in the journal's third issue:

The student of Fine Art in New Zealand must suffer through being so far removed from the great Art collections which are the glory of the old world – he must rely, largely, for his guidance, upon what he finds to read in contemporary Art journals, and upon reproductions of standard works.⁵⁶

The privileging of a historic European canon binds New Zealand to Europe: the dynamic of that affiliation is one shaped by dominance of the old over the new. Though this is an individual opinion, it is indicative of the tentative nature of the early formation of a New Zealand-specific arts discourse. Severing such ties is easier said than done. However, amongst the same pages are those who strongly urge the establishment of a new paradigm for artistic creation. Rather than labouring under the conventions of European art making, New Zealand's artists should instead acknowledge the specificity of their geographic and cultural experience:

...the artists of New Zealand must learn to experiment and create. It is true that many people will always prefer the work and methods of the past to anything new, but the true artist, if he has anything vital to say, cannot be content to reiterate the statements of past masters.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Arthur Hirst, 'The Future of Fine Art in New Zealand: Some Generalisations,' *Art in New Zealand* 1, no. 3 (March 1929): 177.

⁵⁷ W. H. Allen, 'Impressions of New Zealand Art,' *Art in New Zealand* 1, no. 4 (June 1929), 216.

The contradictory and provisional manner in which this picture of ‘New Zealand art’ began to manifest provided an uncertain context for the first consistent critical discussion of women artists in the country. Concerns regarding identity were so comprehensively connected to the questions of national, rather than gendered identity, that the position of women artists was rarely articulated with any level of specificity.

Structural Patterns of Gendered Inclusion

As Spivak and Tuhiwai Smith have made clear, the manner in which historical narratives are constructed depends to a large extent on who gets to write them. Close analysis of art writing during this period reveals that these formative decades of New Zealand’s art history were driven by an authorship that was overwhelmingly male, and largely concerned with the representation of male subjectivity within a nationalist discourse. If the art championed by writers during the 1930s and 1940s was believed to hold a mirror up to New Zealand society, where were women artists situated within this reflection? At first glance, women artists are frequently represented in this literature as active members of the artistic landscape. *Art in New Zealand*, *The Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand* and *Letters and Art in New Zealand* all included reproductions of artworks by women artists within their pages. Many more women artists were named in essays and exhibition reviews. From an initial examination, it becomes clear that women artists were not absent – either from exhibition walls, or from the published literature. The critical examination of this literature from a feminist perspective does not – as one may presume – simply entail the rediscovery of a suppressed history of women artists. The project presented is more complex, entailing more than the parsing of a neglected discourse of women artists from art history.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault addresses the falsehood of the oppositional binary division between accepted and excluded:

...we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. It

is this distribution that we must reconstruct, with the things said and those concealed, the enunciations required and those forbidden...⁵⁸

During the 1930s and 1940s, women artists were not simply edged out into an excluded discourse. The way in which they were written into New Zealand's nascent literary art history continually renegotiated their position relative to that of male artists. These negotiations were subtly woven through those literary enunciations by which the discourse was constructed. As Foucault suggests, we must trace the 'things said and those concealed, the enunciations required and those forbidden'. In doing so, we can begin to make apparent the ways in which the woman artist was constituted as a figure at qualitative and ideological remove from her male counterparts.

Beginning with a broad structural analysis of gendered inclusion across the literature, women artists suffer at every level from fewer instances of representation. Numerical analysis regarding women's inclusion as artists, as writers about art, and as the producers of images reproduced, consistently demonstrate that women are under-represented in relation to men. This is reflected in the gendered division of the stand-alone essays dedicated to individual artists throughout the journal's publication. The majority of essays or articles take a topic-based – 'Music and the Amateur' – or broad – 'Art and the Artist' – approach. In addition to these essays, individual essays devoted to a single artist are a regular feature from the outset. Typologically speaking, these essays can be considered monographic, signalling to the reader the value of those artists selected for such singular treatment. What becomes apparent upon analysis of the subjects of these essays is the influential role granted to male artists in this initial period of canon-formation. Issues One and Two, for example, include essays dedicated to Petrus Van der Velden and James McLachlan Nairn, men who are frequently positioned as significant to the early development of New Zealand art.

It is not until Issue 17, published in September 1932, that a woman is first granted an essay devoted solely to her work. Appearing four years after the journal's initial publication, it takes Rhona Haszard as its subject. Further to the essay on Haszard, 12 other women artists were granted an essay dedicated solely to them throughout the publication of *Art in New Zealand*. Compare this to the 43 essays which took as their subject a single male artist, and the numerical imbalance becomes clear. This quantitative discrepancy is compounded when

⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley, 4th ed. (Australia: Penguin Books, 2008), 100.

analysis is extended to the other texts identified as key during this period. The gendered imbalance is made clearer yet in McCormick's *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, in which 38 artists are mentioned. Of this number, only five are women. As McCormick plotted the narrative of New Zealand's history as an art-producing nation, men more often than women were situated as the drivers of that history, and its most effective exemplars.

A similar pattern of emphasis can be discerned upon examination of the five issues of *The Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand* published during the period in question. Whereas *Art in New Zealand* consisted primarily of written material accompanied by reproductions, the emphasis of the *Year Book* was on the reproduction of a large number of artworks, introduced by an essay outlining the current state of artistic affairs. The first issue included reproductions of works by 59 artists: 20 of these were women, a fairly significant number. However, in the same year, the balance of male to female artists exhibiting at the Canterbury Society of Arts show was 25 to 23. So while women artists seem to be well-represented in the *Year Book*, the proportion is slightly out of step with those actually exhibiting. A more fundamental imbalance can be discerned when we consider the manner in which the weight of critical attention was distributed across the male and female artists chosen for inclusion. In this first issue, small sections of text are inserted alongside some of the plates, discussing the work of specific artists. Of the 14 artists that are addressed in this manner, only two are women. At each point of selection – from exhibition to inclusion, and then from inclusion to special mention – the gendered imbalance tilts increasingly towards male dominance. This subtle filtering out of women artists is reiterated in all but one of the subsequent issues of *Year Book* published in the 1940s.

This overall gendered imbalance is exacerbated further still when the manner of women's written inclusion is taken into consideration. The majority of artists discussed in the texts accompanying the plates in the 1945 volume of the *Year Book* are highlighted in positive terms. Cedric Savage 'captures the golden sunlight of New Zealand in its most halcyon moods with devices that can only be called brilliant'.⁵⁹ W. Basil Honour's paintings 'wear the immensities of our mountain scenery like a glove'.⁶⁰ John Weeks' 'individual vision ... and

⁵⁹ Howard Wadman, ed., *First Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand*, vol. 1 (Wellington: H. H. Tombs Ltd., n.d.), 89.

⁶⁰ Wadman, 1:89.

restless experiment make him a major force in New Zealand painting'.⁶¹ Not only are these painters singled out for their technical virtuosity, they are also highlighted for their ability to accurately present New Zealand as subject matter: they affirm the cohesiveness of national self-awareness. The descriptions of the work of the two women exist in contrast to this. Madge Clayton's work is presented as an example of abstraction, a formal approach which 'does not come easily to the New Zealand temperament'.⁶² Existing already outside the norms of national visual perception, her work fails in the pursuit of stylistic autonomy, her abstraction being 'half-way to representation'.⁶³

Perhaps the most striking example of the way women's work is rendered lesser than the male artists selected can be found in a combined entry relating to Alison Pickmere and Colin Lovell-Smith. Their landscape paintings are compared to illustrate alternative depictions of New Zealand: one deemed honest, one less so. The individual paintings are not the main subject of this entry; rather they are used to serve a wider assertion, that 'we need interpreters of the Wellington southerly, the West Coast rain, the dust storm of the Ruapehu and other excitements of the roaring forties'.⁶⁴ In accordance with this logic, landscape painting should work to present the dynamic rigours of the 'real' New Zealand. The 'dead calm' of Alison Pickmere's work is framed as atypical, failing to rise to the challenge posed by the country's landscape. Colin Lovell-Smith's work, however, is considered a 'more typical' subject for representation. In this instance, the inclusion of a woman artist serves to illustrate the type of work which falls outside the writer's urgent nationalist remit. On a superficial level the inclusion of a female artist renders the woman artist visible and present. However, the tactical function – as Foucault might describe it – of this discursive incursion operates to position the work of the woman artist as insufficient. Her work fails to meet the urgent challenge to truthfully depict the nation's unique landscape in all its raw dynamism.

The general pattern established throughout this period across *Art in New Zealand*, the *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand* and *Letters and the Arts in New Zealand* is one in which women artists are included. It is inaccurate to say that women artists were simply written out of this history as it was being created. More precisely, it was through the conditions of their inclusion that an ideological marginalisation occurred. Through incremental under-

⁶¹ Wadman, 1:43.

⁶² Wadman, 1:60.

⁶³ Wadman, 1:60.

⁶⁴ Wadman, 1:33.

representation, lack of inclusion in single-artist essays, and the qualitative positioning of their work, women artists were placed in a way that highlights the superiority of their male counterparts.

The Gendered Biography

Throughout the writing of art history, the biography has been a common method by which to describe the artist's place in history. The notion that artistic creativity emanates mysteriously from within the individual artistic genius has ensured the centrality of biography as a formative tool in our understanding of an artist's practice. Understand the man, and you can understand his art. From the 1550 publication of Vasari's *Lives of the Most Excellent Sculptors, Painters and Architects* onwards, the link between individual artist and their geographical location has been reiterated as a politically loaded signifier of value.

Viewed through this lens, it is not surprising that much of New Zealand's early art history is concerned with establishing the biographies of men who exemplified the idealised pioneer spirit of the colonial New Zealander. An examination of the ways that both male and female artists were introduced biographically in written discourse through the 1930s and 1940s demonstrates a clear alignment between the male artist and the expression of a national identity. In contrast, the biographies of women artists are more often than not slighter, more personal, and unencumbered by the weight of nationalist concerns. The relative weight of the male artist's biography is initially reflected in their sheer volume. The gendered imbalance of artists discussed in an individual capacity is skewed heavily towards male artists. However, more than the generalities of such numerical observations, it is the specificities of the terms by which individuals – both men and women – were rendered a part of the artistic fabric of the time that is important. Within the representative frame of biographical writing, men are persistently aligned with characteristics which can be read as heroic within the context of colonial identity formation.

As we have already seen, the consolidation of a coherent national identity was forefront in the minds of those men writing New Zealand's art history. Upon close analysis of the discourse, the biography emerges as a key tool in aligning this search for a national identity with a pioneering sense of masculinity. As a result, the woman artist was frequently positioned as the foil against which the male artist could most sharply exhibit nationally conceived

characteristics. To adherents of this belief, the details of an artist's life speak to much more than just his character. They speak also to his qualities as an artist. In an essay titled 'The Art of J. C. Richmond,' published in *Art in New Zealand*, the first two full pages are dedicated to outlining the facts of his life: 'In deciding the most adequate way of speaking of the work of J. C. Richmond, one fact stands out clear – there is no cleavage between his development as a man and as an artist'.⁶⁵ He was constructed for the reader in terms that render him able, physical, indomitable and masculine. His training as a civil engineer points to his practical nature, his pioneer spirit made clear by the fact that 'he came out to New Zealand with his younger brother, Henry, to spy out the land for the rest of his family'.⁶⁶ His masculine physicality, and connection to the unique landscape of New Zealand, are indicated by recounting the fact that he 'and his young brother walked from Auckland, through the King Country, to New Plymouth'.⁶⁷ Here we have the outlines of a biography in which the subject is characterised as a rugged and capable leader, unbowed by the weight of the task ahead. The way in which Atkinson links this masculine character to the aesthetic and ideology of his art is telling:

The benignant power that so often seemed to be guiding the painter, never spoke to him with so certain a voice as in the times and times again when he was led to visit the foothills and what lay beyond and above them... in his mountain pictures his humanity shows itself more unmistakably than in any others. Surely the reason is that here was revealed to him a flash of his true self, a flash that shone through and made these masterpieces for us.⁶⁸

In this description, Atkinson does far more than praise Richmond as a talented painter of mountain scenery. Having established his physical connection to the landscape, alongside his practically minded nature, Atkinson positions Richmond's paintings – 'masterpieces' no less – as the aesthetic manifestation of both his masculine character and the unique landscape of New Zealand.

A biography that appears simply to express the salient details of an artist's life is in fact revealed to function as a device by which a dual agenda is furthered. That agenda aligns Richmond's pioneering colonial spirit with his ability to recognise in the physical landscape of New Zealand the truth of his own humanity. His skill as an artist is pinpointed in his

⁶⁵ Esmond Atkinson, 'The Art of J. C. Richmond,' *Art in New Zealand* 4, no. 15 (March 1932), 173.

⁶⁶ Atkinson, 171.

⁶⁷ Atkinson, 171.

⁶⁸ Atkinson, 183.

ability to transcribe these elements to paint: to make visually evident the truth of both his character and his art.

For the woman artist, the intersection of character and art brings with it a rather different set of cultural and gendered implications. The essay 'Miss M. O. Stoddart' was written in the wake of her death in late 1934. Similarly to the essay on Richmond, this piece offers considerable detail about the facts of her life and interpretation of her character, in order to shed light on her artistic practice. Rather than the rugged practicality and pioneer spirit that typified Richmond's personality, Stoddart is cast in a more refined and graceful light: 'She was a person of great good taste, and in other ways as well as in her painting added a note of distinction to the social life of Christchurch. She possessed a charm that endeared her to a very wide circle of friends...'.⁶⁹ Note the emphasis on the relative triviality of social interaction in Stoddart's case, as opposed to the direct communion between man and landscape as highlighted in relation to Richmond. Both artists are praised for their ability to reflect the natural landscape of New Zealand: 'Her personality and her painting were one, and the environment in which she was working seemed to identify its spirit with hers'.⁷⁰ That spirit, however, is reflected very differently in the work of Richmond and Stoddart:

Miss Stoddart was first and foremost a more intensely vital part of the nature she loved, then she was a woman of gentleness and strength who added dignity to her kind, and lastly she was a painter who put all this down in sensitive colour so that others could partake of her graciousness and life the richer for her having lived.⁷¹

No mention of masterpieces here, nor of the unmistakable flash of humanity that illuminates Richmond's landscapes. Where Richmond is cast as pioneering and solitary, Stoddart is gentle, genteel and gracious. By claiming an inter-connectedness of character and work, the gendered natures of their biographies impacts on our reading of their work. Thus, Richmond creates masterpieces while Stoddart's work merely reflects her good taste.

Richmond and Stoddart are but two individuals. However, the power of the gendered division of values reflected in their biographies can be identified with considerable frequency throughout the literature of this period. We are able to read these gendered value judgments with such ease due to the persistent repetition of the correlations they enforce. Women's lives

⁶⁹ Sydney L. Thompson and J Shelley, 'Miss M. O. Stoddart,' *Art in New Zealand* 8, no. 2 (December 1935), 99.

⁷⁰ Thompson and Shelley, 99.

⁷¹ Thompson and Shelley, 101.

are small, operating on a domestic and slight scale. The lives of men are brought to us heavy with significance, bearing the weight of an entire nation. Consider Archibald Nicoll's consideration of the origins of an art created in and of New Zealand:

In the beginning were Van der Velden and James Nairn, and the greater of these was Van der Velden. Greater, that is, in the measure of influence he exerted. Both men were pioneers in the then virgin field of New Zealand Art. Each left a definite impress in that field.⁷²

The gendered nature of pioneering beginnings could not be made more apparent than it is here. Also speaking of Van der Velden, Leonard Booth claims: 'he was a great artist because he was constantly true to the genius within himself. The quality of greatness cannot be analysed'.⁷³ For male painters, then, the biographical method of entwining an artist's life and work is used to emphasise the particularity of artistic greatness. For women, however, a quite different set of characteristics is reiterated through written biographical engagements of the time. As demonstrated in relation to Margaret Stoddart, the crossover depicted between life and art in relation to women artists is of a different scale. While her life and art are also characterised as inseparable, they are done so within far narrower confines.

More often than not, the artistic vocation is not all-determining for the woman artist in the same way that it is for men. Take, for example, the following description: 'Miss Hester Froom is Mrs. Gwynne-Evans in private life'.⁷⁴ In order to be defined as an artist, the woman's identity becomes fragmented, compartmentalised. Her identity cleaves apart in order to accommodate two separate factors of her existence: her identity as a wife and her separate identity as a woman artist. This particular instance demonstrates a literal fragmentation of the woman artist, by ascribing different names to different facets of her identity. Operating on a structural level, this does far more than simply point to the objective fact that a woman's name changes upon marriage. Splintering her life into separate entities ensures that a woman can only ever be partially an artist. The magnitude of artistry bestowed upon men like Van der Velden or Richmond does not translate into the biographies of women artists: 'Painting has always been a hobby of Mrs. Edith Blunt'.⁷⁵ Her artistry is transformed and diminished to the status of a hobby. It becomes a quantifiable and delineated fragment; it is literally made

⁷² Archibald Nicoll, 'Van Der Velden's Influence on New Zealand Art,' *Art in New Zealand* 1, no. 1 (September 1928), 30.

⁷³ L. H. Booth, 'P Van Der Velden,' *Art in New Zealand* 3, no. 9 (September 1930), 12.

⁷⁴ 'New Zealand Artists Abroad,' *Art in New Zealand* 3, no. 10 (December 1930), 87.

⁷⁵ 'New Zealand Artists Abroad,' 94.

smaller. Biography repeatedly aligned male artists with genius and national identity, while edging women out into a separate, less significant, discursive space.

At the same time that the position of women artists was becoming increasingly circumscribed within art writing, the opposite was true in the pages of *Woman To-Day* magazine. The editorial introducing the magazine's inaugural issue in April 1937 demonstrates a commitment to provide a publishing platform for women:

The opinion has been steadily growing for a long time that New Zealand has no periodical that is a true reflector of her women's thought. She has many excellent ones that portray certain aspects, but the object of this magazine will be to combine those aspects as far as possible and to present unhampered by commercial interests a better and more comprehensive view of the New Zealand woman.⁷⁶

Where we see evidence of the fragmentation of women's identity in an art-world context, here we see an effort to present woman with greater complexity. The biography is again utilised as a tool for delineating the parameters of a woman's life, but in the pages of *Woman To-Day* the delineations are very different to those of women artists examined up to this point. The magazine ran a series of biographies of 'Pioneer Women,' introduced the readers to women working to improve the social conditions for women across the country, and expanded the world's horizons by regularly including a feature called 'Across the World' which listed news from around the world relating to the rights of women. In one such feature, Sophie Donald writes:

For long ages women have held an inferior position in life. They were the chattels of men, protected and cherished or abused as possessions invariably are. Through education and the subsequent gradual change in environment they have altered their position entirely.⁷⁷

Whilst acknowledging the major alterations that had occurred for women by the mid-twentieth century, it becomes evident, upon examination of the content of *Woman To-Day*, that work remained to be done. By presenting the biographies of women from around the world, alongside those engaged in activism on issues such as divorce and abortion reform, the editors of *Woman To-Day* worked to actively challenge the reductive stereotypes perpetuated in publications such as *The New Zealand Woman's Weekly* and *Art in New Zealand*. *Woman*

⁷⁶ 'Editorial: Who, Why and How,' *Woman To-Day* 1, no. 1 (April 1937), unpaginated.

⁷⁷ Sophie Donald, 'Across the World,' *Woman To-Day* 1, no. 3 (June 1937), 55.

To-Day utilised the biography in order to present a more complex picture of women. By proffering numerous representations of women that emphasised their roles as activists, leaders and pioneers, *Woman To-Day* provided a counterpoint to the foregrounding of cheerfulness, happiness and charm found in more mainstream written descriptions of women at the time. Within the broad written discourse operating at the time, *Woman To-Day* operated to constantly renegotiate the extraneous nature of woman as she had been constituted in the literature:

The woman's movement will not be complete until a woman standing for public office is as usual as she is now unusual; until councils, local and national, have their due proportion of women as a matter of course; until equal work is rewarded by equal pay, no matter by whom it has been done; until motherhood and home-making are rewarded in hard cash instead of in sentimental speeches; until, indeed, such a paper as "Woman To-day" has become entirely superfluous because the interests of men and women are at last realised to be the same.⁷⁸

Despite the scope of work to be done, *Woman To-Day* ceased publication after two and a half years, not because it had become 'entirely superfluous', but due in part to a lack of funds, the difficulties of publication by committee, and most notoriously the division in the ranks concerning the political alignment of the magazine with the Communist party. That a clearly feminist magazine which existed to champion autonomy for women survived such a short period speaks powerfully to the unreceptive nature of its social context. Far more palatable were the benign biographical representations of woman as constituted in the pages of *The New Zealand Woman's Weekly* – which remains in print today – and *Art in New Zealand*.

The Original and the Addendum

A common concern in the discourse of art writing in the 1930s and 1940s was that of originality. When tracing the constitution of the woman artist across this discourse from the context of originality, we are continually confronted with the image of the woman as an addendum to man: in relation to both her identity and her stylistic development. The male figure consistently retains artistic primacy, the woman existing as secondary to him. A common pattern is the mention of a woman artist as the artist's wife, her output framed as an extension of his. Note, for example, this mention of Jenny Campbell's work: 'A good number of the more important paintings have been sent from other centres ... This includes Roland

⁷⁸ Bertha Bogle, 'The Women's Movement of the 19th Century,' *Woman To-Day* 1, no. 3 (June 1937), 64.

Hipkins' large square canvas, "Wellington Suburb," ... and two portraits by his wife, Jenny Campbell...'.⁷⁹

In fact, of the 14 dedicated artist essays which relate to women published over the 28-year-run of *Art in New Zealand*, two of those are concerned, not with a woman artist, but with a married couple. In each of these essays, both authored by men, the couple are treated as a barely-distinguishable artistic unit. J. H. E. Schroder talks of 'Mr. and Mrs. Kelly's habit of unremitting observation and study,'⁸⁰ while of Roland Hipkins and his wife Jenny Campbell, W. S. Wauchop declares: 'Both possess that basic quality of all good art – sincerity'.⁸¹ Where Wauchop does differentiate the work of Hipkins and Campbell, he does so in a way that draws attention to the stereotypically gendered qualities of their working practice. Hipkins' work is presented as considered and intellectual; it offers an objectively truthful counterpoint to the emotional subjectivity of his wife's work. Of Campbell, Wauchop writes, 'Landscape interests her only is so far as it affects her emotionally. She is not interested in making a record of a scene; she aims rather at a record of her emotional reaction expressed in terms of the scene'.⁸² Her husband, by contrast, garners the following description:

After the composition has been carefully planned, and a very complete drawing made, the painting has been direct and vigorous ... One can see that the picture has been most carefully thought out to the smallest detail, but he achieves an effect of absolute spontaneity. ... His oils are more ambitious, and generally the result of long study and careful thought.⁸³

Where Campbell's spontaneity is symptomatic of an emotional response, the same quality in Hipkins' work is characterised as stemming from a sophisticated sense of conceptual forethought.

Perhaps the most striking example of the 'woman artist as wife' trope, particularly when read from a contemporary perspective, is the first mention of Rita Cook [Angus] in the journal's pages. The author circuitously arrives at her name through mention of her then-husband and his brother. Both her identity and stylistic approach are introduced in direct correlation to that of her husband:

⁷⁹ Criticus, 'Canterbury Society of Arts Exhibition', *Art in New Zealand* 4, no. 16 (June 1932): 262.

⁸⁰ J. H. E. Schroder, 'Cecil F. and Elizabeth Kelly', *Art in New Zealand* 9, no. 3 (March 1937): 125.

⁸¹ W. S. Wauchop, 'Roland Hipkins and Jenny Campbell', *Art in New Zealand* 9, no. 4 (June 1937): 177.

⁸² Wauchop, 179.

⁸³ Wauchop, 185.

Examples of Mr. Cook's work in colour and line have been reproduced in *Art in New Zealand*. Promising pencil studies and etchings were shown by Alfred H. Cook, a brother, and Rita Cook, the third artist of the family, was represented by several commendable drawings which at times were reminiscent of her husband's line.⁸⁴

The minimal praise the writer bestows upon her is positioned in direct relationship to her husband. No mention of her formal approach is made based on independent discussion of her work alone – it is strictly defined in comparison to his. Implied here is the derivative nature of Cook's work. There is no possibility in the writer's interpretation that her 'commendable' line came first, followed by that of her husband. Framing the woman artist in this way points to the fact that, though her work may exhibit similarities to that of male artists, it is either derivative or of lesser quality. The naturalised assumption aligning masculinity with originality is evident here. Women are often situated as an addendum to the male narrative by virtue of their status as the student or follower of a more competent male artist. Roland Hipkins, in a review of the 1933 Academy of Fine Arts Exhibition, exhibits this particular mode of thought when he writes: 'In "Still Life Minnie F. White shows analogous tendencies, but is less subtle in colour and composition than John Weeks'.⁸⁵ She may be 'like' him, but she is no match for his aptitude.

There is, however, one woman artist discussed during this period who is often referred to as embodying creative originality. That woman is Frances Hodgkins. Her status as an expatriate positioned her practice outside the discourse relating to national identity. Her geographical remove from this ongoing debate allows her talent to be recognised, but in a manner which neutralises any threat to the primacy of male artists in the quest to depict New Zealand. In the only essay dedicated solely to Hodgkins, she is presented as a deeply original artist: in 'these paintings genius is manifest. In every one of them a new world is born'.⁸⁶ However, that world is not one in which the national character of New Zealand is evident. Rather, it is the character of her adopted homeland, England, which is reflected in her works. 'Through an admirable sense of design and colour [she] turns them into little visual poems that have something of the temper of the most characteristic and classical English lyrics'.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ '1932 Group Exhibition,' *Art in New Zealand* 5, no. 18 (December 1932), 97.

⁸⁵ Roland Hipkins, 'N. Z. Academy of Fine Arts Annual Exhibition,' *Art in New Zealand* 6, no. 2 (December 1933), 68.

⁸⁶ Eric Newton, 'Frances Hodgkins - A Painter of Genius,' *Art in New Zealand* 13, no. 1 (September 1940), 36.

⁸⁷ Newton, 36.

The work of Hodgkins is also praised in an essay by an unnamed author simply titled ‘N. Z. Artists Abroad’. This title furthers the process of her de-nationalisation, while retaining a thread of identity stable enough to claim her international praise within the context of New Zealand. Acknowledging her international reputation adds prestige to the country’s art world, whilst positioning her outside of a nationalist narrative. Even within this complex negotiation of her national identity, the reader is never quite allowed to consider her wholly a genius in the way they would a male artist. Consider, for example, the following passage:

That she is a woman is important. Femininity does mean something in art. It means, in her case, a quite hair-raising reliance on instinct, and a rather disturbing refusal to be logical or prudent. It is a method that could lead to the worst kind of disaster. Without that genius for colour orchestration her painting would be interesting but intolerable.⁸⁸

Her work manages to precariously skirt disaster, despite her ‘hair-raising’ and ‘disturbing’ approach, both of which are attributed to her femininity. The sheer luck which granted her the mysterious quality of ‘genius’ saves her work from the irreparable damage wrought by a gendered reliance on instinct, illogicality and imprudence. Hodgkins, then, complicates the masculine gendering of originality. This complication only goes so far, however. Ultimately this passage reiterates the binary division between male reason and female emotion. The implication that her talent is exceptional for her gender actually works to further alienate the concepts of femininity and originality in the reader’s consciousness. According to the logic of the author, it is femininity itself which ‘is a method that could lead to the worst kind of disaster’. Here Hodgkins functions as the exception which proves the rule. The inclusion of positive reviews of her international work in a national publication positions her outside the discourse on national identity, ensuring that male artists remain the originators of meaning, while women artists functioning simply as their addenda.

The Gendering of Style and Subject

Scanning across the wealth of writing directly addressing the style and execution of individual artworks during this time, discrepancies between the treatment of the work of male and female artists become clear. As individual acts of description, such conventionally

⁸⁸ ‘N.Z. Artists Abroad,’ *Art in New Zealand* 14, no. 3 (March 1942), 142.

gendered language-use could be considered relatively benign. Insidious and persistent repetition of terminology, however, belies a clear set of gendered beliefs regarding artistic quality. Such patterns of linguistic treatment naturalise the qualitative beliefs they betray, establishing assumptions of quality that rest upon the gender of the maker. These individual linguistic acts work cumulatively to buttress the structural methods of gendered exclusion we have considered up to this point. Consider, for example, this description of Van der Velden's *Otira Gorge*⁸⁹:

I regard it as the greatest landscape I have ever seen. For me, it expresses technically and emotionally the very essence and spirit of our mountains – a clear-cut achievement. ... There is for us for all time the inspiration of Van der Velden's whole-hearted devotion to his ideal of graphic expression.⁹⁰

Though lacking close attention to formal and stylistic details, Nicoll's description of Van der Velden's painting is interesting due to the alignment of the key concerns at the time. Here, a male painter is described in a way which foregrounds his technical virtuosity, renders his personality and his art inextricable, and equates his originality of vision with the unique landscape of New Zealand.

The grandiose terms Nicoll uses to discuss Van der Velden are reserved for a limited number of 'masterpieces'. More frequently, individual paintings are discussed only briefly, in the context of a review of Arts Society exhibitions. Such exhibitions were consistently criticised during this period for the cluttered, non-selective approach to hanging taken by the committee. James Shelley expresses a common sentiment when he writes:

The number of pictures hung, the way they are hung, the haphazard assortment of hired furniture, all give a stale and "unimportant" atmosphere to most exhibitions, and the present one is no exception. ... If justice is to be done to the pictures that are worth while there should be a much more severe selection made by the hanging committee.⁹¹

This sheer volume of numbers resulted in reviews addressing the work of one or two standout artists at the outset, before moving rapidly through a list of artists whose work is deemed worthy of brief mention. Despite such reviews being written by a number of different authors,

⁸⁹ The author describes it simply as the Otira Gorge canvas in Dunedin. From its location I assume it to be *A Waterfall in the Otira Gorge*, Petrus Van der Velden, 1891 (Dunedin Public Art Gallery)

⁹⁰ Nicoll, 'Van Der Velden's Influence on New Zealand Art,' 32.

⁹¹ J Shelley, 'Canterbury Society of Arts Annual Exhibition,' *Art in New Zealand* 6, no. 4 (June 1934), 177.

this standard pattern is generally adhered to. These writers, like those of the single-artist essays, were predominantly men. Despite at least one society show being reviewed in nearly every issue of *Art in New Zealand*, it was not until the fifty-first issue, published in 1941, that a Society show was reviewed by a woman. When considered in their totality, these brief – often single-sentence – descriptions of an artist’s work make up the bulk of the written criticism during this period. An examination of the gendered patterns of description that emerge upon a comprehensive reading of them is telling.

The characterisations of the work of male artists often revolve around qualities which are typically perceived as masculine. For example, ‘Mr. Russell Clark’s portrait of Sir Hubert Wilkins is bold and vigorous,’⁹² while Sydney Thompson’s works ‘show a completeness and technical mastery’.⁹³ In an unattributed review of the Otago Art Society exhibition, the accumulation of gendered adjectives bestowed upon the male artists is staggering. Their work is ‘ambitious’ and ‘strongly painted’, their subjects ‘skilfully portrayed’.⁹⁴ The artists themselves are described as ‘not afraid’, ‘an experimentalist of the modern school’ and possessing a ‘direct touch’.⁹⁵

The same writer employs a contrasting descriptive approach when discussing women artists. Consider both the language and tone of the following advisory statement: ‘Mrs. P. L. Ritchie’s pretty scenes leave too little to the imagination. She should choose simpler subjects and handle them in a broader style’.⁹⁶ The gendered nature of language utilised here is perhaps made most explicit when the author directly contrasts the work of a male and female artist, the woman coming off weakest in the process:

J. Weeks’ “A Quaint Corner of Paris” (no. 208), and “Moorish Interior” (No. 309) call for repeated visits to the Gallery. They give one the feeling of “having been there.” The artist handles his subject with a broad outlook, and lays on his colour in bold blocks. The result is impressionistic and virile. I. M. Copeland paints excellent city scenes, similar in subject to Weeks’ work, but lacking the brilliance and dash of the latter. Her two oil studies ... are, unfortunately, hung right alongside Weeks’. Placed elsewhere they would attract more attention.⁹⁷

⁹² Shelley, 178.

⁹³ Shelley, 177.

⁹⁴ ‘The Otago Art Society’s Exhibition,’ *Art in New Zealand* 4, no. 14 (December 1931), 153.

⁹⁵ ‘The Otago Art Society’s Exhibition,’ 153.

⁹⁶ ‘The Otago Art Society’s Exhibition,’ 153–54.

⁹⁷ ‘The Otago Art Society’s Exhibition,’ 156–57.

Even in an instance such as this, when the work of a woman artist is praised, it is done so in a manner which simultaneously diminishes it. While her work is considered excellent, this excellence is qualified: it lacks ‘brilliance and dash’ and will always come off second best in comparison to that of Weeks. Culminating in an assertion of Weeks’ virility, the description of his bold work reinforces his masculinity. The implication is that, as a woman, Copeland is lacking the masculine traits which ensure Weeks’ work will always outshine hers in direct comparison.

The apparent lack of dash, boldness and virility is not reserved for Copeland alone. Throughout the pages of *Art in New Zealand*, the work of women is continually described in diminishing terms. Often work is treated as decorative, charming, gentle. It may be pleasing and even well-executed, but in relation to the central issues of the day it is repeatedly rendered unimportant. Ceridwen Thornton’s ‘pictures are always decorative and of pleasing colour’.⁹⁸ Similarly qualified praise is granted Elsa Morra: it is the ‘charm of her decors and the tasteful blending of her colours’ that are worthy of note.⁹⁹ ‘Miss Hilda Wiseman was represented by two charming examples of her work’.¹⁰⁰

There is a strong correlation running through art criticism in this period between women artists and flower paintings. Often the subject matter itself operates under a burden of gendered connotation, made increasingly apparent through repetition. In an essay written shortly after the death of Dorothy Kate Richmond in 1935, her choice of subject matter is tied explicitly to her gender: ‘The character of her art was essentially feminine. All that was frail, weak and helpless aroused her sympathy – flowers, children, young animals...’.¹⁰¹ Not only does this statement infer those characteristics upon the subject matter, but also upon the artist. The reductive nature of this gendered stereotyping is made sharply apparent when Carbery states of Richmond that ‘she will be known as the New Zealand painter of flowers who always had a nice thing to say, who said it well and with a smile’.¹⁰² Richmond is thus characterised as conforming to the feminine standards of pleasant cheerfulness, and as the painter of feminine subject matter, with all the connotations that they carry.

⁹⁸ ‘Artnotes,’ *Art in New Zealand* 2, no. 6 (December 1929), 141.

⁹⁹ ‘New Zealand Artists Abroad,’ 94.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Artnotes,’ *Art in New Zealand* 3, no. 9 (September 1930), 69.

¹⁰¹ A. D. Carbery, ‘D. K. Richmond: An Appreciation,’ *Art in New Zealand* 8, no. 1 (September 1935), 19.

¹⁰² Carbery, 20.

Such connotations allow the numerous paintings of flowers displayed in various exhibitions to be collapsed into a homogenous mass for ease of dismissal:

Of flower studies there is not much that can be said; either they are like, which Betty Paul's "Scarlet Geraniums," Aileen Palmer's "Anemones," and others certainly were, or they are not like; Jenny Campbell's "Polyanthus" and Beatrice Partridge's fresh, charming "Primroses," alone had something more that made one look again.¹⁰³

Unsurprisingly, every artist mentioned here is a woman. This conflation of gender and subject matter became so entrenched during this period that eventually the subject of flowers themselves came to connote a woman artist. For Howard Wadman, writing in 1943, the implications of weakness, frailty and amateurism attached to the flower painting had become so naturalised that poor examples of such paintings pointed indexically to a specific maker. 'There were some really terrible flower pieces in the show. I hesitate to mention any names for fear they were done by nice old ladies who would be irreparably hurt'.¹⁰⁴

Even when the work of a woman is mentioned in favourable terms, it is often done so in a way which only serves to establish those traits seen as feminine as less significant than those perceived as masculine. Consider, for example, this passage on the work of Maud Sherwood:

She handles water-colour with ability, and without worrying it. In her hands it misses that thin and rubbed look seen in most women's work, and she never indulges in the poor weak trick of outlining water-colours with a pen, as affected by some of her sex...¹⁰⁵

On the surface level of engagement, or when considered on an individual basis, this response might be considered praiseworthy. In structural terms, however, the primary effect of this type of backhanded compliment is to strengthen the reader's perception of women's work as weak and poor. The essay concludes by describing Sherwood's work thus: 'It is candid to a degree rarely found in women's work, but it nevertheless has those feminine qualities which one admires, of sensitiveness to pattern and colour and the spirit of places'.¹⁰⁶ Such a statement reaffirms Sherwood's femininity, effectively preventing her work from disrupting

¹⁰³ Frederick Page, 'N.Z. Academy of Fine Arts Autumn Exhibition,' *Art in New Zealand* 7, no. 4 (June 1935), 189.

¹⁰⁴ Howard Wadman, 'Lament for Academies,' *Art in New Zealand* 15, no. 4 (June 1943), 14.

¹⁰⁵ J. S. MacDonald, 'Maud Sherwood,' *Art in New Zealand* 6, no. 3 (March 1934), 123.

¹⁰⁶ MacDonald, 124.

the structural position of women artists as constituted in this discursive mode of representation.

Setting aside the written word to consider the reproduction of artworks in this literature, we can see the superficiality of such gendered assumptions. In the first *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand*, a pair of paintings are presented on adjacent pages (fig. 2): Vernon Brown's 1954 watercolour *Constitution Hill* (fig. 3) and Doris Lusk's oil on canvas work of 1945, entitled *The Avon River, Autumn* (fig. 4). These works both depict a landscape occupied by buildings glimpsed through a foreground of leafless trees. In keeping with the majority of paintings included in the *Year Book*, both works are reproduced in black and white. This monochromatic reproduction strips away the formal layer of pattern and tone established by colour, rendering evident the structural composition of the paintings.

Dominating the literature of this time are representations of male painters as the strong, virile, muscular embodiment of New Zealand's pioneer spirit. The most frequent critical response to the work of women was that it was more feminine: the work, like the women, was characterised as gentle, charming, soft and delicate. Visual comparison of Brown and Lusk's work contradicts such simplistic categorisation. Brown's watercolour appears sketchy and tentative, the buildings indicated rather than depicted. Dark rectangles and linear hints of a sloping edge act to transform blocks of watercolour wash into buildings. The scene is indistinct, the edges softened. Though the trees operate to give linear solidity to the painted foreground, they grow less distinct as they recede back into the picture space. At points their form is transparent, the lines demarcating buildings particularly visible through the tree trunk in the left foreground. Brown's work emphasises the wetness of the medium, the thinned paint pooling and seeping into the paper. The softness of focus and the emphasis on watercolour as a medium – according to the perceived logic of the time – indicate a femininity of approach.

Consider Lusk's work, *The Avon River, Autumn*, in comparison. There is nothing soft or indistinct here. The lack of colour in the reproductions highlights the power of her structural composition. A sequence of concentric curving lines pulse outwards from the left edge of the frame. The semi-circle of the narrow footpath is echoed throughout the work: we see it in the heavy linearity of the river bank, the wide expanse of the river itself, the opposing bank as it rises up from the river, and the gently curving line of the land as it slopes upward into the left

mid-ground. This tightly aligned dynamism is bisected by a series of strong, heavily outlined trees, stripped of leaves to emphasise the vertical thrust of their trunks. The upper edge of the frame crops the tops of several of the foreground trees, heightening the sense of grid-like structural force they bring to the composition. The angularity of the riverbank as it runs horizontally across the foreground of the picture plane is echoed in the horizon line, suggestive of the outline of hills in the distance. Lusk has utilised a complex interplay of horizontal, vertical and diagonal line here to create a dense interlocking of structural elements. This is a strong, muscular landscape unconstrained by the boundaries of the picture's frame. It at once pictures a specific, familiar New Zealand landscape, and demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the structural force of line.

It is telling that the painting of a woman artist demands description in terms that might be considered masculine. Lusk's choice of the ultimate nationalist subject matter – the unique New Zealand landscape – in tandem with her commanding use of structural line make clearly evident the fact that the feminisation of style and subject matter was a politicised process. Had this painting been the work of a male artist, might it have been deemed worthy of discussion? Here, the work of a woman artist stands in direct contradiction of the stylistic assumptions that have been established within the literature. The formal comparison of *Constitution Hill* and *The Avon River, Autumn* demonstrates the insufficiency of gendered descriptors such as 'charming', 'decorative', 'pretty' or 'weak' to accurately describe the work of women artists at the time. Such analysis demonstrates the extent to which simplified gendered categorisations of painterly style can be troubled, laying bare their constructed artificiality.

'New Zealand Artist's Tragic Death': Constituting Rhona Haszard

Rhona Haszard (fig. 5), the first woman granted a single-artist essay in *Art in New Zealand*, offers a fascinating subject by which to examine the specific way in which a woman artist was constituted. Tracing her presence in the literature demonstrates the specific manner in which the woman artist was constructed in this period.

The central fact of Haszard's life, as it has come to be told in retrospect, was that of her untimely death at the age of thirty. The *New Zealand Herald* (fig. 6) broke the news as follows:

The late Mrs. Leslie Greener (Miss Rhona Haszard) whose tragic death in Cairo was reported by cablegram to-day, was the eldest daughter of Mr. H. D. M. Haszard, of Waihi, at one time commissioner of Crown lands, Canterbury, and a sister of Mr. H. V. M. Haszard, engineer to the Wanganui Harbour Board. She was educated at Invercargill and the Girls' High School, Christchurch. Miss Haszard married Mr. Leslie Greener, formerly an English Army officer in India.¹⁰⁷

That three men are mentioned within the opening sentences of the notice of her death is perhaps unsurprising when you consider the extent to which women's identities at the time were contingent upon their relationships to men. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Haszard consistently chose to sign her work using her maiden name, Rhona Haszard. That she is referred to as Mrs. Leslie Greener during the announcement of her death signifies the patriarchal nature of New Zealand society at the time. In aligning with convention, and introducing her thus, the reporter consigns her self-proclaimed name to parentheses.

The manner in which the same news was first broken within an art-world context offers a contrast of sorts. Rather than positioning Haszard within a network of relationships to men, A. J. C. Fisher, writing in *Art in New Zealand*, places her firmly within an art-world context: 'I would like here first to refer to the work of that talented woman painter, Rhona Haszard, whose recent death by accident has deprived New Zealand of one of her most promising painters; her demise is a distinct loss to art'.¹⁰⁸ Upon first examination, the contrasting levels of autonomy granted to Haszard here seem striking. In spite of this initial discrepancy, wider examination of the discursive utterances – those 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' – relating to Haszard, work to position her in a conventional manner.¹⁰⁹ Analysis of the three structural forms outlined above in relation to the constitution of Haszard in this literature, is telling. In the treatment of her biography, the construction of her identity as an addendum to the men around her, and in the formal discussion of her work: in all of these instances, the manner of Haszard's inclusion ultimately operates structurally to marginalise her achievements.

¹⁰⁷ 'Tragic Death in Cairo,' *New Zealand Herald*, 25 February 1931, 12.

¹⁰⁸ A. J. C. Fisher, 'Auckland Society of Arts Exhibition,' *Art in New Zealand* 4, no. 13 (September 1931), 66.

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, 49.

By 1940, her death some nine years prior had come to occupy a central position within the narrative of her life. The full biographical entry in the *National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art Catalogue* reads:

Born at Thames in 1901, Rhona Haszard studied at the Art School in Christchurch and later proceeded to France. Her work has been exhibited at many galleries in England and France. In 1927 her husband, Leslie Greener, obtained the post of art instructor at Victoria College, Alexandria, and it was here, in 1931, when she was painting from a high window, that she fell and was killed.¹¹⁰

Her life is compressed into three sentences. This entry may be brief, but the way in which it is constructed speaks volumes. That Haszard chose to study at art school and travel overseas indicates that certain freedoms were available to women during this time. However, Haszard's freedom was a precarious one, contingent in part upon her relationships to men. Not only was her financial freedom granted her by virtue of her class, much of her travel was framed in direct relation to her husband, Leslie Greener. Her relationship to Greener and her subsequent death are repeatedly included in each mention of her work around the time of her death. Such repetition insinuates these facts into the fabric of her identity, becoming central to the way she is perceived as a woman and an artist. By 1940, as we have seen, they have come to occupy a significant part of the compressed version of her life. Key to understanding Haszard's life and her work, we are led to believe, are her marriage to Greener and her early and tragic death.

Greener's role in the constitution and solidification of a posthumous identity for Haszard is significant. More than simply a figure within the narrative of her life, he was a principal player in the construction of that narrative. The circumstances surrounding his entrance into her life were relatively unusual for the time: 'Rhona Haszard was formerly the wife of Ronald McKenzie, a brilliant young New Zealand painter who is now working in New York. She was divorced from him in 1924 and later married Greener, the two going to Europe together'.¹¹¹ Challenging conventional understandings of a woman's role within marriage, Haszard's status as a divorcee was barely mentioned at the time of her death. Greener, however, was a frequent written presence. 'Admirers of the work of the late Rhona Haszard

¹¹⁰ 'National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art Catalogue' (New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs, 1940), 40.

¹¹¹ 'Rhona Haszard's Art,' *Otago Daily Times*, 29 July 1933, 17.

will be interested to hear that her husband, Leslie Greener, intends bringing to New Zealand an exhibition of her paintings'.¹¹²

The entwining of Haszard and Greener's narratives was in place prior to her death, echoing standard conventions of the time in which women were located in relation to a significant male figure. The *New Zealand Herald's* announcement of Haszard's exhibition in Alexandria centralised the role of Greener in her career: 'Miss Rhona Haszard (Mrs. Leslie Greener), who, with her husband, has been in Alexandria for the past year, held a successful exhibition of her paintings recently in that city. The artist's husband, Mr. H. L. Greener, also an artist, is now a master at the Victoria College'.¹¹³ Discussion of Haszard and Greener as a pair of virtually indistinguishable artists echoed those of other married couples examined previously in this chapter, despite her individual success as an artist outshining his. In the following example, Greener assumed the authority to speak for both himself and Haszard during her lifetime:

'In our art,' Mr. Greener told an interviewer, 'we do not pursue any particular effect or style... We do not seek to represent things "as they are seen" in our work, but at the same time we never make things unreal for the mere sake of departing from Nature. We want to go on gaining varied experience in life and in art...'¹¹⁴

That both the events of Haszard's life, and her opinions, were often expressed in direct relation to Greener during her life, laid a foundation which was further solidified after her death. Greener declares that they 'did literally everything together – even to the mere posting of a letter – and often we laughed at ourselves for our inseparability. But I grew to know Rhona as one can seldom know a fellow-being in this life'.¹¹⁵ Greener frames his expertise in relation to her art, upon this claim of a unique level of knowledge of Haszard.

Greener laid the foundation of his version of her narrative in an essay published in *Art in New Zealand*. This essay bears close examination. Evident within it are many of those structural methods identified as influencing the positionality of the woman artist within an art historical discourse. The four-page essay reads as a romanticised biography, constructing an image of Haszard as modern woman and bohemian free spirit, reiterating the femininity of the subject,

¹¹² 'Artnotes,' *Art in New Zealand* 4, no. 13 (September 1931), 72.

¹¹³ 'A New Zealand Artist,' *New Zealand Herald*, 14 February 1929, 5.

¹¹⁴ 'New Zealand Artists Abroad,' 93.

¹¹⁵ Leslie Greener, 'Rhona Haszard,' *Art in New Zealand* 5, no. 17 (September 1932), 20.

despite her unconventionality. Simultaneously, the essay cements the formative role of the author in the life of the artist. By centralising himself in the narrative, Greener also paints a literary picture of Haszard in which she is only understood through him. The following passage is indicative of the overall tone of the essay, and effectively demonstrates the way in which Greener entwined Haszard's biography with her art, at the same time insinuating himself into both:

Her love of colour and form extended to her dress, which was never the same as everyone else's, and yet never bizarre. She simply had that perfect taste which would allow her to be adventurous. Our home in Alexandria was, too, like nobody else's, though it was essentially a house with a woman's touch. Our table was a mass of colour. Even the fruits were set out to their best colour advantage...¹¹⁶

By transcribing her artistic practice into the domestic sphere, Greener renders it decorative, personal and feminine. This overlap between character and art contrasts sharply with male artists whose character and art were integrated in a manner which held far loftier connotations. Remember, for example, Van der Velden: 'a great artist because he was constantly true to the genius within himself'.¹¹⁷

In 1933, Greener brought an exhibition of Haszard's work to New Zealand, framed as a homecoming – not only of the tangible paintings, but of Haszard herself. The artworks are then read through two very specific lenses: that of Greener, and that of her death. The shadow cast by Haszard's early – and easily romanticised – death is pervasive. It looms large in almost every newspaper reference to the 1933 exhibition.

The untimely death in Egypt two years ago of Rhona Haszard was referred to last evening by Mr. D. A. Ewen, president of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, when he opened in the Art Gallery an exhibition of the late artist's pictures.¹¹⁸

A memorial exhibition of works by the late Rhona Haszard, one of New Zealand's most distinguished women painters, who died in Egypt two years ago, was opened in the Kitchener Hall last evening by Dr. E. B. Gunson...¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Greener, 18.

¹¹⁷ Booth, 'P Van Der Velden,' 12.

¹¹⁸ 'Paintings of Merit,' *Evening Post*, July 1933, 3.

¹¹⁹ 'Exhibition of Pictures,' *New Zealand Herald*, 22 June 1933, 14.

The tragic death in Alexandria about two years ago of Rhona Haszard (Mrs Leslie Greener) removed from the ranks of the New Zealand artists one of the brightest, of the younger stars...¹²⁰

The repetition of such similar statements operates to give them an air of inevitability. It seems almost impossible to mention Rhona Haszard without referring explicitly to the nature of her death. The interdependency of her art and death are highlighted with a morbid sort of fascination in the catalogue accompanying Greener's exhibition of her work. The final work listed in the catalogue bears the posthumously bestowed title *Sketch made on the morning of her death*. The sketch thus operates as a haptic trace, forever connected to Haszard. More than marks upon paper, it is imbued with a charge that operates outside of the purely aesthetic. It is the tangible expression of the potential and promise that was lost, perpetually held in an oscillating tension between life and death.

Stripping away the romanticised legacy of her death, what remains in the literature to reflect Haszard's skill as a practicing artist? Here, too, the presence of Greener is almost inescapable. In an article in the *Press*, published in the year prior to her death, her work was discussed in direct relation to Greener. The exhibition in question included work by both husband and wife, but the solitary passage in which individual works are discussed in formal terms is symptomatic of the way many women's paintings were discussed. Note the respective attention the work of each artist has been paid here:

In describing in detail a number of the pictures, the correspondent commends the artists for their excellent work. 'Very original and beautifully conceived,' he says, 'is the New Zealand wood-cut, "The Wilderness," by Leslie Greener. It gives an intensely mournful feeling of a new country just being broken up by pioneers. The hills in the foreground were once covered by forests, of which now nothing remains but withered stumps. A little farm is seen nesting among them near a road, which is being cut among the hills, and in the far background is a range of snow-capped mountains.' The critic also states that one of the finest of the wood-cuts by Rhona Haszard is the picture of the Marne Valley.¹²¹

The emphasis here is firmly upon the work of Greener, with particular weight placed upon his depiction of the unique New Zealand landscape, despite the fact that the exhibition took place in Cairo. The cursory manner in which Haszard's work is praised stands in contrast. Not only is her work granted no formal description, it is also a work made overseas, of an overseas

¹²⁰ 'Rhona Haszard's Art,' *Otago Daily Times*, 29 July 1933, 17.

¹²¹ 'New Zealand Artists,' *Press*, 19 May 1930, 15.

subject matter. Like Hodgkins before her, the work is praised in a manner that excludes it from the discourse surrounding the question of national identity in New Zealand art.

Where her work is discussed in formal terms, the engagement often falls into gendered patterns of language. Even when singled out for praise within a group exhibition, that praise is still qualified, and therefore diminished. Christopher Perkins writes that '*Les Evaux-sur-Marne*, by Rhona Haszard, was a little painting in mat colours put on with a large brush. This, like all good compositions, can be described in a few pencil strokes'.¹²² Though Perkins deems it 'good', he goes on to compare it unfavourably to the works he had previously highlighted, stating that: 'It belongs, however, to a different category to the works discussed above. Its design depends on surface pattern, not on space or three-dimensional composition'.¹²³ More than an observation, this comment implies a level of superficiality. Her work is characterised as being concerned with the surface, rather than the underlying structure.

The repeated attention paid to Haszard's use of colour is interesting in this regard. Her work is deemed 'notable for its exquisite taste in colour'.¹²⁴ Elsewhere it is described as having 'glowed with light and colour'.¹²⁵ Complementary as these observations seem, her proficiency in colour handling is often framed as operating on a decorative or superficial level. One journalist observes that her 'warmth of colour is built into a decorative pattern'.¹²⁶ Another describes her painting, *Breton Fields*, as 'a peaceful country scene where even the ploughed fields conveniently arrange themselves in pattern'.¹²⁷

Further to this emphasis on pattern and the decorative elements of her work is the firm positioning of her work outside of the discourse of cultural nationalism. The chronological ordering of the exhibition organised by Greener charts her development 'from her student days onward and both before and after she came under European influences'.¹²⁸ These European influences are singled out as the defining moment in her development as an artist: 'Even in her student days Rhona Haszard exhibited the qualities which distinguish her later

¹²² Christopher Perkins, 'The N. Z. Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington: Forty-First Annual Exhibition,' *Art in New Zealand* 2, no. 6 (December 1929), 139.

¹²³ Perkins, 139.

¹²⁴ 'Picture Exhibition,' *Otago Daily Times*, 1 August 1933, 10.

¹²⁵ 'Art Notes,' *Art in New Zealand* 2, no. 8 (June 1930), 288.

¹²⁶ 'Art Exhibition,' *Press*, 17 July 1933, 10.

¹²⁷ 'The Otago Arts Society's Exhibition,' 154.

¹²⁸ 'Exhibition of Pictures,' 14.

work, but it is quite clear that without the wider opportunities which were afforded her she must have remained an immature artist'.¹²⁹ The representation of Haszard, as she is constituted through the literature is one made tragic through the repetition of her biography; she is insistently identified in direct relation to her husband; her work is rendered superficial and decorative. Like numerous other women in the literature, she is excluded from the central narrative of New Zealand's national art history.

The Centennial Year: Looking to the Past to Shape the Future

For a colonial nation celebrating its centennial year, the assertion of a continual history is politically loaded. In accordance with a teleological view of history, the span of a century must be filled with a narrative which charts a clear national development. In order to project the development of the country's future, a coherent and tangible past must first be shored up: the story of New Zealand's 'genuine past' must be written. The assertion of a national cultural identity was a powerful tool within the construction of this genuine past. This cultural identity was foremost in the minds of the organising committee of the Centennial Exhibition *New Zealand Art*. Structured along similar lines to the literature of the time, the exhibition traced artistic developments within the framework of historical progress. The catalogue's introductory essay, written by A. H. McLintock, director of the National Centennial Exhibition, was one of the earliest attempts to tell New Zealand's art history. He frames this history in familiar terms:

In any young country there is always the temptation to place undue emphasis on material rather than on cultural values. The stern struggle for existence in a new land and the strain of pioneering are far from favourable for an emergence of the Arts. ... For this reason, a survey of one hundred years of New Zealand art becomes a faithful reflection of the national spirit and reveals unmistakably the social and political changes which transformed a struggling colony into a progressive dominion.¹³⁰

Here, McLintock makes it explicitly clear that a nation's artistic and social development stand in direct correlation. New Zealand's social progress can be traced through the artworks produced within it; those artworks can also show New Zealand to New Zealanders. That the exhibition toured the country is indicative of this, with the Minister for Internal Affairs

¹²⁹ E. B. Gunson, 'Exhibition of Contemporary Art,' *Art in New Zealand* 6, no. 1 (September 1933), 40–41.

¹³⁰ A. H. McLintock, 'Introduction,' in *National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art Catalogue* (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1940), 7.

stating: ‘it has been my desire that as many members of the public as possible should have an opportunity of seeing it’.¹³¹ This centennial exhibition constructs a narrative which sees New Zealand developing from a ‘struggling colony into a progressive dominion’.

Ostensibly this straightforward progression is outlined in the introductory essay, and illustrated through the hundreds of works selected for inclusion in the exhibition. Similarly, E. H. McCormick’s landmark 1940 book, *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, contributed to the shaping of a progressive art historical narrative. Commissioned by the New Zealand government as part of a series of Centennial Surveys, the book can be seen as part of a wider project, the ideology of which was firmly entrenched in the colonial process of nation-building. The narrative McCormick puts forth in *Letters and Art in New Zealand* is intentionally written from this specific historical vantage point. Throughout the book’s seven chapters, McCormick traces a historical narrative regarding the development of the arts in New Zealand, which in fact extends beyond the reach of a century. Referencing the ‘discovery’ of New Zealand by Abel Tasman in 1642, McCormick makes a case for the history of New Zealand reaching back through two centuries prior to the signing of Te Tiriti O Waitangi: ‘For nearly two centuries before the official date of its birth New Zealand existed as a fragment, though a remote fragment, of the European world’.¹³² This remote fragment was constructed through written and visual accounts of expeditionary voyages through the Pacific. Produced purely for the European spectator, these accounts worked together to create the tenuous, imagined foundation upon which the country of New Zealand could be built. It is an image of nationhood which we have seen reinforced throughout the pages of *Art in New Zealand*.

The writers of the 1930s and 1940s constructed a narrative in which they situate themselves at a fulcrum of history. They do so through the consolidation of a history of art-making that reaches back through centuries of European contact with New Zealand. Now that a coherent, linear narrative of the past had been established, artists and writers had the means at their disposal to look to the future. While the nationalist narrative had not yet reached its apotheosis at the time of writing, it is evident from this formative body of writing that more often than not, men were responsible for narrating this history. The documents shaping this

¹³¹ W. E. Parry, ‘Foreword,’ in *National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art Catalogue* (Wellington: New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs, 1940), 6.

¹³² E. H. McCormick, *Letters and Art in New Zealand* (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1940), 2.

narrative are predominantly written by men and this does indeed have political implications. Let us take, for instance, the catalogue for the *Centennial Exhibition for New Zealand Art*. The key figures responsible for the organisation of such a prestigious project are listed at the beginning of the catalogue. Of the 11 individuals listed here, not one is a woman. This particular historical narrative was put together from an entirely male perspective. Such gendered imbalance in terms of decision-making responsibility is of consequence, particularly for an exhibition claiming to show ‘the whole scope of New Zealand’s development and progress during a century’.¹³³ Of the artists selected for inclusion in this celebratory exhibition, 182 were men, 40 were women. The imbalance is more pronounced here than in contemporaneous Society exhibitions, due most likely to the all-male selection committee. The skewed gender representation is compounded within the catalogue essay. The history presented here deems 32 male artists worthy of mention, in comparison to three women. Again, at each stage of selection, women artists are incrementally diminished in both number and importance.

Not only do male artists significantly outnumber women in both the *Centennial Exhibition for New Zealand Art* and McCormick’s narrative, but they act as the focal point for innovation. It is the originality of men who enable the narrative to be driven inexorably forwards:

This stagnation of the nineties, however, ended with the arrival of two men, James Nairn, the Scot, and Van der Velden, the Dutchmen, who between them were destined to exercise a profound influence on a number of young painters of promise.¹³⁴

A through-line of originality can be traced from the earliest European arrivals to the country, consisting of those men whose vision allowed them to see New Zealand clearly and to attempt to accurately represent it visually: from Charles Heaphy, who attempted to ‘define the peculiar quality of each part of New Zealand, as he visited it in turn,’¹³⁵ to William Hodgkins who ‘captures the vital spirit of a landscape peculiar to New Zealand. In a sense it is the forerunner of a true New Zealand art toward which we are slowly moving’.¹³⁶ These early progenitors of New Zealand painting are discussed in terms similar to those men

¹³³ ‘Centennial Year Ends,’ *Press*, 16 November 1940, Volume LXXVI, Issue 23179, 3.

¹³⁴ McLintock, ‘Introduction,’ 13.

¹³⁵ McCormick, *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, 34.

¹³⁶ McLintock, ‘Introduction,’ 12.

identified as the truly original and innovative artists working contemporaneously with the written discourse. In comparison, McLintock makes no mention of Haszard, and refers to Hodgkins only in passing, as one of a number of artists who ‘journeyed abroad in search of wider opportunities’.¹³⁷

While both women were included in the exhibition, it is interesting to note the extent to which the brief biographical entries dedicated to them in the catalogue reflect the gendered patterns of representation evident within the literature of this period. Haszard is discussed in terms that, by now, will seem unsurprising:

Born in Thames in 1901, Rhona Haszard studied at the Art School at Christchurch and later proceeded to France. Her work has been exhibited at many galleries in England and France. In 1927 her husband, Leslie Greener, obtained the post of art instructor at Victoria College, Alexandria, and it was here, in 1931, when she was painting from a high window, that she fell and was killed.¹³⁸

Similarly, the entry regarding Hodgkins re-treads familiar ground. Here the focus is predominantly upon her role as expatriate, in addition to highlighting those men who have played a formative role in the development of her artistic talents:

Frances Hodgkins was born in Dunedin, and received art tuition from her father, W.M. Hodgkins, and from G.P. Nerli. Miss Hodgkins went to England in 1901, and with the exception of one visit to New Zealand, has spent her time painting in England and on the Continent. She studied under Norman Garstin at the New Lynn School of Art...¹³⁹

It is significant that the presence of women artists in the catalogue was confined predominantly to these biographical entries. In contrast, the introductory essay puts forth a narrative that positions men as the active producers of meaning. There is a gendered alignment evident in that text between male artists, originality and progress. This operates as a key structural component in the development of an ideology of art writing which continually privileged men over women.

In a remarkable essay, published in *Woman To-Day* in 1937, long before the revisionist feminist art histories of the 1970s, Rose Margaret Zeller wrote the following:

¹³⁷ McLintock, 14.

¹³⁸ A. H. McLintock, *National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art Catalogue* (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1940), 40.

¹³⁹ McLintock, 43.

In many current histories of art there is a notable absence of mention of early women painters. Indeed it is a rare occasion to see even one of their names in print, or to hear one mentioned even in the inmost of art circles. One might be lead to infer that there were none, or that they were only worthy to be forgotten.¹⁴⁰

Contrast this assertion with the following statement attributed to Professor James Shelley at the opening of the exhibition of Rhona Haszard's paintings organised by Greener:

“These are the days of women in the arts.” ... No one would say nowadays that women could not paint, continued Professor Shelley. Once again, after a century of waiting, there were women Royal Academicians. ... It was now necessary to enquire very carefully before saying “her” or “she” with reference to a work of art...¹⁴¹

As this chapter makes evident, the reality of the situation did not easily align with either writer's position. This formative period of New Zealand's art history could certainly not be declared ‘the days of women in the arts’. Neither, however, were women absent from the discourse. Women artists were, in fact, a frequent presence in the literature of the period. However, the position they occupied within this literature was marginal, or subsidiary, in comparison to that of male artists.

¹⁴⁰ Rose Margaret Zeller, ‘Women Painters,’ *Woman To-Day* 1, no. 5 (August 1937), 45.

¹⁴¹ ‘Art Exhibition,’ 10.



Figure 0.2: Rita Angus, *Cass*, oil on canvas on board, 1936
(Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū)

Chapter Two

The 1950s and 1960s: Cultural Nationalism and Subsumed Difference

Writing in *Landfall* in 1958, Leslie M. Hall addressed the topic of gender inequality in New Zealand in an essay titled ‘Women and Men in New Zealand’.¹⁴² In the essay, Hall highlights the growing social tension stemming from the discrepancy in society’s treatment of the sexes:

This grave disharmony between educated men and women arises out of women’s growing unwillingness to accept that general inferiority of status and limitation of function which, despite our legal and political sex equality, have always been assigned to them; and men’s growing fear that their traditional dominance is threatened.¹⁴³

It is significant that a literary journal such as *Landfall* provided a forum for Hall’s politicised assertions regarding gender. However, the treatment of women’s social role in more mainstream publications during the 1950s and 1960s was markedly different. *The New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*, for example, maintained the ideological position which it had established in its opening issue. Within its pages, articles espoused the importance of the domestic realm for women. The home – rather than the workplace or the arts – was the woman’s domain, her femininity vital for establishing a home which provided her husband comfort and reprieve from the professional world he occupied. As Barbara Brookes observed of the magazine during this period, its readership was:

...expected to know the bargain that marriage entailed for most families: men worked to become homeowners and married women maintained the domestic side of life, even if they returned to part-time work once their children were in school. To assist young women in imagining their futures, the magazine ran a series about a young engaged couple, Judy and John, which exemplified the division of labour and ownership thought appropriate in 1954. The couple were planning to build a house: John would be the homeowner while Judy, preoccupied with ‘the kitchen, the laundry, the decorating and the cleaning,’ was to provide the ‘extras’.¹⁴⁴

The story of Judy and John, the archetypal couple, was representative of the belief system which governed the content of the magazine. The wide dissemination of such a popular

¹⁴² According to Jenny Carlyon, the slightly androgynous name Leslie M. Hall was a pseudonym for Pheobe Meikle. See endnote 211, chapter one in: Jenny Carlyon, *Changing Times: New Zealand Since 1945* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2013)

¹⁴³ Leslie M. Hall, ‘Women and Men in New Zealand,’ *Landfall: A New Zealand Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (March 1958), 47.

¹⁴⁴ Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women*, 301.

publication ensured that the expectations for gendered behaviour permeated the social fabric of New Zealand. The normalisation of separate spheres of responsibility – one financial, the other domestic – enforced a set of norms and standards for social behaviours which acted to ideologically encourage compliance.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault discusses the influence that normalising judgements have on systems of behaviour, arguing that they produce:

... a whole range of degrees of normality indicating membership of a homogeneous social body but also playing a part in classification, hierarchization and the distribution of rank. In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another.¹⁴⁵

The networks which represent and reproduce certain modes of behaviour operate as a process of normalisation. The introduction of women such as Judy, who takes pride in her place within a domestic sphere, exposes the readers of *The New Zealand Woman's Weekly* to socially mandated modes of gendered behaviour. Norms are established against which women's behaviour can be measured. During the 1950s, one such norm was the secondary role that women played in the paid workforce. The conditions by which women were able to enter the workforce at this time were relatively restrictive. Often, they were limited to positions lacking the social prestige of male-dominated professions. As Brookes notes, women:

... were clustered in female-dominated occupations where wages were traditionally low: they were nurses and midwives; primary teachers; stenographers, typists and clerical workers; tailors, cutters, furriers; salespeople, shop assistants; and housekeepers, cooks, maids.¹⁴⁶

The prevalence of women in low-waged sectors further reduced the perceived value of these jobs, exacerbating the gendered division between highly skilled professions and those career paths considered 'feminine'. Popular cultural discourse continually re-inscribed the normality of this situation in the public consciousness. Trivial though the advice doled out in the pages of a woman's magazine may seem, the insidious repetition can work to normalise, in

¹⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 184.

¹⁴⁶ Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women*, 309.

Foucauldian terms, the ideologies they uphold. Such cultural ideologies find their corollary in more tangible systems of material benefit and disadvantage. The discrepancy in gendered attitudes was such that it was a commonly held belief that ‘women are less efficient than men’.¹⁴⁷ The material consequence of the social devaluation of work performed by women is, of course, the financial devaluation of that same work. Not only were women more densely represented in sectors considered low-skilled, they were treated as second-tier employees within the sectors in which they could find employment. For instance, ‘female factory wages were still only half those of males as late as 1967-68, while for nominal weekly award wage rates across the economy the ratio in that year [1960] reached 70.2 per cent’.¹⁴⁸ This statistical evidence of women’s secondary status within the workforce is echoed by Hall’s more psychological observation of the same pattern of employment:

In New Zealand today this reluctance and resentment are increasing fast as women continue to be automatically relegated to inferior positions over salary, status and opportunity for advancement; and, at least as important, as they find, in the daily work of school, university or office, their talents unused and their opinions unasked except on those restricted and capriciously selected occasions when the men decide that it would be a good idea to ‘see what the women think’.¹⁴⁹

As increasing numbers of women sought to enter the workforce, the general perception was that they did not do so to the same professional standards as men. In 1964, Dr W. B. Sutch, the Secretary for Industries and Commerce, addressed a conference with a paper entitled *Women’s Contribution in a Changing Society*. In it, he sought to outline the manner in which women can contribute more effectively to the country’s economy. Reading the report today, over half a century after its publication, its assertions seem relatively forward-thinking. Sutch claims that gendered inequality in the workforce is due to social and structural factors, rather than being grounded in biology:

Because of the institution of the home and the family there has been a social tendency for women to be the auxiliary worker outside the home rather than the person making the decisions in economic life. This is probably not related to any inherent differences between men and women but to training and background. Whatever may be the reasons for the fact that women often do the low paid lowly jobs, it has long been noted that the women who suffer are those who have to rely

¹⁴⁷ Helen Christie, ‘Legislative Review, Wage Comparison,’ *Woman To-Day* 1, no. 5 (August 1937), 43.

¹⁴⁸ Prue Hyman, *Women and Economics: A New Zealand Feminist Perspective* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Ltd, 1994), 84.

¹⁴⁹ Hall, ‘Women and Men in New Zealand,’ 49–50.

entirely on their own economic activity rather than partly that of their husbands.¹⁵⁰

Despite the articulation of such a perspective, the public discourse which shaped the way women were perceived in the workforce generally reflected the belief that ‘there is such a thing as men’s work and women’s work’.¹⁵¹

This belief in the gendered division of work is evident in the correlation between women artists and amateurism in an art world marked by its increasing professionalism. As Director of Auckland Art Gallery between 1956 and 1964, Peter Tomory played a pivotal role in establishing a discourse of professionalism around the visual arts in New Zealand. Writing in the literary journal *Landfall* in 1958, Tomory outlines two of the central tenets which shaped his tenure: a concerted effort to move away from amateurism towards a professional arts infrastructure, and the need to establish a critical discourse within which to discuss the visual arts.

In a country with a small population, lack of a strong body of professional painters, the absence of a core of properly informed opinion, the cult of amateurism has spread widely and with it, amateur criticism. The amateur critic becomes a back padder, mumbling soft words of encouragement to the artists. Serious art can flourish only if there is strong, informed criticism to sweep away the dross and explore what is good.¹⁵²

This chapter traces the trajectory of these developments as they become increasingly prevalent within New Zealand’s art landscape in the 1950s and 1960s against a backdrop of strengthening cultural nationalism. Significantly, this chapter demonstrates the extent to which the establishment of both a professional arts infrastructure and a critical published discourse were underpinned by increasingly oppositional and binary notions of gender. During this period, the stereotypical gendering of artists evident in the writing of the 1930s and 1940s was exacerbated and solidified. Women artists were frequently correlated with amateurism, while the shift towards professionalism was characterised as being driven by the serious male artist. The gendered landscape, which had been provisionally mapped during the period of *Art in New Zealand’s* publication, was consolidated as a history against which to locate the contemporary.

¹⁵⁰ Dr W. B. Sutch, ‘Women’s Contribution in a Changing Society’ (Industries and Commerce, 1964), 11.

¹⁵¹ Sutch, 11.

¹⁵² Peter Tomory, ‘Looking at Art in New Zealand,’ *Landfall: A New Zealand Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (June 1958), 165.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the infrastructure of art display, reception and history became firmly embedded. The pervasive desire – mapped in Chapter One – to formulate a national artistic identity, was, by the close of the 1960s, largely deemed a success. The country was no longer blindly searching for its national identity. Consider, for example, the shift in attitude towards the possibility of a coalescent artistic milieu surrounding New Zealand painting. Writing in 1929, W. H. Allen expressed hope for the future that a time would come when ‘it should be possible for this Dominion to evolve an Art of its own’.¹⁵³ Four decades later, in the introduction to their 1969 book *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting: 1839-1967* (fig. 7), Gordon H. Brown and Hamish Keith claimed that such an art had not only evolved but also assumed such wide acceptance that it no longer inspired tortured searching:

This awareness is no longer accompanied by a frenzied desire to establish roots in a barely discernible tradition but is now accepted as a normal background against which the painters work... Perhaps this recognition and acceptance of the past is a prerequisite for the present sense of national identification. Having arrived at this point it is not too difficult to see where one has been.¹⁵⁴

Brown and Keith’s declaration that New Zealand’s national identity is no longer the topic of ‘frenzied’ artistic soul-searching does not diminish its centrality within their project. The book’s closing chapter, addressing the contemporary work of Pat Hanly, concludes with a refrain that will be familiar to readers of *Art in New Zealand*. ‘For some, at least, there is a growing awareness that certain natural characteristics are emerging from this body of work we call New Zealand painting that can possibly supply a lead into the immediate future’.¹⁵⁵ Though ostensibly concluding a chapter about Hanly, this sentence in fact closes the entire book.

Despite the clarity by which earlier concerns echo through these concluding thoughts, there is a significant difference. Writers such as Allen and McCormick looked to the future formation of a coherent national identity to precipitate a national art. Brown and Keith also look forward. However, the position from which they look is far less tenuous, in that it posits a recognisable and accepted national identity. The ‘present sense of national identification,’

¹⁵³ Allen, ‘Impressions of New Zealand Art,’ 125.

¹⁵⁴ Gordon H. Brown and Hamish Keith, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1967* (Auckland: Collins Bros & Co. Ltd., 1969), 9.

¹⁵⁵ Brown and Keith, 204.

cited on *An Introduction*'s very first page, becomes the fixed point from which 'this body of work we call New Zealand painting' will grow. This body of work was distinctive in a number of ways, the key principles overlapping with those identified in much of the writing of the earlier twentieth century. Those painters concerned with depicting the New Zealand landscape in a manner which reflects the clarity of the country's unique 'harsh light' have, by the close of the 1960s, been granted a privileged place within a national art history. The consistent elevation of such stylistic elements, and the canonisation of those artists who foregrounded them in their work, is frequently observed. As recently as 2009, Francis Pound makes clear the constructed nature of such a historical lineage:

Thus, from McCormick in the 1940s through to Brown and Keith in the 1960s, the topographic was approved for its stylistic clarity, its stark simplicities – so seemingly modern – and for its blunt reportage of fact. In retrospective proclamation, these qualities were requisitioned to serve as standard-bearers of truth to New Zealand and as precursors to twentieth-century Nationalist painting.¹⁵⁶

By requisitioning certain qualities as representative of national truth, this discourse of art writing structured a narrative which culminates with the realisation of a national identity. This identity was itself proclaimed truthful and self-evident. By the end of the 1960s, the visual arts had developed an infrastructure of galleries staffed by professionals, a history stretching back to the days of the first European voyages, the beginnings of Art History as an academic subject, and the foundation of the Arts Advisory Council in 1961. A new age of professionalism had been purposefully ushered in, drawing a line under the amateurism of the recent past.

International Modernism in the 1950s

Earlier in this period, however, this self-declared sense of cultural and national certainty had not fully taken root. The 1950s were marked by a more tenuous sense of nationhood. It was against such a backdrop that the nascent professionalisation of the arts world emerged. Auckland Art Gallery appointed its first full-time, professional Director – Eric Westbrook – in 1952. Westbrook was committed to modernising the gallery, both through his desire to bring Modern art to the New Zealand public, as well as through the modernisation of the gallery building itself. During his tenure, he oversaw significant work on the gallery's

¹⁵⁶ Pound, *The Invention of New Zealand: Art & National Identity, 1930-1970*, 330–31.

exhibition spaces, replacing the dark, heavy Victorian interior, with a bright, clean modern one. In 1956, when Tomory succeeded Westbrook, he continued the project of modernisation and professionalisation. One of his earliest priorities was strengthening the quality of the Gallery's permanent collection. In doing so he aimed to provide the New Zealand public with a collection of sufficient quality as to be educational and aspirational. Tomory also sought to limit the inclusion of local amateur painting within the gallery. This was primarily achieved through the removal of Arts Society exhibitions from the main gallery, moving their work out into the self-contained and peripheral Lindauer room.¹⁵⁷

It is clear that the desire to adhere to international levels of artistic excellence was long-held in New Zealand, with the constant spectre of European artistic dominance haunting the foundational period of the country's art history. In line with this, Tomory's initial focus when expanding the collection, lay with the acquisition of international works, rather than local ones. Scanning through the acquisition lists published in the *Auckland City Art Gallery Quarterly* during the late 1950s, the dominance of European works starkly evident. Historical artists such as the Royal Academicians Richard Wilson and Sir Thomas Lawrence are represented in these early acquisitions lists: so too are a significant number of European Modernists, with newly acquired bronzes by Auguste Rodin and Edgar Degas gracing the cover of the Spring 1956 issue. It is, however, the acquisitions made for the expanding print collections which demonstrate most clearly the significance placed upon International Modernism at the Gallery in the early 1950s. Prints, markedly more affordable than oil paintings, offered an accessible way for a newly-professional gallery to acquire the works of internationally significant artists. During the mid-1950s, the gallery acquired prints by a host of European artists working within the broad paradigm of International Modernism including Cézanne, Gris, Chagall, Kandinsky, Matisse and Picasso. These international acquisitions were supported by an exhibition programme that frequently showcased international work, such as *Contemporary Young French Painters* in 1955, *Highlights of American Painting* in 1956 and *French Contemporary Prints* in 1957. It was, however, the 1956 exhibition *Henry Moore: an Exhibition of Sculpture and Drawings* which was to prove the most significant in bringing European Modernism to public attention in New Zealand during this period. The exhibition, organised and toured internationally by the British Council for Canada and New

¹⁵⁷ Courtney Johnston, 'Peter Tomory: The New Zealand Years, 1956-1968' (Unpublished Masters Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2004), 30.

Zealand, brought 59 of the British modern sculptor's works to the country, drawing large visitor numbers, and predictably mixed reactions.

This focus on European Modernism within the gallery's acquisition and exhibition programme was expanded by a number of New Zealand artists whose practices engaged with such international developments. Interestingly, two women artists, each of different generations, each played a prominent role within this modernist discourse in the 1950s. The internationally-influenced practices of both Frances Hodgkins and Louise Henderson proved a particularly good fit within Westbrook and Tomory's project of modernisation and professionalisation. Though Hodgkins had died in 1947, Henderson was at the peak of her career during the 1950s. Many of her paintings made during this time, such as *Duravel no. 2* (fig. 8), created in 1952, clearly exhibit the influence of cubism on her practice. Henderson was born in France and moved to New Zealand in 1925. Notably, Henderson returned to Europe for an extended visit in 1952, spending time in London and Paris. In Paris she spent a year studying under the cubist painter Jean Metzinger, before returning to New Zealand. She brought with her a deepened interest in cubism, and a direct connection – through Metzinger – to key artists such as Picasso and Braque.¹⁵⁸ The influence of her time in Europe was displayed in New Zealand upon her return. In 1953, one year into Eric Westbrook's tenure as Auckland Art Gallery's Director, the gallery mounted its first exhibition dedicated to a single artist. Significantly, the artist chosen for this project was Louise Henderson. The exhibition, which included 41 works, garnered positive attention. One reviewer, writing in the *Evening Post*, called her work 'so technically accomplished, so imaginative, original and exploratory that only those who had recently been abroad could appreciate the level she had reached'.¹⁵⁹

Here, Europe is situated as a centre of artistic excellence, the yardstick against which local incursions into artistic terrain are measured. In the context of Westbrook's modernisation project, Henderson's internationally-inflected practice and her tangential relationship to the 'masters' of Cubism were likely key influences in his selection of her work for a solo exhibition. Writing in response to the exhibition in *Landfall*, E. H. McCormick similarly

¹⁵⁸ See Christina Barton, *Louise Henderson: The Cubist Years 1946 - 1958* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1991) for more on Metzinger's influence on Henderson.

¹⁵⁹ W.B.S., *Evening Post*, undated clipping, Henderson's scrapbook, quoted in: Barton, 25.

highlighted the importance of an international context for the interpretation of Henderson's cubist-inspired work:

With the exception of a few minor works, everything shown had been done either in Europe or since the artist's return to New Zealand. The exhibition thus represented the immediate results of the year or so Mrs Henderson recently spent in France, Italy and England. In the past many artists have left New Zealand and returned. But it is doubtful whether any of Mrs Henderson's numerous predecessors has shown in so spectacular a way the quickening effects of European experience.¹⁶⁰

The success of her solo exhibition was consolidated the following year, when she was the sole woman artist to be included in Auckland Art Gallery's landmark Modernist exhibition *Object and Image* in 1954 (fig. 9). Curated by Colin McCahon, this exhibition brought together the work of seven New Zealand-based artists whose work engaged with the Modernist painterly language of cubism and abstraction.¹⁶¹ Though Henderson's career unfolded in New Zealand, it was perhaps the 'quickenings effects' of her time in Europe that played a central role in heightening her profile in the 1950s.

While Henderson had left Europe to settle in New Zealand, Frances Hodgkins (fig. 10) had, quite famously, made the journey in the opposite direction several decades earlier. Following her death in 1947, Hodgkins profile grew as representation of her work proliferated in the context of both literature and exhibitions. For women artists, both she and Henderson gained an exceptionally high level of visibility during this period. The Auckland City Art Gallery alone held four exhibitions dedicated solely to her work, along with four group shows in which she featured prominently, such as *Frances Hodgkins and Her Circle*, which ran from the 5th to 27th of June 1954.

1954 was, in fact, a pivotal year in establishing the reputation of Hodgkins in New Zealand. It saw the publication of two significant scholarly works by E. H. McCormick: *The Expatriate: a Study of Frances Hodgkins* and *Works of Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand*. The culmination of painstaking and extensive research, McCormick's rigorous historical approach formed the bedrock upon which Hodgkins' subsequent reputation has been built. In so doing,

¹⁶⁰ E. H. McCormick, 'The Louise Henderson Exhibition: A Note in Retrospect,' *Landfall: A New Zealand Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (March 1954), 54.

¹⁶¹ The other six artists involved were Michael Nicholson, Colin McCahon, Kase Jackson, Milan Mrkusich, John Weeks and Ross Fraser.

McCormick established the widely accepted narrative of Hodgkins' life, as he had done for the development of New Zealand painting fourteen years previously. McCormick's scholarship is an inescapable presence in the writing on Hodgkins during this period. Exhibition catalogues during this period frequently point towards his work, with Tomory acknowledging that the Auckland City Art Gallery exhibition, *The Paintings and Drawings by Frances Hodgkins*, 'depends heavily on E. H. McCormick's exhaustive *Works of Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand*'.¹⁶²

Providing a New Zealand-specific counterpoint to the narrative of British success provided in *The Expatriate*, the production of such a text points to the tension evident in the discourse surrounding Hodgkins' work. A geographic duality is established which posits Hodgkins as a New Zealander whilst simultaneously celebrating her as a successful European painter. By publishing two separate volumes, effectively writing Hodgkins into two distinct narratives, McCormick set the structural paradigm through which Hodgkins' work has consistently been viewed. His biographical approach to Hodgkins set the pattern, not only for the narrative of her development, but also for its tone. The inclusion of extensive portions of Hodgkins' letters to her family lend credence to a narrative of poverty and sacrifice. They also strike a deeply personal note, with McCormick describing his experience of reading the letters thus:

To do them justice, the letters of Frances Hodgkins must be absorbed in sequence and in bulk. When read in that way, they create the illusion, also given by the great diaries, that one is immersed in the life rather than reading *about* it, that one is being swept along in the stream of its daily trivialities and perplexities.¹⁶³

The 'Frances Hodgkins' constituted in the literature was a woman who had to sacrifice the trappings of womanhood in order to attain acceptance as a serious painter. Quoting from one such letter, McCormick uses Hodgkins' own words to make clear the sacrifices that she was willing to make. 'I am slowly settling down to an oldmaidship, and I have only one prominent idea and that is that nothing will interfere between me and my work'.¹⁶⁴ The conventional expectations of womanhood, it seems, were mutually exclusive with the pursuit of a serious artistic career.

¹⁶² P.A.T in: Colin McCahon, 'The Paintings and Drawings by Frances Hodgkins' (Auckland City Art Gallery, 1959), unpaginated.

¹⁶³ McCormick, *The Expatriate: A Study of Frances Hodgkins*, xvi.

¹⁶⁴ Frances Hodgkins in: McCormick, 31.

In the catalogue for the 1954 exhibition *Frances Hodgkins and her Circle*, E. H. McCormick opens the brief section titled ‘The Exhibition’ with a paragraph traversing the central themes of her reputation:

Like any other artist for whom large claims are made, Frances Hodgkins must in the end be judged on the score of her achievement. The romantic interest of her life, its harsh struggles and long-deferred success, her integrity of character, her wit and personal charm, her special importance to New Zealand as a symbolic, almost mythical figure – all these will avail nothing when the time arrives to assess her place as a British and European painter.¹⁶⁵

The prestige associated with her success in Europe, the life-long sacrifices she made in the pursuit of her art: these elements are located at the heart of her reputation. However, as McCormick acknowledges, such a reputation must ultimately be measured by the quality of her art. It was in this context that Auckland City Art Gallery, under the professional directorship of Eric Westbrook, began a concerted acquisition effort. The thoroughness of McCormick’s representation of her life was to be paralleled by a representative collection of her oeuvre.

The Professionalisation of the Arts

Both Henderson and Hodgkins were notable, in part, due to the impact of the European artistic tradition on their practice, though their relationships to Europe differed. Henderson’s artistic career – despite the fact that she was born, raised and largely trained in Europe – played out within New Zealand, whereas it was Hodgkins, a New Zealander by birth, who achieved notable European success. Each artist saw their profiles raised in the 1950s, during a period which saw a commitment to the development of European Modernism they each engaged with. The 1950s also marked an acceleration of the professional development of arts infrastructure within New Zealand. Henderson and Hodgkins can again be seen as notable figures within this context; both were women committed to becoming professional artists, rather than amateurs content to work within the society system. The gradual movement towards professionalism was one which relied, in part, on the waning clout of the regional arts show. These types of exhibition thoroughly dominated the discussion in *Art in New Zealand* throughout the duration of its life, demonstrating their previous importance.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Frances Hodgkins and Her Circle’ (Auckland City Art Gallery, 1954), 5.

During the 1950s and 1960s the critical response to these exhibitions became increasingly negative, to the extent that in 1965 the reviewer for the Christchurch newspaper *The Press* was compelled to ask: ‘has this kind of exhibition outlived its usefulness?’¹⁶⁶ Such a challenge was based upon the indiscriminate nature of these exhibitions. Throughout his review, the author consistently questions the validity of an open policy of display within arts societies. The result of such an approach, he argues, is an exhibition which may be rich in the number of works displayed, but consequently poor in terms of quality and innovation:

A general tiredness of paint, a she’ll do standard of drawing, do-it-yourself frames (which in the event would have been better done by someone else) – all these elements conspire to produce a drab untidy exhibition. The very large number of works only accentuates these difficulties.¹⁶⁷

The central assertion here is that the quality of work on display in society shows is sub-standard, relegating them to the realm of the amateur. Much of the discourse surrounding these exhibitions demonstrates the solidification of those linguistic discrepancies between the treatment of male and female artists noted throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Writing in response to the 1952 Group show in *Landfall*, for instance, John Summers demonstrates the extent to which stylistic traits had come to occupy binary gendered positions. The polarities of masculine and feminine painting had become so naturalised that Summers could claim in all seriousness that ‘Doris Lusk has a masculine grasp of landscape, being more concerned with the vast wide sweep than with details’.¹⁶⁸ As the indiscriminate nature of society shows drew increasing criticism, publically funded galleries, led by the Auckland City Art Gallery worked to actively ‘contribute to the sustenance and development of the visual arts’.¹⁶⁹

By the late 1960s, the gradual expansion of a critical arts discourse throughout the previous decades had led to a greater public awareness of the arts, with painting in particular being regarded as an increasingly respected artform. In his 1966 edition of *Portrait of New Zealand*, David Hall notes this development in a chapter titled ‘What New Zealand Thinks’:

While it is more dangerous to generalise in this field than in most others, it would appear that a quickening impulse is at work in art today in New Zealand, and that it finds expression not yet in any consistent line of development, but rather in an

¹⁶⁶ H. J. S., ‘Highlights, Dowdiness,’ *The Press*, 1 April 1965, 14.

¹⁶⁷ H. J. S., 14.

¹⁶⁸ John Summers, ‘The Group Show, 1952,’ *Landfall: A New Zealand Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (March 1953), 60.

¹⁶⁹ Michael Volkerling, *New Vision: A Critical View of New Zealand’s Visual Arts Infrastructure* (Wellington: Creative New Zealand, 1998), 42.

increasing boldness in experiment, and an increased self-confidence and disregard of the baser type of “public opinion”. The public is probably better educated than at any previous time in our history...¹⁷⁰

That Hall can claim a more educated public than at any other time in history is due, in part, to the increasing professionalisation of the gallery and museum sector, in tandem with the expansion of art criticism.

Self-consciously professional galleries such as the Auckland Art Gallery were not the only space in which artists were attempting to stake a claim for the seriousness of the visual arts. The increasingly poor critical response to regional society shows found in regional newspapers was echoed in the manner by which artists chose to represent their own work. Independently organised groups of artists who wished to present their work outside of the society system had by this stage been operating for several decades. Auckland’s Rutland Group, established in 1935, and The Group, established in Christchurch in 1927, are the best known examples. Explaining the absence of his work from the Canterbury Society Exhibition in 1967, William Sutton is quoted in a contemporary newspaper as stating: ‘If I did have any paintings, I’d keep them for the Group, which is a much more serious show’.¹⁷¹ The arts landscape in New Zealand was further expanded during the 1960s through the emergence of a network of dealer galleries across the country, exhibiting and selling the work of contemporary New Zealand artists. Some of the earliest and most influential of these were The Ikon Gallery which ran from 1960 – 1965 in Auckland, and its successor Barry Lett Galleries, which opened in 1965. It was, however, the pioneering Wellington gallerist, Peter McLeavey, whose Wellington gallery opened in 1968, who was to play the most significant role within this newly expanding field. McLeavey represented artists such as Toss Woollaston and Colin McCahon at the time when their position in the canon on New Zealand’s art history was being solidified through the written discourse.

As demonstrated in Chapter One, this writing came from a predominantly male perspective. This preponderance of male writers continued during the 1950s and 1960s, the central figures of Peter Tomory, Gordon H. Brown and Hamish Keith publishing frequently during this period. Una Platts was an exception to this male dominance, working as a curator at Auckland Art Gallery during the 1950s, focusing predominantly on the Colonial period.

¹⁷⁰ David Hall, *Portrait of New Zealand*, 4th ed. (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1966), 182–83.

¹⁷¹ ‘Autumn Art Absenteeism,’ *The Press*, 27 April 1967, 13.

However, it is noteworthy that, while Tomory, Brown and Keith published extensively during this period, Platts' voice was not a recurring feature in the published discourse. In fact, it was not until 1980 that her rigorously researched, encyclopaedic book, *Nineteenth Century New Zealand Artists: A Guide and Handbook*, was published.

A gendered comparison of exhibiting artists during this period establishes a corollary between perceptions of amateurism and gender. The number of female contributors to the Canterbury Society of Arts shows, for example, consistently outweighed those of their male counterparts. Often, the gendered difference in contributing numbers was significant with women, in most instances, representing between 60 and 70 percent of contributors. In 1965, for example, 32 male artists were represented, alongside 66 women. It is clear from this that considerable numbers of women were making art, and had a desire to display it. The 'much more serious' Group shows, however, display a more balanced ratio. In general terms, the numbers of male and female contributors to these exhibitions is relatively equal, though the balance is tipped slightly in favour of men over women. Comparing the numbers for the same year, the Group show exhibited the work of 19 men alongside that of 16 women. If we follow the progression of 'seriousness' from society show, to independent, to professionally staffed public gallery, the presence of women gradually dwindles.

In 1965, the Auckland City Art Gallery held two major exhibitions of work by contemporary New Zealand painters: *New Zealand Painting* and *Contemporary Painting in New Zealand: An Exhibition Organised by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council*, produced in order to travel to Britain. The first of these consisted of the work of 26 male artists and only five women; in the second, 12 men are represented alongside only two women. This general pattern echoes that discerned in the literature surveyed in Chapter One. The large numbers of women who exhibited work in the regional society shows across New Zealand were represented in proportionally smaller numbers in the literature of the period. They were even less frequently discussed in single-artist essays. At each stage of selection, women were subtly filtered out of the literature. This pattern also appears to hold true for the inclusion of work by women artists in exhibitions at this time. As selection processes became progressively stringent, female numbers diminished. Dominated by women, the devaluation of the Arts Society exhibition resulted in a correlation between women and amateurism that was both perpetuated and naturalised. This resulted in a growing divide between the woman-dominated

open-policy society exhibitions, and those that were increasingly selective, professionalised and male-dominated.

Each year, beginning in 1957, Auckland City Art Gallery showcased the work of contemporary New Zealand painters of note. Standing in direct contrast to the open policy of society shows, these exhibitions were carefully curated in order to demonstrate the ‘more promising and enterprising of the younger painters’.¹⁷² In comparison to the amateurism of society shows, these exhibitions contained the work of a limited number of artists, 31 in 1965 in comparison to the 98 included in the Canterbury Society of Arts show of the same year. As previously noted, an increase in selectivity was accompanied by a dramatic decrease of women artists. Not only were a mere five female artists included, no women at all were mentioned in Hamish Keith’s catalogue essay. In this essay, Keith ties contemporary developments to historical ones, tracing a through-line of stylistic development which supports his search for a distinctive national or regional style:

There are, of course, historical precedents for these two styles. The nineteenth century watercolourists working in the Auckland area demonstrated a crispness of technique similar to that of the contemporary painters. While it may seem a far cry from Kinder, Hoyte and Sharpe to Hanley [sic], Binney and McCahon, there are certain undeniable similarities. In Canterbury the work of Petrus van der Velden at the turn of the century, could be seen, perhaps, as a harbinger of the contemporary style.¹⁷³

In seeking to create links between past and present, Keith echoes the concerns of those earlier historians, such as McCormick and McLintock, who sought to write a coherent narrative of national development structured around certain key figures. That in all of these cases those key figures were predominantly male should not go unnoticed. Operating along similar lines, the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council exhibition, *Contemporary Painting in New Zealand*, held in 1965, selected the work of 14 contemporary New Zealand artists to send to Britain. In this instance, the catalogue essay was written by Tomory, and again traces the historical roots of contemporary artistic developments.

Though writing from a slightly different perspective in relation to the debate surrounding a national school of painting, Tomory again casts the selected artists as those whose work is most representative of the significant contemporary developments in New Zealand painting.

¹⁷² Hamish Keith, ‘New Zealand Painting 1965’ (Auckland City Art Gallery, 1965), unpaginated.

¹⁷³ Keith, unpaginated.

Making clear the process of selection that resulted in an exhibition that was to represent New Zealand in an international context, Tomory states that ‘the selectors have attempted, within their terms of reference, to give as wide a picture as possible of contemporary painting in New Zealand’.¹⁷⁴ So wide was this picture that it included the work of only two women. The implication is clear: only two women working in the previous five years are producing work worthy of selection.

The move towards ensuring galleries became professional spaces was predicated upon the assertion that women-dominated society shows were the domain of the amateur. This trend can clearly be traced in the demographics of exhibition participants. To what extent, though, was this shift reflected in the critical literature that engaged with the visual arts in the 1960s? The beginnings of the art historical discourse that were evident in the 1930s and 1940s were further consolidated during this period, with prolific writers like Tomory, Keith and Brown all citing the foundations laid by McCormick and Tombs in their writings. The intertextual dialogue established here is one both acknowledging an inheritance and offering a veiled type of dismissal. Keith and Brown, in the very opening sentence of *An Introduction*, acknowledge the significance of their predecessor: ‘Since the appearance, some thirty years ago, of Dr E. H. McCormick’s book *Letters and Art in New Zealand* there has been no substantial work published on New Zealand painting’.¹⁷⁵

Their project is thus framed from the outset as the next substantial piece of scholarship to concern itself with the topic. In doing so, they position their voices as bringing a level of criticality that was generally lacking from prior written engagement with the visual arts:

If Art in New Zealand did not always live up to its expectation, if its articles tended to be uncritical, its short stories and poems undistinguished, it did however, provide a modest platform without which the arts in New Zealand would have been the poorer.¹⁷⁶

This attitude is similarly expressed by Tomory in his chapter titled ‘Art’ in *Pattern of New Zealand Culture*. He writes that criticism in the journal ‘was proffered with a supine equivocation (“fair-mindedness” in local terminology), so that the reader now has no means

¹⁷⁴ Peter Tomory, ‘Contemporary Painting in New Zealand: An Exhibition Organised by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council’ (Auckland City Art Gallery, 1965), unpaginated.

¹⁷⁵ Brown and Keith, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1967*, 9.

¹⁷⁶ Brown and Keith, 105.

of determining contemporary attitudes'.¹⁷⁷ The publication of the journal, along with the *Year Book* series, were acknowledged by Tomory only due to the fact that they 'lent some cohesion to the artistic milieu'.¹⁷⁸

This cohesion, loose though it was, allowed for the growth of a discourse relating to the visual arts to emerge and strengthen over the following decades. Prior to the publication of Brown and Keith's book in 1969, which can be viewed as the culmination of the discourse of cultural nationalism, this network of art writing was patchy and inconsistent. Although many exhibitions were reviewed in regional newspapers, the broad-ranging nature of print journalism ensured that such reviews were buried amongst local and international politics, current events, local interest stories, and advertising. This context may have provided the public with a window into the visual arts, but it was a window through which the view was both narrow and fragmented. Regional newspapers reviewed the exhibitions within their geographical area, and the lack of provision for long-form writing resulted in individual reviews being reduced to the status of stand-alone statements.

Between the cessation of *Art in New Zealand's* publication in 1946, and the emergence of *Art New Zealand* in 1976, there was no publication dedicated to the visual arts, with one brief exception. Stemming from a desire to fill this void, *Ascent: a Journal of the Arts in New Zealand* appeared between 1967 and 1969. *Ascent* was both short lived and frequently criticised, but during its short life it provided a forum for writers and artists to grapple with the significance and implications of art-making in New Zealand. The roster of writers publishing within its pages includes many of those who have shaped art writing in the country: Gordon H. Brown, Peter Tomory, Gil Docking, Leo Bensemman, Douglas MacDiarmid, Charles Brasch, E. H. McCormick and Anthony Green, among others. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those authors whose names are recognisable today are all men. In fact, of the 39 writers listed in the contents pages of the journal during its existence, only five of those were women. In two of those cases, the women were listed as joint authors alongside a man, and none of the women was responsible for more than a single piece of writing. On the other hand, seven male artists wrote multiple articles, with some such as Charles Brasch

¹⁷⁷ P. A. Tomory, 'Art,' in *The Pattern of New Zealand Culture* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1968), 200.

¹⁷⁸ Tomory, 200.

responsible for two pieces, through to Gordon H. Brown, whose name is attached to seven pieces of writing across the five issues of the journal.

In every issue of *Ascent*, excepting the last – a commemorative issue dedicated to Francis Hodgkins, which is considered in detail later in this chapter – men outnumber women as both writers and subjects. Discussion of the work of male artists heavily outweighs that of women, as do the number of artworks reproduced. Despite this imbalance in terms of visibility and representation, neither women artists nor writers were absent from the pages of *Ascent*. This echoes the pattern set by *Art in New Zealand* and continued throughout the published literature in the intervening years. The editorial concerns of the journal echo those expressed in *An Introduction*, *Pattern of New Zealand Culture*, and *Painting 1827-1967*. Across the discursive network of these writings, a narrowing of focus occurs.

Contributing to this narrowing of focus was a continuation of those structural elements identified in Chapter One. As the decades progressed, patterns established in this early literature can be seen to harden, settling into a normative perspective. In the first issue of *Ascent*, in a review entitled ‘The 1966 Contemporary Painting Exhibition,’ women artists are seen to exhibit more conventionally female characteristics.¹⁷⁹ Elizabeth Fanning’s *Blindman, South Australia* is noted as exhibiting a ‘straight charm’, whilst Elizabeth Steven’s *Rockscape* is deemed ‘modest and charming’.¹⁸⁰ In the same issue, Gordon H. Brown contributes an article entitled ‘The Auckland Scene’. This expansive review appraises the work of 14 artists, including four women. Despite this imbalance, Brown’s discussion of the work of women artists is certainly not dismissive; in fact, he often praises their work. However, this praise is almost always tempered by technical weaknesses evident in the work. Of Gretchen Albrecht’s work, he writes that ‘her images are not strong or clear enough to fulfil [her] aim’.¹⁸¹

Similar tendencies are discernible in Brown and Keith’s book, an air of inevitability shrouding their description of Rhona Haszard:

... there were painters working outside the orbit of the main centres, although not necessarily isolated from them: the most notable were Charles N. Worsley, Mina

¹⁷⁹ The review is attributed only to L.B., presumably Leo Bensemann, the editor of *Ascent*

¹⁸⁰ L. B, ‘The 1966 Contemporary Painting Exhibition,’ *Ascent* 1, no. 1 (November 1967), 67.

¹⁸¹ Gordon H. Brown, ‘The Auckland Scene,’ *Ascent* 1, no. 1 (November 1967), 70.

Arndt, Edith Collier, and at the very end of the period in the early twenties, Rhona Haszard. This latter painter properly belongs to the next generation but her life was cut short in 1931 when she fell from a high window while living in Alexandria where her husband had a teaching job.¹⁸²

The weaving of Haszard's early death into the narrative of her life, charted in Chapter One, had been so effective that by 1969 it was considered the only observation worth making. Though a reproduction of her oil painting *The Marne Valley* (1929: Auckland City Art Gallery) is included, no mention is actually made of her work. In the text, she is solely represented by this brief, tragic, biography.

Frances Rutherford's work is similarly held back by a lack of proficiency:

... if her work appears to have strong ties with traditional landscape painting, it has also, at its best, some very rewarding qualities that cannot be dismissed out of hand as old-fashioned art society stuff. [She suffers from] ... a hit-and-miss approach which results in work of a very uneven quality... this failure to see the whole work as a complete working unity is a recurring disability found in a considerable portion of her work.¹⁸³

Though offering high praise in recognising those 'very rewarding qualities' which are evident in her work, it is difficult not to believe that Brown feels her works actually are 'old-fashioned society stuff' at heart. While Albrecht and Rutherford are presented in a moderately positive light, Brown reiterates the dominant description of women's painting in reference to Irene O'Neill. His discussion of her work is brief, and concludes that 'the most positive aspects to be found in her work are some mildly decorative qualities'.¹⁸⁴ The inference, of course, supported by the weight of previous repetition, is that decorative is merely feminine. It is not of the same calibre as 'serious' art. The gendered tension is less explicit in this article than in much of the contemporary literature. However, it is certainly not absent, and points towards the socio-cultural context – and the specific arts discourse – in which Brown is writing.

¹⁸² Brown and Keith, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1967*, 72.

¹⁸³ Brown, 'The Auckland Scene,' 70.

¹⁸⁴ Brown, 71.

Cultural Nationalism and the Gendering of the Artist

As the writing of a distinctively national art history clarified during the 1960s, Europe was edged further out of the discourse. That women artists such as Hodgkins and Henderson had gained prominence, in part, through the European-ness of their work, ensured they did not fit comfortably into an increasingly nationalist discourse. Hodgkins had, by this stage, been firmly framed within a British arts context. The European Modernism evident in Henderson's work certainly helped to raise her profile in the early 1950s. However, a decade or so later there was no place for her cubist-inspired, European-influenced modernism within the framework of a nationalist narrative. The construction of this canonical narrative, founded upon cultural nationalism, instead sees the elevation of a key trio of New Zealand artists whose names would become its cornerstones. Brown and Keith argue that 'Woollaston, Rita Angus and Colin McCahon were still the only painters consistently able to surprise'.¹⁸⁵ Their names appear together continually during this period, though varying weight is given to their individual achievements. Mark Young, for instance, mentions Angus only in passing, positioning the two male painters at the forefront of the development of a school of art worth taking seriously:

Now it is possible, although still a hardship, for the more serious and artistically valid painters to be self-supporting. The two painters to whom should go the greatest credit for the change in climate are M. T. Woollaston and Colin McCahon.¹⁸⁶

Again, the concept of 'serious', 'artistically valid painters' is tied only to men. As demonstrated in Chapter One, representational conventions had developed that gave the impression that only male artists were capable of being wholly artists. Neither the single-minded pursuit of genius, nor the production of masterpieces, were attributed to women artists. Throughout the literature of this period it becomes clear that McCahon, more so than any other artist, is held aloft as a figure of excellence. The considerable critical discourse that has sprung up around his work over the last seven decades is testament to the dominant position he retains in the national artistic consciousness. Delving deeply into this scholarship falls outside of the remit of this thesis. However, it will be instructive to briefly consider the discrepancies in the treatment of McCahon and Angus during this pivotal time in New

¹⁸⁵ Brown and Keith, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1967*, 167.

¹⁸⁶ Mark Young, 'Painting 1950 - 1967,' in *Painting 1927 - 1967*, ed. P. A. Tomory (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1968), 3.

Zealand's art history. Doing so through the lens of gendered imbalance will demonstrate the divided foundations upon which the narrative development of a national art came to rest.

According to the predominant voices working within a paradigm of cultural nationalism, it is McCahon, 'one of the most forward-looking painters in New Zealand, [who] comes closest to occupying the position of *guru*'.¹⁸⁷ Angus, despite the praise her work garnered during this time, was not similarly framed. The fact that Brown and Keith include individual chapters on both McCahon and Woollaston, but not Angus, in their book, would appear to support this assertion. However, it is important to note that it was Angus herself who objected to the inclusion of a chapter dedicated to her work. Her objections were founded upon her belief that her work did not belong to a specific national 'school'. Angus's refusal pointed towards her – extremely prescient – fear that inclusion in such a 'school' would subsume her artistic practice within a specific narrative.¹⁸⁸ The selective nature by which Angus's work was discussed in the 1960s, did somewhat predictably ensure that it was comfortably positioned within a nationalist narrative which privileged the 'distinctive qualities of New Zealand light'.¹⁸⁹ It was not until the 1980s when other aspects of her work, such as her self-portraits, began to draw critical attention from a new generation of women scholars. Despite Angus's wide-ranging subject matter, it was her landscape paintings that drew the bulk of critical attention in the late 1960s. Works such as *Central Otago* (fig. 11) have a visual immediacy that belie the complexity of their composition. Appearing at first to depict the landscape in graphically simplified forms, the densely interlocking linearity of the work pulls the viewer's eye constantly onwards. From the furrows of freshly ploughed fields, we cross roads, gently rolling hills and over the water to the angular snow-capped Southern Alps, their form echoed by the clouds hovering above. The jewel-bright palette, so distinctive in Angus' work, adds to this rhythmic sophistication. Bursts of colour are pulled together by heavy line, compressing the landscape into concentrated distillations of space, colour and line working together in service of dynamic pulsing form.

Such elements are again present in her now-iconic 1936 oil painting, *Cass* (fig. 0.2). More so than any other work of this period, *Cass* has come to stand for the regional real in New Zealand painting. Harsh light casts heavy shadows across the isolated station buildings,

¹⁸⁷ Young, 4.

¹⁸⁸ See Jill Trevelyan, *Rita Angus: An Artist's Life* (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2008), for a more extensive account of this.

¹⁸⁹ Brown and Keith, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1967*, 9.

framed by a rhythmic, linear depiction of the landscape. This marriage between landscape as subject matter, and her harsh, bright, linear stylistic approach, secured Angus a position within the nationalist canon. However, the fact of her gender was often remarked upon as a point of difference. Her recognised skill as an artist ensured that she was depicted as exceptional, rather than archetypal, of her gender. The fact that she is a woman is an inescapable caveat attached to her status as an artist.

Brown and Keith praise the formal approach of Angus through the inclusion of a quote by Roland Hipkins.¹⁹⁰ The authors choose to immediately follow this passage by drawing attention to both her femininity and what they perceive as the declining quality of her work:

“Her vision”, wrote Roland Hipkins, referring to her landscapes in particular, “carries her beyond the externals to the basic forms of the earth... Her paintings are clear cut in design and consciously rhythmic. The sparkling light, so characteristic of New Zealand, is intensified, not by atmospheric realism but by the use of sharp, linear emphasis and by simplified colour and tonal gradations within the mass.” One traditionally feminine subject of which she grew particularly fond was her interest in painting flowers. ... Towards the end of the nineteen-forties, however, Rita Angus’ work seems to have temporarily lost some of its bite. There are works from these years that have a slight tendency towards sweetness and a preoccupation with detail.¹⁹¹

When her painting conformed to Brown and Keith’s nationalist concerns – note their insistence upon an emphasis on landscape for instance – it received high praise and specific formal interrogation. However, after reminding the readers of Angus’ femininity, the descriptors attributed to her work are reminiscent of those pinpointed in Chapter One as qualitatively loaded signifiers of gender. The previous sharpness of her work ‘lost some of its bite’, the inescapability of feminine qualities, such as ‘sweetness and a preoccupation with detail,’ ensure that she can never truly be free of the perceived weaknesses of her gender.

Brown and Keith’s engagement with McCahon is also gendered, though in a more subtly pervasive manner. Angus’s gender is seen to minimise certain aspects of her work, to make its ‘bite’ less. In contrast, the language describing McCahon is expansive:

At the same time as the *Wake*, McCahon worked on a series of enigmatic landscapes similar in many ways to *Painting* but on a much greater scale and of

¹⁹⁰ This quote, like all cited material in this book, is not accompanied by a reference to its place of origin, considerably diminishing the claims made to serious scholarship by the book’s authors.

¹⁹¹ Brown and Keith, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1967*, 136.

much greater intensity... Early in 1959 McCahon began work on the monumental *Elias* series without doubt his most significant works. Based largely on the text of the St John Gospel, the *Elias* paintings completely realise McCahon's vision of the order inherent in the forms of the New Zealand landscape... Their content is far too complex to be reduced to words, but behind their tragic implications lies the joy of the discovery that salvation and enlightenment can be found immediately at hand.¹⁹²

Language itself is rendered inconsequential in the face of McCahon's genius. His paintings, such as *Elias Triptych* (fig. 12) of 1959 are enigmatic, significant, monumental and complex. They embody the full gamut of human experience: from tragedy to salvation and enlightenment. Here, then, McCahon becomes the Christ-like saviour of New Zealand painting. Tomory, too, slides towards linguistic hyperbole when declaring his unique genius. Of McCahon he writes:

Intense is the key word, for the intensity of his conception has a touch of the messianic about it, equally matched by strong dynamic forms and color [sic]... McCahon is the most profound artist that New Zealand has produced and also one of the best painters... the over-all quality of work has risen to the extent that painting in this country is now a major force in cultural development.¹⁹³

Tomory's writing echoes the discrepancy of treatment found in Brown and Keith. McCahon is granted messianic status, not only as the most significant individual artist in the country, but as the representative of that country's cultural development. Angus, too, is praised by Tomory, recognising in her work the 'timeless emblems of a land and people'.¹⁹⁴ Such praise when directed at a woman artist cannot – it would seem – go unqualified. Tomory may not explicitly base his reading of her work on her gender, but the manner in which her work is framed is a clear continuation of the gendered qualitative language tracked through the development of the discourse thus far. Rather than attributing her use of colour to the 'harsh light' school of thought, her motivations are identified as originating from her femininity: '[h]ence the clear bright colours, reminiscent of embroidery, a craft she had practised'.¹⁹⁵ Where McCahon's work is complex, significant and monumental, Angus's is 'clearly defined yet unsophisticated'.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Brown and Keith, 190.

¹⁹³ Tomory, 'Art,' 183.

¹⁹⁴ P. A. Tomory, 'Painting 1890 - 1950,' in *Painting 1827 - 1967*, ed. P. A. Tomory (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1968), 5.

¹⁹⁵ Tomory, 5.

¹⁹⁶ Tomory, 5.

Angus and McCahon, though frequently positioned together in the literature, alongside Woollaston, are not presented to the reader as equals. The unbounded expansiveness of McCahon's work is contrasted with continual assertions of the smallness of Angus's. Her love of traditionally feminine subject matter, such as flowers, the influence of the inward-looking domesticity of embroidery, her 'unsophisticated' and 'simplified forms': the continual circling back to such elements and influences in her work diminishes its magnitude as McCahon's expands exponentially.

The critical discourse which negotiated McCahon's status as the profound, messianic saviour of the nation's art is reliant, too, on a minimisation of those artists against which he is most frequently compared. Angus is one such artist. Though considered an extraordinary female talent, her gender offered a socially ingrained set of assumptions by which critics could reduce her work in the face of McCahon's. Despite the significant level of critical praise Henderson's work received in the early 1950s, it was perhaps the very 'European-ness' of these paintings which ensured that they were rapidly edged from a discourse that had become increasingly focused on establishing a national art. Despite the level of success Henderson gained in the 1950s, she does not make a considerable mark in the dominant narrative as it was solidified in the 1960s. Brown and Keith, for example, list her name five times in the index to *An Introduction*, in comparison to McCahon's 16 references. Of these five listings, however, two refer to the inclusion of her name within a list of artists, while the remaining three point towards a mention that consists of less than a complete sentence. That a woman artist was granted such a minimal presence in their narrative is, perhaps, unsurprising. However, it does point towards the significant shift in her profile which occurred between the opening of the period in question and its close, as International Modernism was rapidly edged out of a canon founded upon the tenets of cultural nationalism.

The privileging of the 'harsh light' narrative, made concrete by Brown and Keith, resulted in a relative lack of contemporary attention being paid to those New Zealand artists whose practices were clearly influenced by, or directly engaged with, modernist abstraction. The centrality of the quest for an authentic and unique identity for New Zealand art necessitated a canon of artists who took their stylistic inspiration from the country's landscape and light, rather than looking outward to engage with an international artistic dialogue. While Henderson was largely absent from this constructed narrative, Hodgkins was not. In fact, between the publication of McCormick's books, and the centennial year of her birth in 1969,

her profile within New Zealand both increased and solidified. In 1969, the centennial year of her birth, Hodgkins' work was celebrated in the Arts Council-funded exhibition *Frances Hodgkins 1869-1947*, organised by the Auckland City Art Gallery, and *The Origins of Frances Hodgkins*, organised by the Hocken Library in Dunedin. The centennial year was also marked by a commemorative issue of *Ascent*, the only one of its five volumes to be dedicated to a single artist. That a woman was the subject of such an issue appears to signal the acceptance of women as serious artists. However, upon examination of the literature dedicated to Hodgkins at this time, it becomes clear that she was considered an exceptional figure. Hodgkins was given visibility within the discourse while simultaneously being situated outside of it. Framed in an international context, her work offered a parallel to the discourse of cultural nationalism, rather than a challenge to it. Her work – according to the literature – was not directly concerned with those two key elements evident in the work of New Zealand's 'more important New Zealand painters'.¹⁹⁷

Echoing the discourse of tragedy which coalesced around Rhona Haszard after her death, Hodgkins' narrative is one in which personal sacrifice is foregrounded. One of the most common recurring themes throughout *The Expatriate* are the 'grey clouds of vanishing resources and anxiety for the future that hung over Frances'.¹⁹⁸ Choosing to jettison the conventional pathways of femininity, Hodgkins was blighted frequently by 'poverty and anxiety and indecision'.¹⁹⁹ This discourse of tragic sacrifice is continued in the 1960s, where the observations McCormick makes from her letters are given credence – romanticised even – in Opie's 1969 essay for *Ascent*. For this essay, Opie gathered the recollections of people who knew Hodgkins, one of whom – Ben Nicholson – is quoted as saying:

It is very difficult, today, to understand just how poor Frances Hodgkins was or how she survived the appalling conditions under which she lived. She knew hunger over long periods, was almost permanently cold and had to accept gifts of blankets and clothes from friends.²⁰⁰

This narrative of sacrifice and poverty is pervasive, and presented in such a way that it seems an inevitable consequence of her unconventional decision to pursue a professional artistic career as a woman.

¹⁹⁷ Brown and Keith, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1967*, 9.

¹⁹⁸ McCormick, *The Expatriate: A Study of Frances Hodgkins*, 72.

¹⁹⁹ E. H. McCormick, *Works of Frances Hodgkins in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1954), 78.

²⁰⁰ June Opie, 'The Quest for Frances Hodgkins,' *Ascent* 1, no. 5 (December 1969), 54–55.

The 1969 Arts Council funded centenary exhibition *Frances Hodgkins 1869 – 1947*, sought to present a comprehensive overview of Hodgkins' life and work. 'Our aim has been to assemble not necessarily the 'best' works but a fully representative selection covering a painting life that lasted half a century'.²⁰¹ In the same year, the exhibition *The Origin of Frances Hodgkins*, held at the Hocken Library, and conceived as an 'ancillary exhibition,' sought to 'place Frances Hodgkins in her New Zealand context, to show work that, if only indirectly, formed the background against which she grew'.²⁰² Such a desire, to situate her work within the context of her country of birth, is indicative of the duality inherent in virtually all critical engagement with Hodgkins in New Zealand. It is evident, however, that such a duality was not one between equals. The belief that New Zealand was the 'background against which she grew,' rather than the nation through which her work could be understood, became increasingly entrenched as time progressed.

McCormick highlights the precariousness of Hodgkins' New Zealand-ness at the outset of *The Expatriate*, arguing that: 'New Zealand must ultimately find some place – whether in the foreground or, as seems more probable, in the middle distance or background...'.²⁰³ By 1969, the indeterminacy of her national alignment had hardened into certitude. In the centennial issue of *Ascent*, she is referred to almost exclusively as a British or English painter. Brown and Keith make only cursory mention of her throughout *An Introduction*, emphasising her status as an expatriate when they do so. For example, they reference her 1906 departure from the country as follows: 'Frances Hodgkins was not to stay long in Wellington, for on the 18th January 1906, at the age of 37, she left once more for England to become New Zealand's best known expatriate painter'.²⁰⁴

One hundred years after she was born in Dunedin, Hodgkins' reputation within the country of her birth rested firmly upon her position within a British national narrative. Her relatively cursory role – as an expatriate artist – in Brown and Keith's development of painting in New Zealand stands in marked contrast to the position she occupies in relation to British art in the discourse at this time. Consider, for example, the commemorative issue of *Ascent*, comprising

²⁰¹ 'Frances Hodgkins 1869 - 1947: A Centenary Exhibition' (Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, 1969), unpaginated.

²⁰² Una Platts, 'The Origins of Frances Hodgkins: An Exhibition of Paintings in the Centennial Year of Her Birth' (Hocken Library, University of Otago, 1969), 4.

²⁰³ McCormick, *The Expatriate: A Study of Frances Hodgkins*, 7.

²⁰⁴ Brown and Keith, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1967*, 67.

five articles by five authors. Melvin Day, Director of the National Art Gallery in Wellington, opens the issue by situating Hodgkins as a British painter of whom New Zealand can be proud due to the location of her birth:

... Frances Hodgkins has achieved a reputation which places her in the front rank of New Zealand born painters. I imagine, also, that little doubt exists in the minds of many connoisseurs that she has a rightful place amongst those artists who are regarded as the best British painters of this century.²⁰⁵

She may be New Zealand born, but she is not a New Zealand painter. In fact, as Graham Sutherland is quoted as saying in June Opie's anecdotal *Ascent* essay 'The Quest for Frances Hodgkins,' 'one was not conscious at all that she was, in her painting, a New Zealander'.²⁰⁶ Why, then, was such a concerted critical and curatorial effort made during this period to rehabilitate her reputation within New Zealand? Despite the 'present sense of national identification' pinpointed by Brown and Keith at the close of the 1960s, the cultural shadow cast by Europe continued to loom large. The publication, in 1961, of *Distance Looks Our Way*, a volume of essays specifically addressing New Zealand's geographic remoteness, demonstrates the persistence of that tension between 'Home' and 'Dominion' articulated so consistently in the early decades of the twentieth century. Tomory's contribution to this volume opens with the claim that 'New Zealand is an experiment in European civilisation, removed geographically, climatically and in social pattern from its original source'.²⁰⁷ Self-consciously isolated and remote, despite an increasingly secure sense of national identity, New Zealand to some extent remained, as McCormick asserted in 1940, 'a fragment, though a remote fragment, of the European world'.²⁰⁸

The link between Europe and New Zealand, though increasingly downplayed, remained virtually unassailable. Quantifiable European success, such as that achieved by Hodgkins, reflected positively upon New Zealand. Repeatedly throughout *Ascent 5* (fig. 13), the role played by Hodgkins in the development of a national art – whether English or British – is emphasised. The quality of her work ensured that 'from the late twenties onwards Frances Hodgkins gradually became known among modern English painters'.²⁰⁹ The relevance of her

²⁰⁵ Melvin Day, 'Frances Hodgkins: 1869 - 1947', *Ascent* 1, no. 5 (December 1969), 5.

²⁰⁶ Opie, 'The Quest for Frances Hodgkins,' 61.

²⁰⁷ P. A. Tomory, 'The Visual Arts,' in *Distance Looks Our Way: The Effects of Remoteness on New Zealand*, ed. Keith Sinclair (Auckland: Paul's Book Arcade for the University of Auckland, 1961), 63.

²⁰⁸ McCormick, *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, 2.

²⁰⁹ E. H. McCormick, 'Frances Hodgkins: A Pictorial Biography,' *Ascent* 1, no. 5 (December 1969), 21.

painting to the nation was to increase, however, from achieving recognition, to exerting creative influence:

It seems as if Frances Hodgkins' influence on these young English painters was quite marked and artistically most beneficial. ... it is obvious in view of the development of British art that she occupies a pivotal position in British painting of the late 30s and early 40s.²¹⁰

Within the context of New Zealand art, however, she came to be defined as a very specific figure: the expatriate. The power of McCormick's label acts to simultaneously include and exclude her from the discourse. As Colin McCahon said in 1962: 'we can no longer rightfully claim [Hodgkins] as a New Zealand painter, although we may feel a certain pride in ourselves belonging to the land of her birth...'.²¹¹

If there was no place for her art here during her lifetime, then there was certainly no central place for her in a discourse which positioned national identity at its very heart. For those critics concerned with the 'profound implications' of New Zealand's landscape, and the 'distinctive qualities of New Zealand light,' an artist who was making art at such a far geographical remove from those elements was clearly not making New Zealand art.²¹² Hodgkins, had she been considered a New Zealand painter, would represent a divergent conception of New Zealand art by challenging the hegemony of the Pākehā male within the country's national identity. However, Hodgkins is not directly included within the unfolding narrative of a developing national school of painting. To do so would pose a threat to the dominant narrative of cultural nationalism. Rather, she is positioned within a parallel discourse: one of exceptionality. Her professional status as an artist renders her exceptional within a contemporary context which increasingly aligned women with amateurism, and men with professionalism. Success forged predominantly at 'Home' excluded her from the dialogue of cultural nationalism, yet allowed a certain level of international prestige to be incorporated into New Zealand's burgeoning art history.

It is important, however, to recognise that the dominant narrative constructed within this national history was one shaped firmly within the parameters of a Pākehā discourse. The efforts of numerous writers to negotiate a cohesive history of New Zealand art, alongside a

²¹⁰ Day, 'Frances Hodgkins: 1869 - 1947,' 6.

²¹¹ Colin McCahon in: 'Six New Zealand Expatriates' (The Auckland City Art Gallery, April 1962), 7.

²¹² Brown and Keith, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1967*, 9.

framework for critical discussion, had resulted in a discourse which was exclusively European. The marked absence of many of the practicing Māori artists who were actively making and displaying work at this time, points to the myopia of a self-consciously constructed national identity. The limitations of this identity were imposed by cultural difference, as well as by gender. These tensions, as we shall see, would prove to play an increasingly significant role in the development of the arts discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand throughout the 1970s and the 1980s.

It is evident that cultural nationalism had ushered in a certain level of cultural and national certitude within New Zealand's mainstream arts discourse by the close of the 1960s. However, this sense of the nationhood, while purporting to shape an art that accurately reflected the unique realities of New Zealand, was limited by its cultural specificity. National identity, so conscientiously and earnestly sought, was strictly constrained within the parameters of a male, settler-colonial nation. New Zealand's professionalised art historical discourse was formulated from this starting point, a starting point which privileged the male Pākehā New Zealander's experience above all else. Women were edged further into the margins, as an increasing emphasis was placed upon 'maintaining a high professional standard in the arts in a country that, for decades, has worshiped at the shrine of amateurism'.²¹³

Shay Docking, writing in *Ascent 5*, however, provides glimpse of the critical events which were to unfold in response to the establishment of such a restrictive narrative. Rather than placing Hodgkins within a discourse of exceptionality, rather than seeing her as a never-to-be-repeated anomaly, Docking positions her instead within a specific lineage. She asserts the presence of a female 'tradition begun by a few women a century ago, and propelled forward by significant artists such as Frances Hodgkins'.²¹⁴ The centring of women within Docking's assertion echoes those observations made by Leslie M. Hall in *Landfall* quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Hall recognised that the mid-twentieth century was marked by women's 'growing unwillingness to accept that general inferiority of status and limitation of function' to which they had been socially assigned.²¹⁵ Throughout the 1960s specific issues, such as abortion reform and the introduction of the contraceptive pill, had provided

²¹³ Tomory, 'Art,' 207–8.

²¹⁴ Shay Docking, 'Frances Hodgkins and a New Tradition,' *Ascent 1*, no. 5 (December 1969), 75.

²¹⁵ Hall, 'Women and Men in New Zealand,' 47.

flashpoints around which women's role in society was questioned.²¹⁶ Similarly, the rise of 'suburban neurosis' in the 1960s pointed to women's growing sense of unease and dissatisfaction with the social status quo. As a generation of women gained access to international feminist texts, such as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, they began to form a critical context for their dissatisfaction.²¹⁷ This context was strengthened through the beginnings of group discussions regarding the social status of women. Though a widespread network of women's groups dedicated to consciousness-raising did not emerge until the following decade, the 1960s did see an early manifestation of this approach.

In 1966, inspired by a *Voice of America* programme played by the New Zealand Broadcasting Service on 'Women's contribution to a changing society', members of the Linden Playcentre in the Wellington suburb of Tawa organised a lecture series to explore the New Zealand context. The six lectures analysing 'The changing role of women' drew large and enthusiastic audiences.²¹⁸

Those normative gendered expectations, which appeared so firmly entrenched at the beginning of the 1950s, were held up for scrutiny and found to be insufficient. The explicit debating of such issues demonstrated the extent of that 'mounting disharmony' Hall had identified between men and women within New Zealand. Docking, in her essay on Hodgkins, offers an alternative to the naturalised inferiority and normative patterns of behaviour inscribed upon women by the dominant discourse:

For centuries, society rigidly dictated the behaviour and station of females. ... When, in perhaps fifty years, two or three generations having in turn, matured and evolved, the melted floes of the most devastatingly disruptive, if the most subtly *quiet* revolution in history, have ceased their agitation and the river finds its own depth and level, I believe we can expect life to regain a direction (and a new one) deeper and wider for the fact that both men and women function naturally as fulfilled and creative humans, contributing in their unique and complementary ways to society.²¹⁹

The revolution that was to unfold over the following decades was, as we shall see, anything but quiet.

²¹⁶ See Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women*, 329–32.

²¹⁷ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963).

²¹⁸ Brookes, 332.

²¹⁹ Docking, 'Frances Hodgkins and a New Tradition,' 74–75.

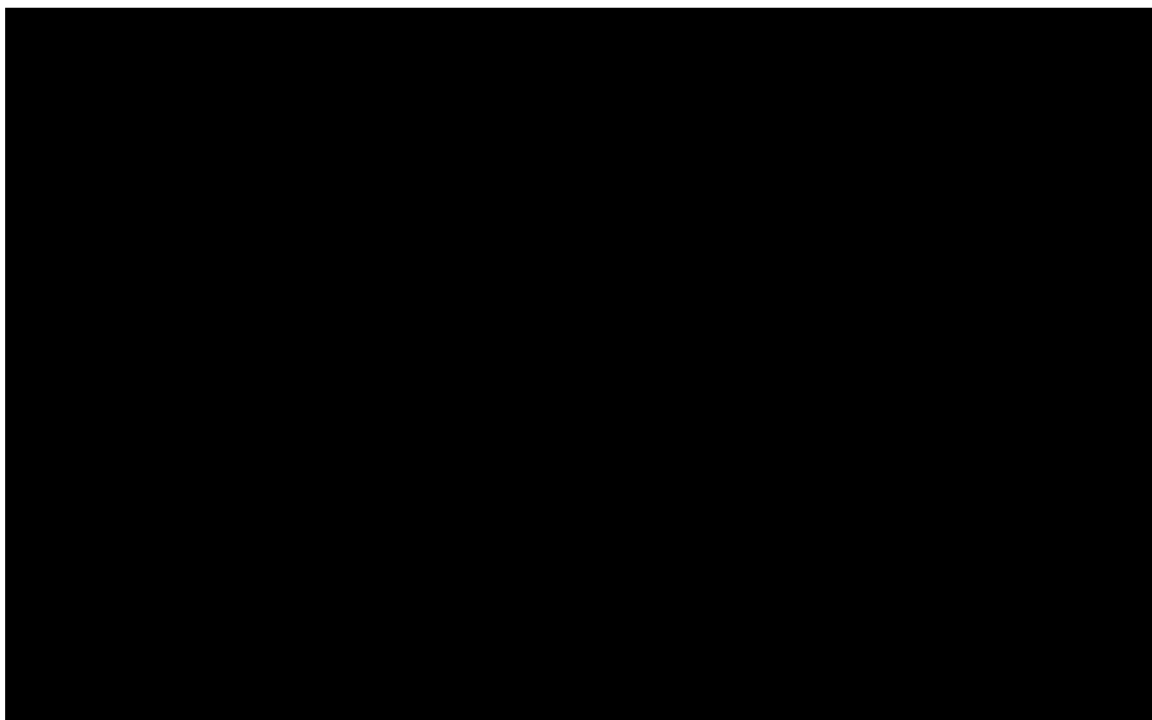


Figure 0.3: Vivian Lynn, *Book of Forty Images*, silkscreen, vinyl cover, 1973-74
(Te Papa Tongarewa)

Chapter Three

The 1970s: Expansion and Fragmentation

The 1970s marked a period of turbulent socio-political change in Aotearoa New Zealand, and have retrospectively been characterised as a decade of protest and activism.²²⁰ Political foment sought to radically alter the country's social structure, challenging attitudes towards gender, sexuality and cultural identity. During this period the public took to the streets to protest a range of issues from the Vietnam War to French Nuclear testing in the Pacific. Alongside public agitation protesting the country's involvement in such international issues, protest regarding long-standing cultural issues within the local political landscape also rose to prominence. The Crown came under increasing scrutiny regarding its record of upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi, particularly in relation to Māori land rights. Significantly, these issues were made increasingly visible through the creation of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975, established by the government in order to address Crown breaches of the Treaty. Significant protest, spearheaded by newly-formed organisations such as Ngā Tamatoa, fought discrimination against Māori, and agitated for significant change of political and social structures which continued to privilege Pākehā over Māori. The 1970s also saw the growth of a women's movement in New Zealand, with the establishment of a network of grassroots feminist organisations emerging across the country. The dissemination of feminist politics was supported through the emergence of publications such as the feminist magazine *Broadsheet* – established in 1972 – and organisations such as the Women's Studies Association, established in 1976.²²¹ The urgent and contentious debate of such political issues acted as the backdrop against which New Zealand's art discourse unfolded. This chapter will consider these discursive developments in relation to the increasingly discordant politics of the decade.

The tenuous sense of cultural and national certitude established within the mainstream art discourse by the close of the 1960s came under increasing scrutiny during the 1970s. New Zealand's art world underwent significant expansion during this period, as a growing number of artists, art historians and critics sought to challenge its narrow parameters. The country's first Art History department was established in 1969 at the University of Auckland, marking

²²⁰ While many written histories of Aotearoa New Zealand centre political protest within their accounts of the 1970s, two books that are particularly relevant within this context are: Barbara Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2016) and Atholl Anderson, Judith Binney, and Aroha Harris, *Tangata Whenua: A History* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Ltd, 2015)

²²¹ Renamed The Women's Studies Association (N.Z.) Pae Akoranga Wāhine in 2015, the WSA remains active today.

a significant step in the establishment of the arts as a serious scholarly discipline. Anthony Green, the head of the department from its establishment until 1992, played a vital role in the growth of the discourse, training the first – and subsequent – generation of New Zealand’s art historians. Awarded a PhD in Art History from the University of Edinburgh, Green’s academic training resulted in an assertion of the need to bring a new level of rigorous critical scholarship to bear upon the arts in the country.

As the discipline of Art History in New Zealand was being shaped into an academic subject, the training many artists received at art school was also undergoing radical change. This was due in large part to two sculpture departments, the most influential of these run by Jim Allen at Elam School of Fine Arts (University of Auckland), as well as that at Ilam School of Fine Arts (University of Canterbury) in which Tom Taylor taught. The role of these departments in fostering a new avant-garde within New Zealand was significant, unshackling sculpture from the necessity of producing discrete autonomous objects. Increasingly performative, large in scale and frequently ephemeral, the deeply experimental approach to art-making that was fostered in these departments was to have a major impact on the development of contemporary art in New Zealand. As Jim Allen and Wystan Curnow assert in the front matter of their important 1976 book *new art: Some recent New Zealand sculpture and post-object art*:

In recent years sculpture has taken a rare initiative. It looks as if what will become of art is in the hands of sculptors rather than painters. We think that some such confidence informs the toughness and energy of the work in this book.²²²

Allen and Curnow’s prediction was to prove accurate, as artists increasingly experimented with alternative media. The dominant mediums of painting and sculpture were subject to increasing artistic interrogation throughout the 1970s and beyond. In tandem with this institutional invigoration of art-historical and art-making practices, the 1970s gave rise to a broadening network of publically funded art galleries across the country. February of 1970 saw the opening of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth, the first public gallery in New Zealand established with a dedicated remit to exhibiting and collecting contemporary art. Significantly, its opening exhibition demonstrated this commitment to the contemporary. Commissioned to create the gallery’s first exhibition, Leon Narbey – a recent graduate of

²²² Jim Allen and Wystan Curnow, eds., *New Art: Some Recent New Zealand Sculpture and Post-Object Art* (Auckland: Heinemann Educational Books (NZ) Ltd, 1976), unpaginated.

Allen's sculpture programme at Elam – created *Real Time*, an immersive installation in the new gallery space, utilising plastic sculptural material, light and sound. The Dowse Art Museum followed soon after, opening in Lower Hutt in 1971. They were soon joined by public galleries in Hastings and Rotorua, greatly increasing the number of opportunities for New Zealand artists to exhibit their work outside of the country's main centres. As the infrastructure for arts education and display expanded throughout the 1970s, new publications emerged to provide a critical space of reflection. These publications were varied in their remit and scope, from the widely circulated art magazine *Art New Zealand*, to the medium-specific periodical *Photoforum*, and the specialist academic publication the *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History*.

An Expanding Arts Discourse

As art history grew into its distinctive academic identity following its introduction as a University subject in 1969, art historical scholarship required a published outlet. With the cessation of publication of *Ascent* at the close of the previous decade, there was once again a void in the literature relating to the visual arts, though this time it was rapidly filled. The *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History*, first published in 1972, was edited by Anthony S.G. Green, the founding Professor of Art History at the University of Auckland. Through the *Bulletin*, Green sought to create a publishing platform that would bring both awareness and identity to the study of Art History in New Zealand. As an academically trained art historian, he intended to create a publication which both professionalised the discipline of art history, and stood apart from previous, more mainstream, publications. The *Bulletin* was to be an academic journal, aimed at a critical scholarly audience, rather than a periodical aimed at the interested layman. As such, Green spells out the specific parameters of the *Bulletin's* remit in its inaugural editorial:

The purpose of this publication is to make available the results of recent research into the history of art in New Zealand. Apart from the publications of libraries and art galleries, this is the first of its kind to appear in New Zealand. Historians of art, inside and outside the University of Auckland, have had little opportunity for publication. Further, their number has been very small. ... inside and outside the University the history of art in New Zealand is in its infancy. With the honourable exception of the work of a few pioneers, very little has been done.²²³

²²³ Anthony S. G. Green, 'Editorial,' *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History* 1 (1972), i.

Echoing the increasing professionalisation of the arts evident in the 1950s and 1960s, the *Bulletin* positions itself firmly as a resource produced by – and for – the nascent professional discipline of art history. The emphasis lies not only on the importance of building a historical record, but on providing a published forum which seeks to centre scholarly academic research. As such, Green makes no mention of periodicals such as *Art in New Zealand* and *Ascent* which had come before, marking an ideological break with their broad, often connoisseurial, approach. Working within the paradigm of a critical art-historical model, the familiar rhetorical refrain of discursive emptiness remains. The *Bulletin*'s first editorial firmly positions the publication as a lone voice in the wilderness of academic art writing: 'There is urgent work to be done,' states Green, 'and at present very few to do it'.²²⁴

In his editorial, Green situates the *Bulletin* at the forefront of the development of art history as a professional discipline, stating:

However modest in size and scope this number may be, it is hoped that together with future numbers it will provide a gradually increasing body of information, which will be of value to New Zealand historians of art and to students in other countries of the arts of colonial culture.²²⁵

By clearly stating the intention to produce a resource valuable both in New Zealand and internationally, Green signals a desire to participate in an existing international art historical discourse. The *Bulletin* published the critical writing of a small stable of – predominantly male – writers during the 1970s, the most frequent contributors being Michael Dunn, Anthony Green, Leonard Bell and Wystan Curnow. Familiar names, such as Francis Pound and Gordon Brown, also appear within its pages. An analysis of the seven volumes of the journal published throughout the 1970s reveals a gendered balance which seems unsurprising when considered against the development of the discourse of art writing in the country. Of the 26 individual essays listed in the contents pages over the decade, only one took a woman artist as its subject, and a mere two of those 26 pieces were written by women.

Such numerical statistics might indicate that the work published in the *Bulletin* largely reflected the stereotypes and biases we have seen in the mainstream arts writing up to this point. However, this limited quantitative information must be interrogated further, through an

²²⁴ Green, i.

²²⁵ Green, i.

analysis of the ideological underpinnings of the *Bulletin's* scholarly approach. It becomes clear upon examination that the scholarship published in the *Bulletin* does not perpetuate the narrative of cultural nationalism that had gained prominence by the time of its appearance. In an essay published in Volume 3, titled 'Doing Art Criticism in New Zealand,' Wystan Curnow, a key voice in the critical discourse to emerge around Post-Object art, surveyed the country's critical landscape and found it lacking. He argues that by this period:

Art is a great deal richer than it was and its social prestige is considerable and likely to improve. The time has come when we should be able to read criticism that can take for granted the importance of its task, that is informed, subtle, careful, and sustained.²²⁶

This commitment to sustained and informed criticism is central to the *Bulletin's* remit. It provided a space for long-form and experimental critical writing, unconstrained by the limits of popular taste. The *Bulletin* also published scholarship relating to artistic media which had – to this point – largely fallen outside the bounds of art writing in New Zealand. In this context, it is worth noting the subject matter of the two contributions made by women writers during this decade, neither of whom wrote about either painting or sculpture. Elizabeth Eastmond's essay was titled 'Medieval Book Illumination in New Zealand', while Sister Gael O'Leary wrote about the history of St Mary's Convent Chapel in Ponsonby. The inclusion of texts dedicated to topics often considered minor or peripheral, demonstrated the *Bulletin's* commitment to interrogating pre-existing definitions and limitations within the discourse of art writing.

Only one essay published in the *Bulletin* throughout the 1970s considered the work of a woman artist as its subject. Initially, this sole inclusion appears indicative of the place women artists occupied within the academic field of art history during this period. Once again, however, such simplistic statistical analysis paints a very limited picture. Published in Volume 5 in 1977, the piece was titled 'Jean Horsley: A documentary account'. The choice of Horsley as subject is particularly telling here. An abstract expressionist painter who lived and worked in both London and New York, Horsley was – unsurprisingly – absent from Brown and Keith's earlier book. Her commitment to abstraction, as well as her choice to work outside of New Zealand for a considerable portion of her career, situated her firmly outside of the national narrative. Rather than a long-form essay, Anthony Green presents a

²²⁶ Wystan Curnow, 'Doing Art Criticism in New Zealand,' *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History* 3 (1975), 11.

compilation of small snippets of text relating to Horsley, including letters exchanged between her and Don Wood of Ikon Gallery, price lists of her work, newspaper clippings and catalogue listings. These short excerpts are presented to the reader as archival information, free from analysis or interpretation. This approach can be seen as reflective of international shifts occurring in art history during this decade. The New Art History, as it was labelled, enacted a paradigm shift within the discipline, rupturing the continuity of a chronological, hierarchical narrative constructed largely around parameters of taste and style. The presentation of archival information, without the construction of an interpretative narrative, refutes the authority of previous universalising approaches.

Using the statistical analysis applied in preceding chapters, the *Bulletin* appears to extend a pattern of gendered exclusion. However, such an assumption is significantly complicated upon analysis of the quality of women's inclusion. It is complicated, too, by the critical approach taken by many of the writers publishing within the *Bulletin*'s pages. One particularly compelling example was published in Volume 2, in 1974. 'L.J. Steele's "Spoils to the Victor" and the "Women in Bondage" Convention', was written by Leonard Bell and Francis Pound and is demonstrative of the fact that this younger generation of writers were increasingly engaged with the New Art History. Although addressing the work of early twentieth-century male artists, Bell and Pound contextualised their reading of the work within a social and political context, bringing an awareness of structural gender inequality to their argument through their analysis of Steele's colonial depiction of a Māori woman. Situating *Spoils to the Victor* firmly within a European painting tradition, Bell and Pound assert that the painting is 'fundamentally the expression of a European male fantasy'.²²⁷ Depicting a slain Māori warrior and a woman we assume to be his captured bride, *Spoils to the Victor* (fig. 14) is the compositional inheritor of a European painting tradition in terms of 'pose, gesture, expression, design, themes and sentiments expressed'.²²⁸ Bell and Pound's account of *Spoils to the Victor* is compelling in its interrogation of the veiled acceptability of sexualised imagery of the 'exotic other'. They identify the extent to which artistic convention has played a role in such, ultimately destructive, representations:

²²⁷ Leonard Bell and Francis Pound, 'L.J. Steele's "Spoils to the Victor" and the "Women in Bondage" Convention,' *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History* 2 (1974), 23.

²²⁸ Bell and Pound, 18.

The fantasies of lust and violence, female fear and submission, of priapic pride which sustained this imagery, were ‘clothed’ by respectable literary or historical referents in order to make the pictures socially and artistically acceptable.²²⁹

The authors go on to cite numerous examples of bound and subjugated women from European art history, arguing that proliferation of such imagery is reflective of the ‘subjugation of women in Victorian and Edwardian society. Subjugation of women to the male sex was no less real in New Zealand’.²³⁰ While this essay was written by men, on the subject of male painters, the gendered critique it levels at *Spoils to the Victor* demonstrates an understanding of the way that artworks can work to echo and naturalise oppressive societal power dynamics. Bell and Pound offer a nuanced analysis of the intersection of the colonial and male gaze, providing perhaps the first sophisticated analysis of such issues to figure in the published art historical literature of New Zealand.

The discourse of art writing was broadened further still with the 1976 launch of *Art New Zealand* by Peter Webb (fig. 15). Formerly an exhibitions officer at Auckland Art Gallery, Webb had also run a dealer gallery and founded John Cordy auction house. His more commercial background, in comparison to the academic career of Green, ensured that their respective publications operated along quite different lines. *Art New Zealand* was intentionally mainstream, targeting a wider reach than the *Bulletin*.

Echoing that of the *Bulletin* four years prior, the opening editorial of *Art New Zealand* sought to define the parameters and expectations of the publication:

The founding of a new national art magazine may call for a few words of explanation. It is a fact that with the exception of *Ascent*, published for a few years in Christchurch from the late ‘sixties, there has been no regular New Zealand journal devoted entirely to the visual arts since the end of the ‘forties.²³¹

Despite claiming a scarcity of writing concerning the visual arts, *Art New Zealand* does position its emergence within a wider arts discourse, and emphasises in particular the role of art galleries in shaping such a discourse. It is perhaps no surprise, considering the managing editorship of Webb, to read that ‘*Art New Zealand* has in fact grown out of involvement in a

²²⁹ Bell and Pound, 22.

²³⁰ Bell and Pound, 23.

²³¹ Peter Webb, ‘Editorial,’ *Art New Zealand*, no. 1 (September 1976), 7.

more recent newsletter from a private gallery, the *Peter Webb Galleries Newsletter*.²³² In fact, where the *Bulletin* set out as a specialist platform within the discipline of art history, *Art New Zealand* was more general in its focus, offering a broad range of insights into a spectrum of practices both contemporary and historical. In large part *Art New Zealand* offered a response to the evolving programmes of both public and dealer galleries, many of whom advertised in its pages from the outset. The magazine set out to encourage a discerning, art-consuming, public:

A journal like *Art New Zealand* could not have come into existence without the help of the galleries. We have not launched on the project without the promise of their support. It is in the dealer galleries especially that the latest developments in New Zealand art are to be seen. And it is mainly from these exhibitions that the public art galleries select such contemporary work as they buy. We will therefore begin each issue with a brief survey of current exhibitions.²³³

In the fourteen issues of *Art New Zealand* published during the 1970s, male contributors significantly outweighed women, as both writers and featured artists. Only one woman artist was the subject of a significant feature, that woman was Rita Angus. A photograph of her, taken by Marti Friedlander, appeared on the cover of the magazine's third issue (fig. 16) in which an article, titled 'Rita Angus: Impressions By Some Friends,' was published. Of the five friends to share their recollections of Angus, four were men. Betty Curnow was the only female contributor. Close analysis of the *Bulletin* revealed a more nuanced representation of women than initial statistics would suggest. However, similar analysis of *Art New Zealand's* output throughout the 1970s reveals a pattern of representation that largely inherits the stereotypes and biases embedded in the existing mainstream discourse. The feature on Angus, for example, opens with the words of John Tarlton, who situates Angus firmly within the discourse of cultural nationalism that we have seen evolve throughout the preceding decades. The opening paragraph of this section is striking in the level of critical praise that Tarlton bestows upon Angus:

Rita Angus in association with such artists as Colin McCahon and Toss Woollaston established a tradition in painting which has persisted, and which has profoundly influenced the course of modern New Zealand art. Her talent, her pioneering of new directions in painting, and her involvement with the Christchurch 'Group', helped to redirect and reinterpret artistic attitudes concerning the depiction of nature.²³⁴

²³² Webb, 7.

²³³ Webb, 7.

²³⁴ John Tarlton et al., 'Rita Angus: Impressions by Some Friends,' *Art New Zealand*, no. 3 (January 1976), 14.

Somewhat inevitably, Angus' name is hitched to those of McCahon and Woollaston, unable to stand alone. Despite the establishment of the McCahon, Woollaston, Angus trio, it becomes clear upon continued reading that even within this model Angus is treated as something of an anomaly.

Though her gender is never explicitly addressed, close reading of the essays in the issue reveal echoes of the linguistic patterns that a reader of New Zealand art history would have come to expect. Throughout the issue Angus is cast in a variety of stereotypes. Here she is the eccentric woman, tinged with madness: 'Certainly she had a bad breakdown and - how shall I put it? - became very mysterious and mystical. And this, especially in a woman, makes me swallow my adams-apple'.²³⁵ Here she is gripped by a single-minded determination to succeed as a painter, to the extent that she must sacrifice the trappings of a normal life: 'Not only does the artist have to battle against the go-getters but also with her own community... Thus while her work gave Rita her marriage, to the artist-teacher Alfred Cook, it was soon to take it away from her...'.²³⁶ Here, she is cast as irrational and driven by emotion:

A long letter came to me from Rita... The letter, a long one, was venomous, and I did the best thing, dropped it in the fire; and what with varying circumstances we did not immediately meet again. I was comforted by two friends who asked me if I had received a letter from Rita. "Don't worry: we've all had them at one stage or another." ... in this episode she was genuinely upset and I happened to be there to be shot down.²³⁷

Despite the insidious presence of such ad hominem descriptions of Angus, her position within the canon of New Zealand's art history was, by this stage, relatively assured. The repeated references to her eccentricities underline her exceptional status as a woman in the arts. Such success, it is implied, comes at great personal cost. The position carved out for her in the mid-twentieth century was, by the late 1970s, relatively unchanged. Much of her reputation was contingent upon the fact that her landscape paintings, in particular, fit within the paradigm of a national painting style.

Despite the sustained dominance of landscape painting within the country's national arts discourse, not all publications established at this time chose to critically address such work.

²³⁵ Denis Glover in Tarlton et al., 15.

²³⁶ John Summers in Tarlton et al., 16.

²³⁷ Frederick Page in Tarlton et al., 18.

As the boundaries of art-making were being increasingly challenged by a new generation of artists and writers, the 1970s also saw a significant shift in attitudes towards photography in New Zealand. Auckland Art Gallery alone mounted five exhibitions dedicated to the medium throughout the decade. Since the announcement of photography's invention in 1839, its status as an art-form has been continually challenged. During the 1970s, the medium was increasingly asserted as a viable form of art-making in New Zealand. The establishment of *Photo-Forum*, a journal dedicated solely to photography, played a vital role in this trajectory. In an editorial introduction titled 'An Ideal Into Action', the periodical's editor John B. Turner announced that it aimed 'to meet the need for an authoritative magazine of New Zealand photography'.²³⁸ *Photo-Forum* continued and expanded upon the work of its predecessors, *Photographic Art and History* and *New Zealand Photography*. In comparison with the publications it superseded, *Photo-Forum* was widely distributed, bringing the work of photographers to a broader audience than they had previously reached in New Zealand.

Due to the tenuous position of the medium within the arts, all photographers during this period could perhaps be considered to occupy a marginal position within the arts discourse of New Zealand. However, this marginalisation was exacerbated further still by issues of gender. Writing about the difficulties facing the contemporary woman photographer in *Photo-Forum* in 1976, American curator Anne Tucker writes that even 'if she succeeds in clarifying her unique vision, she must be prepared for the neglect, even hostility, of a male dominated art world'.²³⁹

Despite the persistence of male-dominance within the New Zealand art world, the broadening network of publications was not the only space in which women artists were represented throughout the 1970s. In 1975, the United Nations' International Women's Year, Auckland Art Gallery held a significant women-only exhibition. *New Zealand's Women Painters*, curated by Anne Kirker and Eric Young, showed between June and July, and surveyed the work of 23 women artists, focusing solely upon painters. The selected artists span a relatively broad historical period, and include many of those women artists who populated the pages of *Art in New Zealand*, such as Francis Hodgkins, Grace Joel, Dorothy Kate Richmond, Rhona Hazard and Rita Angus, alongside more contemporary painters, including Louise Henderson and Gretchen Albrecht. That a significant exhibition dedicated to women painters was

²³⁸ John B. Turner, 'An Ideal Into Action,' *Photo-Forum*, no. 18 (March 1974), 5.

²³⁹ Anne Tucker, 'The Woman's Eye,' *Photo-Forum*, no. 29 (December 1975), 9.

mounted by a major gallery could be interpreted as an important step to combat the gendered bias evident within New Zealand's art world. To what extent, however, did this woman-only exhibition combat the entrenched structural marginalisation of women artists within New Zealand's arts infrastructure?

The tone of the exhibition and its catalogue was celebratory, praising the work of the 23 women artists included. The project sought to locate and make visible women artists within the parameters of an existing history, rather than offering a critical analysis of their structural marginalisation. Despite the central role of a woman in both the curation of the exhibition and the writing in the catalogue, the note it strikes is certainly not discordant with the dominant arts discourse of the time. Presented 'as its contribution to the United Nations' International Women's Year,' *New Zealand's Women Painters* offered no real challenge to the existing arts infrastructure.²⁴⁰ Despite the incremental minimisation of women's inclusion in both exhibitions and literature during the preceding decades, Kirker and Young choose not to address this fact. Rather, they construct a quite different narrative – one of equality. 'The first and most obvious fact that springs to mind is that the women are not periphery to New Zealand painting, but are in the main stream...'.²⁴¹ While, on a superficial level, it is possible to make this claim due to the number of practicing women artists in New Zealand, the analysis provided in Chapters One and Two serves to refute the accuracy of this narrative. In fact, the discourse of exceptionality which coalesced around a select few women artists during the 1950s and 1960 is evident again in the *New Zealand's Women Painters* catalogue.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the dominant figure looming over this exhibition was that of Frances Hodgkins. Though there is not a huge discrepancy in the number of paintings included by each artist, Hodgkins' selection is the largest, totalling six paintings. Of more significance than this numerical emphasis on Hodgkins' work is the way that the structuring discourse created by the catalogue positions her in a manner reflective of that we have seen previously:

Frances Hodgkins takes her place at the head of the catalogue, not only because she was the earliest important woman artist in New Zealand, but also because her influence, both direct and indirect, has been of such overwhelming importance to

²⁴⁰ Ernest Smith, 'Preface,' in *New Zealand's Women Painters* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1975), 3.

²⁴¹ Anne Kirker and Young, Eric, 'Introduction,' in *New Zealand's Women Painters* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1975), 4.

the later artists... Her work has a deeper significance, however, than merely its effect upon her fellow lady artists.²⁴²

In the socio-political climate of the mid-1970s, when feminist agitation was not only visible, but radically and vocally so, the phrase ‘lady artists’, especially when written by a woman, smacks of conservatism, perpetuating the tropes established in the earliest decades of the century. In Chapter One, three key strategies were identified which served to enact a structural marginalisation of women artists: the gendered biography, the original and the addendum, and the gendering of style and subject. Upon examination of the catalogue produced to accompany *New Zealand’s Women Painters*, it would appear that these strategies – rather than being dismantled – had in fact become deeply entrenched in the mainstream arts discourse.

The gendered narrative which we saw coalesce around Rhona Haszard at the time of her death in 1931, and which was consolidated in the 1960s, was by the mid-1970s definitively established. In fact, her biographical entry utilises all three of the structural strategies that had, by this stage, become naturalised elements of artistic discourse:

... studied Canterbury School of Fine Arts under Archibald Nicoll and R. Wallwork... Married artist Ronald McKenzie but marriage failed and later married artist Leslie Greener... In 1927 Leslie Greener took position [sic] at Victoria College, Alexandria in Egypt and Rhona worked in Egypt, exhibiting in Cairo, Alexandria and London until her tragic death from a fall in 1931. Her style was largely her own development and used to the full her intense interest and faultless good taste in colour.²⁴³

Not only does her biography focus on her marriages and the influence of Greener on her travels, it also situates her as an addendum to a series of male teachers and husbands. The inclusion of the details of her ‘tragic’ death strikes a note of inevitability, as does the gendered analysis of her style as being reliant upon her ‘faultless good taste in colour.’ Produced by a major professional gallery for a wide audience, this catalogue was clearly aimed at a broad spectrum of the public. The accessibility of its writing, along with its conventionally stereotypical treatment of women artists was indicative therefore of the mainstream arts discourse of the time.

²⁴² Anne Kirker and Eric Young, *New Zealand’s Women Painters* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1975), 5.

²⁴³ Kirker and Young, 7.

Feminist Politics, Publishing and the Arts

Just trying to find a name for this kind of paper will give you an excellent idea of the way women are regarded in our society. ... So here it is. If the name puts you off all that much, don't buy it, because the contents probably won't be your cup of tea either. If it doesn't, take out a subscription. It will be worth it. We mean to be around for quite a while.²⁴⁴

Anne Else, July, 1972

Leading with an article by Anne Else explaining the choice of the publication's name, *Broadsheet*, New Zealand's earliest and longest-running feminist magazine, unapologetically announced its arrival in July of 1972. Seeking to tackle the secondary status of women in New Zealand society, *Broadsheet* (fig. 17) was one of many politically motivated publications which sprang to life throughout the 1970s as the women's movement gained traction and visibility. The establishment of the Women's Liberation Front Clubs began in Wellington and Auckland in 1970 and continued across the country in subsequent years. This expanding network of consciousness-raising women's groups created a new space for women to gather together and discuss the issues which impacted their day-to-day lives. The personal became political as the position of women in society was debated with increasing frequency across many strata of New Zealand society. The emergence of this feminist discourse had a legislative impact too, with the establishment of the Select Committee on Women's Rights in 1972. The committee was formed with the explicit remit of investigating 'the extent of discrimination against women in New Zealand'.²⁴⁵

The art history of New Zealand, having come to tentative fruition in the late 1960s, was not immune to feminist critique. Although revisions of this history were not produced in book form until the 1980s, the impact of this period was both significant and complex. In the shadow of the tumultuous socio-politics of the decade, the arts infrastructure of the country was subject to similar ideological interrogation. Such challenges played out across an ever-broadening discourse, populated by an increasing number of publications. Many of these, such as *Broadsheet*, engaged with the visual arts, bringing them into direct conversation with the urgent contemporary social issues they covered.

²⁴⁴ Anne Else, 'What's in a Name?' *Broadsheet*, no. 1 (July 1972), unpaginated.

²⁴⁵ Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women*, 338.

Growing out of the Auckland Women's Liberation Group, *Broadsheet* differed in its organisational structure to the publications that have been analysed thus far. Publications from *Art in New Zealand* through to *Art New Zealand* and the *Bulletin* were all led by an individual. Rather than a male editor, *Broadsheet* was created and run by a collective of women. Listed on the opening page of each issue was a list of contributors who worked to bring the magazine to print. No specific roles were individually attributed, echoing the emphasis on non-hierarchical collectivity which came to define much of the women's movement.²⁴⁶ *Broadsheet* was a deeply political publication which provided a forum for debating women's position in New Zealand society. Coney's editorial in the first issue outlined the magazine's key objectives as follows:

- 1) Let the converted (or those on the way) know where the WL groups are and what they're doing.
- 2) Keep existing groups in contact and friendly.
- 3) Get at the unconverted and convert them or make them realise they were with us all the time and just didn't know it.²⁴⁷

The dual emphasis here is on consciousness-raising and communication. The network of women's groups which emerged throughout the 1970s was to play a central role in the attempt to achieve such aims, with reports from five such groups making up a significant portion of *Broadsheet*'s first edition.

Aimed at a broad readership, *Broadsheet*'s consciousness-raising approach offered a way in to feminism for the women of Aotearoa. It was not, however, the only publication dedicated to feminist concerns to emerge during this decade. The following year, 1973, the Sisters for Homophile Equality in Wellington launched *The Circle*. While *Broadsheet* was aimed at a relatively broad readership for a 'niche' publication, *The Circle* had a more specifically targeted readership. Its full title was changed to *Lesbian Feminist Circle* in 1977, and from the outset its cover declaration 'For Women Only' was intended to be taken literally. The motivation behind such a proclamation was outlined in an editorial in the Autumn 1978 issue as follows:

²⁴⁶ The collective responsible for the inaugural issue were Anne Else, Sandra Coney, Kitty Wishart, Marilyn Razez, Martin Sutcliffe, Anne Parsons, Trevor Jones, Beryl Burnett, Bronwen Mason, Stephanie Chung, Rosemary Ronald, Brian Harris. Note the inclusion of both men and women.

²⁴⁷ Sandra Coney, 'Editorial,' *Broadsheet*, no. 1 (July 1972), 1.

... 'For Women Only'. By this we make it explicit that the Circle collective wants Circle to be sold to and shared with women only. We have no desire to share our creativity, ideas and experience with men. When we are writing for Circle it is other lesbians we have in mind to communicate with. On this basis, some women write very personal and revealing articles which they do not want to be read by men. Lesbianism and lesbian politics are none of men's business.²⁴⁸

By explicitly excluding men from their readership, and targeting a lesbian audience, *The Circle* declared its separatism, not only from mainstream publishing, but from *Broadsheet* too. The publications outlined thus far are the most visible examples of both feminist literature and art writing to emerge in the 1970s. Occupying a discursive space somewhere in between these categories was the art magazine *Spiral*. First published in 1975, *Spiral* labelled itself a 'women's art magazine' but, unlike *Art in New Zealand*, was not restricted to coverage of the visual arts. Under the heading 'Who are we?' the *Spiral* collective wrote:

We are a collective of Christchurch women with a feminist perspective eager to provide New Zealand women with a literary/arts journal which is a forum for their own thoughts, feelings, attitudes in a nurturant supportive atmosphere.²⁴⁹

Spiral emphasised its platform as one which provided a space for the women marginalised from more mainstream arts publications. Despite an emphasis on consciousness-raising and shared experience, art played a central role. This is made particularly clear in an editorial in the second issue linking women, art and socio-political change:

Change is what the women's movement is about - changes in values, actions - and assessments of women artists. Art embodies our sexuality, spirituality, intellect, mirrors our psychic growth, is not made in a vacuum. As our lives are urged and restricted by stereotypes so will our art be.²⁵⁰

The stereotypical tropes which we have seen develop during the early and mid-twentieth century were being acknowledged and challenged. Though not always specifically formed to address the arts, some of the most nuanced writing on women artists to be produced in the country during this period appeared within the pages of these newly-emerged feminist publications.

²⁴⁸ Linda, 'Editorial,' *Lesbian Feminist Circle*, no. 30 (Autumn 1978), 1.

²⁴⁹ 'Frontispiece,' *Spiral Women's Art Magazine*, no. 2 (1977), unpaginated.

²⁵⁰ 'Editorial,' *Spiral Women's Art Magazine*, no. 2 (1977), 1.

In September of 1974, *Broadsheet* published its first issue dedicated to women in the arts, opening with an editorial entitled 'Frances Hodgkins' Legacy, New Zealand Women in the Arts'. While the placement of Hodgkins in a preeminent position acknowledges 'the prominence of some New Zealand women in the arts early in our cultural development,' the editorial, written by Sandra Coney, ends with a critical feminist analysis of the contemporary social reality for most women.²⁵¹

For most women motherhood and domesticity impede the artistic process both physically and emotionally. Virginia Woolf spoke of the need for every woman to have a room of her own. For New Zealand women in their three bedroomed bungalows, on a quarter acre section and with 2.6 children, such an arrangement is virtually impossible and our tradition of constant and unrelieved motherhood and wifehood imposes impossible restraints, making mental space for creativity merely a dream. This is the greatest barrier.²⁵²

Other than this editorial, the visual arts are the main focus in three other pieces in the issue: Una Platts' interview, a piece titled 'Robin White, Painter' written by the artist herself, and a piece titled 'Printmakers' which features profiles of Juliana Jarvie and Kate Coolahan. In addition, a seven-page section, simply titled '20 artists', introduces the reader to a selection of writers, musicians and visual artists. Of the twenty, Rita Angus, Patricia Perrin, Gretchen Albrecht, Bronwynne Cornish, Frances Hodgkins, Barbara Skelton, Alison Duff, Molly Macalister and Suzanne Goldberg represent the visual arts. These nine artists work across a range of media, including pottery and sculpture as well as painting. The format of this segment centres on the artist's own voice, allowing for diverse representations of individual female subjectivities. The attitudes of two of the visual artists discussed in '20 Artists' are illustrative of this. The first, Gretchen Albrecht, declares: 'The kind of attitude demonstrated by asking whether or not my work has been affected by my sex is not one with which I agree. Quality of work is not predetermined or made necessarily easier or harder by one's sex'.²⁵³ Marte Szirmay, on the other hand, explicitly references the societal restrictions she feels as a woman artist:

Marte feels that the social limitations women experience all over the world have categorised women as being less important voices in the art world. ... new

²⁵¹ Sandra Coney, 'Editorial: Frances Hodgkins' Legacy New Zealand Women in the Arts,' *Broadsheet*, no. 22 (September 1974), 10.

²⁵² Coney, 10.

²⁵³ Gretchen Albrecht in '20 Artists,' *Broadsheet*, no. 22 (September 1974), 21.

thinking is required if women are to function in these fields without being subjected to the masculine attitudes which still prevail.²⁵⁴

That both of these opinions are articulated by the artists themselves is important in demonstrating the range of politicised positions from which women artists were working during this time. It is significant that these artists were given the opportunity to speak about their artistic practice in their own voice, granting them a level of agency over the discourse which was to coalesce around their work. Key to this approach was the collective feminist approach underpinning *Broadsheet's* larger project. Operating within a loose collective editorial structure, the publication challenged the authority of a singular voice in the construction of a narrative. The way in which the issue dedicated to the arts was structured is testament to that commitment. Whereas the majority of literature examined thus far has been written from a singular perspective, *Broadsheet* allowed for a multiplicity of positions – sometimes contradictory – to be presented, side by side.

By the 1970s, the societal obstacles women met with in their pursuit of an artistic career may have altered slightly, but the change was certainly not radical. This issue was addressed in an interview with Una Platts, one of the first women to have been professionally involved in arts curation and writing in the country. By the 1970s, Platts had a relatively established career within the arts in the country, most notably as a curator and researcher at Auckland Art Gallery during the 1950s. Her interview, which appeared in this issue of *Broadsheet*, makes evident the dearth of material opportunities for women artists in New Zealand, while tracing the impact of financial constraints they faced if they hoped to negotiate a professional career in the arts. Describing the situation of the 1920s and 1930s, Platts notes that women were present ‘in art schools, becoming teachers, but getting so much less money for the same work as men and being denied opportunities’.²⁵⁵ Her interviewer, Marie Hamer, referring to the contemporary situation, acknowledges that women ‘generally are unable to live off their earnings as artists. Unless, like many, they drop their living standards sharply to try and accommodate a livelihood solely from their art’.²⁵⁶ Though very few artists in New Zealand during this period were able to make a comfortable living through art alone, it is clear that the increasing professionalisation and masculinisation of the arts infrastructure resulted in a more acute feminisation of poverty.

²⁵⁴ ‘20 Artists,’ 26.

²⁵⁵ Marie Hamer, ‘Una Platts on Women Artists,’ *Broadsheet*, no. 22 (September 1974), 13.

²⁵⁶ Hamer, 13.

A note of – perhaps ironic – progress is sounded however: ‘Mrs Platts smiles and says women art students have it made nowadays in that they can marry male art colleagues who accept their careers right from the start’.²⁵⁷ Woman again, cast as the addendum, in order to facilitate a career. This position is reflected with humour in an illustration which follows Platt’s interview (fig. 18). The half-page drawing consists of an expansive space filled with rows upon rows of receding tombstones. It is captioned ‘but where are all the great women artists?’ in direct reference to Linda Nochlin’s landmark feminist essay of 1971 ‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists’. Each tombstone is engraved with the woman artist’s cause of death: ‘devoted all emotional energy to support of male artist,’ ‘burnt at stake,’ ‘killed self,’ ‘married,’ ‘locked up as insane,’ ‘plagiarized by male artist.’ This wry commentary on the position of women artists demonstrates the persistence of a discourse which continually enacts their marginalisation.

The art magazine *Spiral* (fig. 19) similarly provided a women-only space, growing out of the women’s movement rather than the art world. It sought to create ‘a climate unique in herstory - an international environment of supportive women with previously unacknowledged potential and ideas’.²⁵⁸ Where the *Bulletin* stressed academic disciplinary rigour, and *Art New Zealand’s* glossy, standardised publication was closely entwined with a contemporary national art market, *Spiral* was geared towards a very different readership. The *Spiral* collective was established in 1975 in Christchurch and originally comprised of Heather McPherson, Alison Mitchell, Paulette Barr and Kathryn Algie. Between 1976 and 1992, *Spiral* ‘became a floating imprint used by a variety of feminist groups’. Under this aegis, seven issues of *Spiral* were published by a series of collectives in various parts of the country, each issue varying significantly in format and appearance. While the literature growing out of an increasingly professionalised arts infrastructure sought to produce a highly polished product, *Spiral* retained the aesthetic of a grassroots publication. Each issue of the journal was printed at a different scale, ranging roughly between A5 and A4 size. The journals were soft bound, simply typeset and included only black and white images. Though driven partially by the exigencies of budgetary constraints, these formatting decisions resulted in a journal that felt more analogous with self-published feminist literature such as *Broadsheet* and *Lesbian Feminist Circle*, than with the more polished publications dedicated solely to the

²⁵⁷ Hamer, 13.

²⁵⁸ ‘Editorial,’ *Spiral Women’s Art Magazine*, no. 2 (1977), 1.

arts. In an arts context dedicated to the lifting of professional standards, *Spiral* struck a political note in its refusal to privilege professionalism over amateurism. This position is evident in the journal's aim to 'offer space to women artists, particularly those who have not been accepted by the male critique – publishers and galleries – and further, share the polemics of the global women's art movement'.²⁵⁹ This position can be read as a rejection of the hierarchical standards of quality by which mainstream publishers and galleries – here explicitly identified as dominated by men – critique artwork. The women responsible for *Spiral* sought to shift the parameters of inclusion. By utilising the exclusionary mechanism of arts publishing in accordance with feminist politics, the collective demonstrated 'a widening refusal by women to be bound by traditional content even when using traditional skills'.²⁶⁰

Publications such as *Spiral* and *Broadsheet* were not the only site of intersection between publishing, art and feminist politics during this time. Many women artists were similarly working to interrogate this nexus of ideological power. The most notable work to be produced in this vein in the 1970s was Vivian Lynn's extraordinary *Book of Forty Images* (fig. 0.3), which she began working on in 1973. As Christina Barton explains: '...the screenprints are finished in 1974 but the final four sheets of text – that make use of information gathered in the 1976 census – are not integrated until the end of the decade'.²⁶¹ *Book of Forty Images* occupies a position of ambiguity, challenging the conventional disciplinary boundaries which separate artwork from textual publication. The work adheres only tenuously to its titular description, with Lynn describing it retrospectively as 'an object which deconstructed the notion of a book'.²⁶² Lynn's work enacts a provocative discursive incursion into the art-writing of the time, disrupting received notions of authorial authority. Where feminist publications such as *Broadsheet* sought to provide a published platform for women artists to write about their own work, Lynn extended her own artistic agency further. In claiming the form of the book as artwork, she wrested the discursive power away from external voices, claiming it instead for herself. The text comprises excerpts from the 1976 census, alongside sections of text relating to reproductive rights, sexuality and feminist politics taken from a variety of uncited resources. The manner in which Lynn has presented these various textual excerpts resists conventional layout or narrative chronology,

²⁵⁹ Frontispiece, *Spiral Women's Art Magazine*, no. 3 (1978), unpaginated

²⁶⁰ 'Editorial: Not in Limbo,' *Spiral Women's Art Magazine*, no. 3 (1978), 1.

²⁶¹ Christina Barton, Vivian Lynn, and Laura Preston, 'Chronology,' in *I, HERE, NOW Vivian Lynn* (Wellington: Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi, 2008), 97.

²⁶² Vivian Lynn, Vivian Lynn, accessed 1 October 2019, <http://www.vivianlynn.com/artworks/book-of-forty-images>.

deconstructing the very foundations of the book-form. Rather than following the logic of a continuous unfolding piece of writing, the textual portions of the book are organised according to a visual logic. Each of the book's forty images consists of a brightly coloured silkscreen image on paper, overlaid with a text which corresponds in shape with the image it is layered upon (fig. 20). In essence the work is made up of 40 rectangular images, and 40 rectangular pages of text, which are then overlaid in order to produce 40 images, each a composite of the visual and textual. These 40 images are each then presented inside a clear plastic sleeve, compiled and bound in a vinyl cover.

The subject matter of these composite images is diverse. The viewer is presented with representations including that of an urban landscape, a rugby match, native birds of Aotearoa, women's bodies, a couple getting married, a pair of figures having sex, an egg about to hatch, and a self-portrait of the artist. Initially appearing quite disparate, connections can be forged between these images. More than a depiction of individual scenes, the work presents the viewer with a visual expression of the gender, culture and power dynamics within contemporary Aotearoa. Lynn's incorporation of text makes the imbalance which occurs along these fault-lines of stratification increasingly evident. For example, one portion of text reads as follows:

Over half of both the Maori and non-Maori female labour force is concentrated in two major occupational groups. For Maori women the two categories are production, etc. workers and service workers and for non-Maori women, clerical workers and professional workers. The proportion of Maori women in the category professional, etc. workers (8.3%) is significantly lower than that of non-Maoris (18.9%).²⁶³

Lynn presents such factual data without linguistic interpretation. However, by layering this statistical evidence of marginalisation – along lines of both gender and culture – upon images which represent New Zealand society, she constructs a 'book' which tells a damning tale of stratification and oppression. By incorporating visual and linguistic representation she both destabilises and re-contextualises meaning. Lynn's *Book of Forty Images* harnesses the book's form in order to deconstruct it, subverting the authority of the singular author.

Lynn's *Book of Forty Images* was not the only work by a woman artist in the 1970s to challenge the discrete autonomy of both artwork and book. Joanna Margaret Paul also made

²⁶³ Text cited from Vivian Lynn, *Book of Forty Images*, 1973 (Te Papa Tongarewa)

work which disrupted the division between the visual and linguistic. Paul, who was both a poet and artist, wove these two strands of her practice together in 1977's eloquent and emotive *Unwrapping the Body* (fig. 21). Realised first as an installation (entitled *Unpacking the Body*) consisting of panels of text and imagery, the work was then presented as a self-published book. *Unwrapping* was made by Paul in the aftermath of her ten-month-old daughter's death, and consists of imagery and etymological lists of words – or poems – which all tangentially refer to the human body. The act of unwrapping suggested by the title is both physical and cognitive. On a literal level the viewer must unwrap first a muslin shroud and then a cardboard cover in order to access the book. Cognitively, the process of unwrapping the body is more complex. The viewer reads and observes, piecing together the fragile networks of connections which suggest – more than describe – the contours of bodily experience. An image of a kitchen colander, one handle threaded with string, hangs from the upper edge of a blackened page (fig. 22). On the adjacent page, a list of handwritten words transform the image of a prosaic kitchen utensil into something human and fragile:

CONTAINER, CUP

CUP

VESSEL

CHEST

BOX, CHEST

CAGE

BOX

LITTLE DISH

CUP

SEIVE [sic]

PAIL

SACRIFICIAL

BOWL

The fact that this work was produced in response to the death of the artist's infant daughter, renders the sacrificial bowl a particularly potent visual and linguistic image. As such, *Unwrapping* is a deeply personal work. However, the work also operates on a conceptual level, interrogating the politics of representation and the disciplinary boundaries which are placed upon women artists. By confounding the boundary between personal and public, between poetry and art, and between author and subject, Paul positions the multiplicity of subjectivity at the heart of her project.

Both Lynn and Paul refuse to fill the pages of their books with a coherently structured or closed narrative. *Book of Forty Images* and *Unwrapping the Body* present, instead, a subversion of the literary text. Each work resists the unifying authority of the book in order to present something multiplicitous and subjective in its place. The act of self-publication can be considered here a declaration of agency, an intentional rejection of the reductive narrative forwarded by the dominant outlets of art criticism. Viewed in this context, artworks like these can be considered part of a wider ideological project enacted by women in the 1970s. The self-representation fostered through feminist publications such as *Broadsheet*, *Spiral* and *Circle* operates on a similar level. Rather than seeking entry into a mainstream discourse, these writers, artists and thinkers forged a discourse of their own. Such self-determination was also evident in a number of independent, women-only exhibitions which were held throughout the decade.

One such exhibition was *A Season's Diaries*, organised by Joanna Margaret Paul in 1977. Paul invited six women – Anna Keir, Allie Eagle [Alison Mitchell], Marian Evans, Gladys Gurney, Bridie Lonie and Heather McPherson – to participate by keeping a visual diary over the course of a month. The parameters were loose, resulting in contributions which took a number of forms, incorporating text and imagery in a variety of ways. These diaries were then exhibited in the Victoria University of Wellington library, rather than an art gallery, interrogating the need to work within an existing arts-infrastructure. The exhibition challenged the conventions of exhibition-making in other ways too, including the work of women who were both amateur and professional artists, and privileging each artist's personal experience and expression, over conventional markers of artistic quality or technical aptitude.

Another significant women-only exhibition took place in the same year, and involved several of the women who participated in *A Season's Diaries*. Organised in conjunction with the 1977 United Women's Convention in Christchurch, the Women's Art Environment was organised by the Christchurch Woman Artists Group (fig. 23). The collective, women-only organisational structure responsible for organising the exhibition operated along similar collective lines to many of the feminist groups and publications that emerged during the 1970s. Prioritising process over end-product, the Art Environment:

...was conceived as an opportunity for women to come together in one place to discover their particular identity as women, in a situation where their expression would be uninhibited by men. The exhibition was opened exclusively to women

for the first five days ... The objects which remained on display after this were evidence of the deeply felt need of the participants to search for the sources of their identities as women.²⁶⁴

Operating outside of the existing arts infrastructure these exhibitions were organised by women, for women. In such a context, the shared experience of creating was as important as the works themselves. Conventional judgements of quality were considered irrelevant in comparison to the desire to create 'a nurturing, energising space for many women'.²⁶⁵ While the exhibition did not figure in the mainstream art-writing at the time, it was covered in significant depth in the third issue of *Spiral*. As *Broadsheet's* 1973 issue dedicated to women in the arts placed the voices of those women front and centre, so too did the coverage in *Spiral*. Rather than offering an interpretative response by a single critic, the *Spiral* piece consisted of seven separate sections, each authored by a different participant. These sections are titled 'The Beginnings,' 'Reality 1,' 'Reality 2,' 'Reality 3' and 'Reality 4,' 'Unpacking the Body' and 'Birth'. The presentation of a range of 'realities' challenges the authority of a hegemonic narrative, and makes clear the subjective nature of these written accounts. Throughout these accounts, a number of common concerns become evident: the importance of creating a space for women to explore their creativity, the rejection of conventional markers of artistic quality, the value of collaboration and communication, and the need to both recognise and tackle women's marginalisation within society. Over and above and stylistic or qualitative artistic concerns, these political concerns predominated all of the responses. As Allie Eagle wrote:

Our male dominated culture has various ways of enslaving us and denying us a woman's culture. I liked the women's environment because we made it a safe place for women to experience a vision of a pro-woman culture. Where the processes of feminism and change could be experienced. I see feminism as more than the demands for women's rights. It's a sense of who we wish to be as women.²⁶⁶

Independently organised women-only exhibitions such as the Women's Art Environment, and feminist publications such as *Spiral* and *Broadsheet* provided a space in which women artists could challenge normative expectations. However, these spaces were themselves marginal, existing outside of the mainstream arts landscape. An important exception to this

²⁶⁴ *The Press*, 11 June 1977, 11.

²⁶⁵ Linda Evans, 'The Women's Art Show,' *Lesbian Feminist Circle*, no. 28 (Autumn Winter 1977), 22.

²⁶⁶ Allie Eagle, 'The Women's Environment at the '77 Women's Convention: The Reality 2,' *Spiral Women's Art Magazine*, no. 3 (1978), 35.

was held in 1975, the same year as Auckland Art Gallery's *New Zealand's Women Artists*. That exhibition was *Woman's Art: An Exhibition of Six Women Artists*, which showed at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery in Christchurch during June and July of 1975. Alison Mitchell [Allie Eagle] who had been actively involved in both *A Season's Diaries*, and the Women's Art Environment, held the role of Exhibitions Officer at the Robert McDougall at this time, and was instrumental in conceiving and curating the exhibition.

In contrast to the contemporaneous Auckland Art Gallery exhibition, *Woman's Art* focused upon the work of six contemporary women artists: four painters – Joanne Hardy, Joanna Harris [Joanna Margaret Paul], Helen Rockel and Stephanie Sheehan – and two photographers – Jane Arbuckle and Rhondda Bosworth. Mitchell's catalogue for *Woman's Art* differs significantly to that of Kirker and Young's, framing the exhibition firmly within the context of an international feminist arts discourse. By including a list of suggested feminist reading, alongside a brief essay entitled 'Some Thoughts on Woman's Art,' Mitchell makes clear the role played by societal structures in enacting the marginalisation of women artists. As Mitchell states, 'the struggle to pursue an art career amidst being a wife and mother has to a great extent disallowed many women a professional pursuit of their career'.²⁶⁷ Not only does she make evident the correlation between the woman artist and amateurism, she also takes aim at the way in which an increasingly professionalised arts infrastructure has persistently overlooked the work of women artists.

Mitchell's catalogue provides another example of the feminist-inflected strategy of centring the voices of women artists in discussion of their practices. Rather than providing a biographical summary of each artist's work – as in Kirker and Young's catalogue – Mitchell provides each artist with a space to represent themselves under two headings: 'Statement' and 'On Women as Artists'. By facilitating self-representation, Mitchell foregrounds the multiplicity of woman's subjectivity. The centring of individual voices combats the imposition of generalising stereotypes upon the women artists involved. Those normative gendered behaviours mapped through artistic discourse from the 1930s onwards are recognised by many of the women involved as retaining a contemporary charge in 1975. Jane Arbuckle writes:

²⁶⁷ Alison Mitchell, *Woman's Art: An Exhibition of Six Women Artists* (Christchurch: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1975), 3.

Our society does not encourage women to develop their abilities as artists. If we should choose to, we must do it within the context of a male dominated art establishment and art education system. Patriarchy discourages in a woman the single-mindedness and inner commitment to herself, that is necessary if she is to be an artist. However, with our discrediting of the old myths of femininity and its limitations, many of us will be woman artists.²⁶⁸

Arbuckle demonstrates the extent to which many women artists were aware of the structural inequalities they faced when attempting to forge a career in the arts in New Zealand. Despite Mitchell's recognition that a number of 'women have been admitted into the art world,' she asserts that they 'are left mostly unacknowledged in historical or current art dialogues, poorly or not represented at all in art gallery collections'.²⁶⁹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, given its explicit politicised stance, *Woman's Art* did not receive an extensive critical response, with one newspaper review dismissing it as 'a propagandist exhibition devoted to the feminist art movement'.²⁷⁰ It was not until the 1980s that women's interrogation of art history's inclusions and exclusions were to edge their way into the mainstream arts discourse.

Radicalisation and Fragmentation

The 1970s saw an interrogation of the boundaries of art-making, within an increasingly turbulent socio-political climate. The expansion of an arts discourse was precipitated through the introduction of mainstream publications such as *Art New Zealand*, as well as specialist publications such as the *Bulletin* and *Photo-Forum*. A contemporaneous burgeoning of feminist publishing worked simultaneously to challenge many of the gendered exclusions enacted by a more mainstream arts discourse. As the rise of alternative media, such as photography and post-object art, became increasingly prevalent the preconceived parameters of art-making were brought into question. Fiona Clark was one woman artist whose practice, emerging in the 1970s, embodied many of these critical elements. Clark began her artistic training in Elam's sculpture programme, under Jim Allen, before turning to photography. Her photographic practice grew in part out of her participation in performative art-making, as both a practitioner and a documenter of the work of others. Her *Dance* series of photographs, made in 1974, combine many of the critical strategies we have seen exhibited during this

²⁶⁸ Jane Arbuckle in: Mitchell, 8.

²⁶⁹ Mitchell, 4.

²⁷⁰ T.R.L. Wilson, *Christchurch Star*, 9 July 1975.

period. Utilising both visual and textual representation, these photographs challenge formal artistic definitions and interrogate normative social attitudes towards gender and sexuality.

Two photographs from the *Dance* series were included in *The Active Eye*, the landmark 1975 touring exhibition of contemporary New Zealand photography organised by the Director of the Manawatu Art Gallery, Luit Bieringa. The exhibition sought to gauge ‘the strengths of contemporary photographic imagery in New Zealand and should be regarded as but one link in the establishment of a solid appreciation (and reputation) of New Zealand photography’.²⁷¹ The exhibition represented the breadth of art photography being made in New Zealand. Many of the artists exhibiting have gone on to become established names within the country’s art history, such as Laurence Aberhart, Marti Friedlander, Peter Peryer and Ans Westra. However, it is Fiona Clark’s name which has become most entwined with the exhibition, due to the public outcry her two photographs provoked.

Reproduced in the exhibition’s accompanying catalogue, Clark’s two photographs are captioned simply *Fiona Clark: Dance, Auckland, 1974*. However, Clark’s photographs provide a striking contrast to the majority of images in the exhibition due to the inclusion of the written word. Text is included in a small number of other photographs: protest banners, shop signs and hand-written notes appear within several photographs. In each of these instances, the text is a component of the subject the image depicts. In contrast, the inclusion of text in Clark’s images disrupts the unity of the visual image. Rather than occupying a space within the camera’s frame, the writing in Clark’s photographs has been scrawled on the photograph’s borders, in ballpoint pen. Filling the blank space that surrounds the image, this writing becomes an integral part of the artwork. Text and image here exist in direct relation to each other.

Clark, significantly, was not the author of this text. The full series of images consists of ten photographs, though only two were included in *The Active Eye*. Clark explains the creation of the series: ‘The images are from a Dance Party at the Auckland University Café for Pride week 1974. The writing on them is from Karl — aka Tracy Karl. Karl was wonderfully witty’.²⁷² These photographs have been made through a process of dual authorship by both

²⁷¹ Luit Bieringa, ‘Foreward,’ in *The Active Eye: Contemporary New Zealand Photography* (Palmerston North: Manawatu Art Gallery, 1975), 3.

²⁷² Fiona Clark, ‘The Active Eye,’ accessed 6 November 2018, www.fionaclark.com/gallery/the-active-eye.html.

Clark, who took the photograph, and Karl, who wrote the text. By utilising this dual authorship, the *Dance* photographs are transformed from images into discursive spaces. By extending the authorship of the works to their subjects, Clark provides a platform from which they can participate directly in the act of representation.

Tracy / Karl, the author of these linguistic incursions, is depicted in one of the images, along with Diane and Tina (fig. 24). Despite the indeterminate blackness of the space the figures occupy, the specificity of the location is important. Writing in 2003, almost thirty years after the titular dance, Peter Wells explains the event which precipitated the series' creation.

It was a gay lib dance held at Auckland University in 1974 and I was there. I still have sharp memories of the occasion. But there was an almost tangible excitement in the air. It was something to do with being out in public with so many young politicised homosexuals and lesbians. It felt new. And the almost rapturous response of the transgendered people in these photographs is a response to what one might almost call the incandescence of history. Each person is thrilled to be caught on camera. It gives their transient, slippery identity a permanence. They become, literally, who they are, when the film is developed.²⁷³

It is this process of becoming that is the subject of the two *Dance* photographs displayed in *The Active Eye*. Though both depict people, neither adhere to portraiture's standard conventions. The formal rigidity of the posing convention of studio portraiture is jettisoned, replaced with a performative excess. In image 28, Tina, Diane and Tracy are clustered tightly together, their bodies overlapping, their faces pressed close together. Tracy's upper body occupies the foreground, leaning back from the camera in an exaggerated contrapposto, her head tilted acutely in the opposing direction. Diane's arm frames the side of Tracy's face, bent dramatically to frame her own face with her hand. Tina's face floats at the top of the frame, her body hidden completely from sight by the two other figures. The darkness behind her gives her head a sense of disembodiment, as if supported only by the interlocking tightness of the others in the frame. Tracy, Diane and Tina each look in different directions, caught in the process of their own self-expression.

Each individual's process of becoming 'who they are' is their own, but it is the forging of relationships within a collective framework of liberation that allows the performance of this self-expression. It is this complex nexus of identity, community and politics that Clark

²⁷³ Peter Wells, 'Incandescent Moment: Fiona Clark's Go Girl', *Art New Zealand*, no. 106 (Autumn 2003): 47.

captures within her camera's frame. By requesting that her subjects write upon the material surface of the photograph's border, Clark extends this space of becoming. There is nothing apologetic or explanatory about the captions written by Tracy. Fierce and declarative, the text, in Wells' words, 'gives their transient, slippery identity a permanence'.²⁷⁴ Clark refuses to play the objective documentarian; rather she provides a photographic expansion of the dance as a site of agency. Through written and visual representation, the *Dance* photographs foreground the multiplicity of experience and identity.

The critical writing which addressed Clark's work, however, failed to recognise — or perhaps, more accurately, failed to accept — the subjective agency it depicted. Written on one of the photographs was the following: 'We are real people + can fuck everything + anyone, enjoying life + having a ball! Aren't you furious you hung up closet queens'.²⁷⁵ The inclusion of the word 'fuck' allowed would-be censors a clear target for their outrage. Despite the repeated focus on the captions as the site of obscenity in the newspaper coverage, it is clear that the photographic subject matter caused deep discomfort from the conventional arbiters of taste. There are repeated assertions from reporters that it 'is not the photographs that are considered obscene, but their captions'.²⁷⁶ Yet, despite such claims, contemporary reports very rarely mentioned the subject matter of the caption. The subject matter of the photographs was, however, mentioned frequently, and often in direct relation to Clark's name.

Taranaki Herald: The photographs are of transvestites and are the work of an Inglewood photographer, Fiona Clark.²⁷⁷

New Zealand Herald: ...the photographs which showed transvestites at a dance. The photographer, Fiona Clark, aged 21, of Inglewood, a graduate of Auckland University school of art...²⁷⁸

Auckland Star: The photographs in question were taken by Fiona Clark of Inglewood and depict transvestites.²⁷⁹

Persistent repetition, as we have already seen, plays a powerful role in embedding particular ideologies within discourse. The core components reiterated throughout the mainstream newspaper coverage can be stripped down to four key points: Fiona Clark, transvestites,

²⁷⁴ Wells, 47.

²⁷⁵ 'The Active Eye: Contemporary New Zealand Photography' (Manawatu Art Gallery, 1975), image 28.

²⁷⁶ 'Permission to View,' *Taranaki Herald*, 12 June 1975.

²⁷⁷ 'Permission to View'.

²⁷⁸ 'The Great Blue Debate,' *New Zealand Herald*, 6 March 1976.

²⁷⁹ 'Obscene Words - Photograph Show Called Off,' *Auckland Star*, 3 March 1976.

obscenity, captions. Though not expressed explicitly, the moral judgement underpinning this writing is that the subject matter itself is 'obscene' or deviant. Transvestites, the reader is led to believe, are an inappropriate subject matter. The vocal opposition to Clark's work which played out in the mainstream media was clearly influenced by the dominant contemporary attitude to any deviations from socially mandated gender norms.

The people pictured by Clark in her *Dance* photographs transgress these rigid definitions of gender and sexuality. Tracy, Diane and Tina pose a challenge to such boundaries. The text goes so far as to issue a direct provocation: 'How many of you boys? would like to either suck these tits or have them for you're [sic] very own. I bet you all would'.²⁸⁰ Written in a scrawling hand by the photographic subject, these words refuse the objectivity of the explanatory caption. They implicate the viewer, addressing them directly. Clark's photographs attempt to collapse the distance between viewer and subject, 'us' and the 'other'.

Despite the subjective agency embedded within these photographs, the dominant discourse ultimately distanced and excluded those subjects. Despite the best efforts of the women's movement, gendered expectations had not undergone significant change by the mid-1970s. Male and female were clearly positioned as distinctly separate. The insistence upon naming the individual subjects of Clark's photographs collectively as transvestites, while labelling the work as obscene, makes clear that they are dangerous due to their failure to conform. While this is never explicitly stated in the newspaper coverage, the continual focus on issues of morality and decency make such underlying assumptions obvious.

The story that unfolded in the dominant discourse – the newspapers which play such a powerful role in shaping public consciousness – was not a story about artworks, or even about an artist. Though *The Active Eye* toured the country, showing at twelve different locations, the culmination of the narrative surrounding the censorship of Clark's work was the cancellation of the entire exhibition by Auckland Art Gallery in 1976. In June of the previous year, when the exhibition was on show at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth, the two *Dance* photographs had been removed from display. As reported in the *Taranaki Herald*:

²⁸⁰ 'The Active Eye: Contemporary New Zealand Photography,' image 29.

Two photographs were removed from an exhibition in New Plymouth's Govett-Brewster Art Gallery yesterday following complaints that they were obscene. At the direction of the New Plymouth City Council's policy and resources committee the photographs were placed in the gallery directors' office where they were available for inspection on request.²⁸¹

By March of 1976, when the exhibition got to Auckland, the parameters of the debate had shifted. No longer was it confined to subjective debates surrounding decency and taste; a police complaint had elevated the matter to the realms of prosecutable offence: 'Gallery director, Mr Ernest Smith, said a member of the police visited the gallery yesterday and told him prosecutions would be laid under the Indecent Publications Act if the two photographs were shown'.²⁸² However, rather than removing Clark's photographs from the exhibition, the entire show was cancelled. Ernest Smith is quoted in the *New Zealand Herald*, explaining that decision:

The gallery has taken this stand because in the first instance the works concerned are not considered by the staff to be indecent, and it did not seem fair to withdraw two works on threat of action by the police. Neither did it seem fair to remove the two works and destroy the context of the exhibition, which is a survey show of aspects of contemporary New Zealand photography.

The actions of the Auckland Art Gallery can here be seen as a defence of artistic freedom. The choice to cancel the exhibition, rather than bending to the pressure to remove Clark's work, was a repudiation of censorship. The cancellation of the exhibition, however, did not act as a complete resolution of the issue, with the catalogue also coming under fire: 'A catalogue which includes two photographs and attached comments is freely available at the Auckland City Art Gallery, even though the police warned that to exhibit the photographs and their captions would invite prosecution'.²⁸³

It is perhaps unsurprising that these photographs were greeted with such a reception considering the challenges they posed to both societal and artistic convention. Made by a woman, depicting trans women, they directly challenge their audience's assumptions about gender and sexuality. These photographs function as documents of self-expression; they provide evidence of a range of subjectivities which cannot be unified under a utopian notion of heteronormative 'sisterhood'. While these photographs cannot be classified as artist's

²⁸¹ 'Gallery Withdraws "indecent" Exhibits,' *Taranaki Herald*, 11 June 1975.

²⁸² 'Obscene Words - Photograph Show Called Off'.

²⁸³ "'Indecent" Photos in Catalogue,' *New Zealand Herald*, 4 March 1976.

books, a conceptual overlap is evident between Clark's approach and that of artists such as Lynn and Paul. In each of these instances, the combination of linguistic and visual systems of representation disrupt the illusion of objectivity put forth by a written narrative. By disrupting the authority of a singular author, Clark foregrounds both subjectivity and multiplicity. The *Dance* photographs highlight, rather than subsume, difference, making visible the heterogeneity of gendered experience. It is apparent from the written accounts of the censorship debate that played out in contemporary newspapers that the dominant discourse was ill-equipped to create space for such difference.

As issues of difference – whether along lines of gender, sexuality or culture – were more frequently made visible in the 1970s, protest politics became increasingly fractured. The emergence and solidification of contemporary Māori activism during this decade made it starkly evident that society in Aotearoa was stratified along lines other than gender alone. A 'rising tide of Maori consciousness,' as Māori scholar Ranginui Walker described it, which occurred throughout the 1970s, saw the formation of various activist groups, most famously Ngā Tamatoa, of which Walker himself was a member.²⁸⁴ Wider public awareness was also brought to the issue by specific large-scale actions, such as the 1975 hīkoi led by Whina Cooper from Te Hāpua in to Wellington to deliver a petition demanding an end to the alienation of Māori land. Those marching were united:

...under the slogan 'not one more acre', meaning not an acre more of Maori land should be taken from Maori hands... The march signalled a marking out of a Maori bottom line and a determination to hold onto what little land Maori had left.²⁸⁵

Supported by local communities as they traversed the length of the North Island, public awareness of the march increased as it made its gradual procession to Parliament. The hīkoi peacefully brought Māori land rights into the wider public consciousness. Two years later, in January of 1977, the seventeen-month occupation of Takaparawhā (Bastion Point) began. Though the initial provocation for occupation was the Crown's proposal to sell 24 acres of land, it was the nature of the Crown's ownership of this land that was the real issue. Land that had originally been promised in perpetuity to Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei was transferred to Crown

²⁸⁴ R J Walker, 'The Genesis of Maori Activism,' *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 93, no. 3 (September 1984), 276.

²⁸⁵ Atholl Anderson, Judith Binney, and Aroha Harris, *Tangata Whenua: A History* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Ltd, 2015), 359–60.

ownership, ‘using a mix of lawful but compulsory or coercive means’.²⁸⁶ The 506 day occupation of Bastion Point culminated in violent action as the government sent in 600 police to evict the Māori occupying Ngāti Whātua land. This process was documented by the Māori filmmaker Merata Mita in her landmark film *Bastion Point: Day 507* (fig. 25). Mita’s film bridges the political and the creative, confronting not only the system of colonial power it documents, but also the Eurocentricity of the cinematic medium. Rather, Mita positions visual story-telling firmly within a Māori perspective, asserting that ‘whakapapa is a form of genealogy in the picture sense... I can unite the technical complexity of film with a traditional Maori philosophy’.²⁸⁷

By the close of the decade, many assumptions about New Zealand’s status as a country of social equality had been vigorously challenged. Systemic imbalances in power had been exposed, both in relation to the Crown’s treatment of Māori, and also by women’s social position within a largely patriarchal culture. These activist movements can be charted as separate – or indeed separatist – entities, the antagonistic relationship between them emphasising their conflicting positions. However, this approach is troubled by the fact that the lived reality of many of these movement’s participants was far more complex than can be reflected in separate historical accounts of their individual development. The network of oppression, identity and politics that came to influence much art-making of this decade was a densely entangled one.

In an essay entitled ‘He Wahine, He Whenua, e Ngaro Ai Te Tangata: By Women, by Land, Men are Lost’, and published in *Craccum* in September 1972, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, the prominent Māori, feminist and lesbian activist, made clear the fragmentary nature of much political struggle in Aotearoa:

Needless to say, modern society has brought some degree of emancipation – but to whom, and how? What use is suffrage to women who comprehend even less than their pakeha sisters their right to put in power an alternative government? ... That year, 1893, the vote for Maori women seemed an irrelevance. This year, 1972, the situation has hardly changed. What good has the present system done to alleviate the pressures confronting the modern Maori woman?²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ Anderson, Binney, and Harris, 362.

²⁸⁷ Merata Mita in Pascale Lamche and Merata Mita, ‘Interview with Merata Mita’, *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 25 (1984), 3.

²⁸⁸ Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, ‘He Wahine, He Whenua, e Ngaro Ai Te Tangata: By Women, by Land, Men Are Lost,’ in *Mana Wahine Maori* (Auckland: New Women’s Press Ltd, 1991), 45.

What did the Pākehā feminist understand of the specificity of experience facing the ‘modern Maori woman’? The diversity of women’s experience of oppression was shaped by a densely layered system of social norms and expectations. Such tensions were gradually exacerbated throughout the 1970s, as women became increasingly politicised. The utopian dream of a unified sisterhood of women who could band together to challenge the patriarchy was optimistically pursued at the opening of the decade. By its close, that idealistic dream lay in tatters. The false unity of ‘sisterhood’ was rapidly undermined and eroded, resulting in a landscape of activism which fragmented along lines of difference that could no longer be subsumed under the banner of ‘woman’.

The unravelling of unity as an ideal can be tracked through the United Women’s Conventions, large-scale gatherings intended to bring women together from across the length and breadth of Aotearoa. Held in 1973, 1975, 1977 and 1979, the tumultuous personal politics of the period often erupted during these mass congregations of women. The first Convention, held in 1973, marked the eightieth-anniversary year of Women’s Suffrage in New Zealand. One anonymous attendee said of the Convention: ‘It was better – more exhilarating – than I ever could have hoped for’.²⁸⁹ However, even at this early juncture, the lines of imminent fracture were evident beneath the surface. In a paper titled ‘Maori Women in Pakeha Society,’ Mira Szászy, the President of the Māori Women’s Welfare League, challenged women to consider inequality more broadly than through the lens of gender alone. She urged the following caution:

The work of Maori women in the future must still be geared to the basic needs of Maoris [sic] and the inequalities existing in our total society, and their aspirations cannot be other than those of the people as a whole. At this stage in our history, it is difficult to inspire women bowed down with misery and insecurity to look upwards at what appears to be middle-class based aspirations of Pakeha women, although many Maori women see the relevance of these to women everywhere. Of the future, I know not – except to say that if, in your surge towards sex-equality you carry Maori women with you, and uplift their status also – so be it!²⁹⁰

The priority given to ‘middle-class based aspirations of Pakeha women’ within the feminist movement became an increasingly contentious issue, with the question of inclusion frequently reiterated by critical attendees of the conventions. By 1977, the level of discontent

²⁸⁹ ‘United Womens Convention,’ *Broadsheet* 14 (October 1973), 7.

²⁹⁰ Mira Szászy, ‘Maori Women in Pakeha Society,’ in *United Women’s Convention: 1973 Report* (Auckland, 1973), 24.

within the women's movement had increased dramatically, as many women began to realise that there was no place for them within it. Fran Noble and Kay Dawson, writing in *Lesbian Feminist Circle*, declared that year's convention 'the united heterosexual women's convention'.²⁹¹ The formation of Gay Liberation in 1972, Sisters for Homophile Equality in 1973, alongside the – unsuccessful – campaign for homosexual law reform of 1974, had helped to form an 'increasing sense of self-identity and pride' within the gay and lesbian communities.²⁹² Such growing self-awareness was to fracture the precarious unity of the predominantly white, heterosexual women's movement:

I think that we can forget the dream of all women standing shoulder to shoulder in a common struggle to assert themselves. ... No, I feel that we lesbians are completely different to these other women who place so much emphasis on their males, and we will always be totally at odds with them in regard to our aims and ideals. We must not exhaust ourselves by fighting both for them and against them - their cause is not our cause.²⁹³

The fourth, and final, convention was held in Hamilton in 1979. It was the first at which an official photographer was invited to document the proceedings. Marti Friedlander, who had arrived in Aotearoa from England in 1958, made a series of photographs. These not only documented the events of the day, but also made visible the increasing fragmentations of the women's movement. This is made particularly evident in a photograph depicting Donna Awatere and Mona Papali'i (fig. 26). Awatere and Papali'i are on their feet, made static by the camera but clearly in motion as they lead passionate protest before of an audience made up largely of white women. In the background, a group of women hold aloft a banner issuing the provocation: 'White Women's Convention?' By this time the cracks in the women's movement weren't just showing; they had morphed into the active fault-lines along which the movement would fracture. For, in asking the question, 'White Women's Convention?' these protestors made clear that the focus on gender as a unified identifier resulted in the marginalisation of Māori and Pasifika women. Friedlander's image, foregrounding this question as well as those asking it, makes starkly clear the fact that women were not, in fact, united. These divisions would remain evident throughout the following decade, when the mainstream discourse of arts writing was to come under considerable feminist scrutiny.

²⁹¹ Fran Noble and Kay Dawson, 'The United Heterosexual Women's Convention 1977,' *Lesbian Feminist Circle* 28 (Autumn Winter 1977), 14.

²⁹² Sharon Alston in Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women*, 373.

²⁹³ Noble and Dawson, 'The United Heterosexual Women's Convention 1977,' 15.

The expansion of the discursive network of arts writing which occurred in the 1970s acted as the foundation for a broader feminist critique of the nationalist art-historical narrative which would unfold in the 1980s. A significant expansion of that discourse was precipitated through the emergence of feminist publications such as *Broadsheet*, *Spiral* and *Lesbian Feminist Circle*, as well as through an increasingly politicised generation of women artists and a range of women-only exhibitions. Allie Eagle, writing in *Spiral* in 1978, posed a series of questions and assertions that would be taken up within the arts discourse in the 1980s:

It is important women further challenge the narrow limits of what the patriarchy allows us creatively. Why do our booksellers and libraries stock so few women artist books? The galleries so few women's works? etc. etc. These are things that MUST change. In order for WOMAN'S VISION TO BE SEEN, HER RIGHT TO CHOOSE, we must create spaces for that to happen.²⁹⁴

The following chapters interrogate the – often fraught – attempts made during the 1980s to create such spaces and to widen these narrow patriarchal limits.

²⁹⁴ Allie Eagle in 'The Women's Environment at the '77 Women's Convention,' *Spiral Women's Art Magazine*, no. 3 (1978), 36.

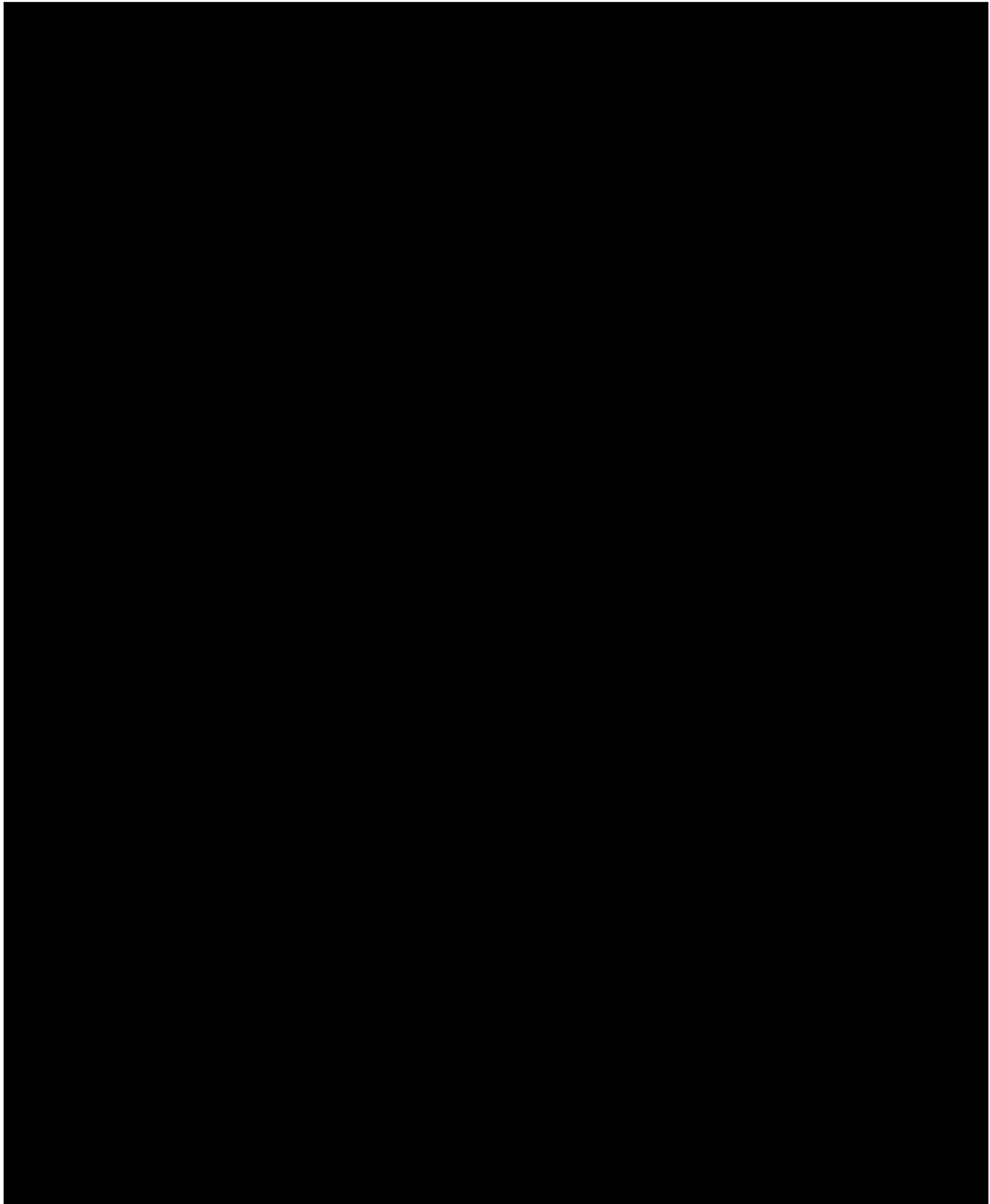


Figure 0.4: Rita Angus, *Self Portrait*, oil on canvas, 1936-37
(Dunedin Public Art Gallery)

Chapter Four

The 1980s: Reclaiming the ‘Woman Artist’

While arts writing from a feminist perspective was becoming increasingly visible during the 1970s, it was not until the late 1980s that significant books dedicated to women artists were published in Aotearoa. By this time the feminist movement had fragmented to the point that any utopian ideals of unified sisterhood were shattered. However, the development of feminist activism was to influence an increasing number of women artists, writers and curators as they sought to interrogate the role women had been assigned in the dominant discourse.

This increase in publications centred on women occurred in tandem with broader developments seeking to address the position of women in the arts landscape. The opening of the Women’s Gallery in Wellington in January of 1980 provided a year-round exhibition space dedicated to women artists (fig. 27). The ad hoc nature of the women-only exhibitions which had been held during the 1970s thus coalesced into a more permanent presence. Though it only remained in operation for four years, the presence of a gallery which showed a steadfast commitment to the work of women artists indicated a certain level of public interest in art by, about and for women.²⁹⁵ The explicitly feminist space created by the Women’s Gallery was not the only one in which women-only exhibitions were being held. In 1980, the National Art Gallery simultaneously held three exhibitions under the umbrella title ‘Women in Communication’. Contemporary women artists were also exhibiting individually across the country.

In the 1980s a number of feminist groups and collectives formed with the intention of advocating for women artists. In 1980, Carole Shepherd established the Association of Women Artists at Outreach gallery in Auckland. This attracted significant numbers of women. The association organised exhibitions of member’s work and produced a newsletter, through which:

...members learnt of relevant publications, exhibitions and courses. Local and overseas speakers discussed topics such as how to apply for grants, the latest

²⁹⁵ For a full account of the Women’s Gallery see: Kirsty Baker, *Inhabiting the Threshold: The role of the Wellington Women’s Gallery in New Zealand’s Feminist Art History*, unpublished MA thesis, 2013.

developments in women's art here and overseas, and types of work, such as Pacific tapa cloth, which had received little attention from mainstream artists.²⁹⁶

The association offered practical support to women artists, equipping them with tools to assist their development as artists. A number of members of the association went on to found the Feminist Art Networkers in 1982, agitating more specifically for increased representation of women within the arts institutions of New Zealand. Many of the women whose writing is addressed in this chapter were members of Feminist Art Networkers, including Juliet Batten, Merylyn Tweedie, Elizabeth Eastmond, Cheryl Sotheran and Priscilla Pitts.

The discursive expansion which occurred in the 1970s, accelerated rapidly throughout the 1980s. Prior to this expansion, the country's arts discourse had been dominated by a relatively narrow range of voices. From 1928's inaugural publication of *Art in New Zealand*, the development of published literature dedicated primarily to the visual arts was marked by each publication's declaration of its singularity. 'At last our artists and writers have a journal they can justly call their own', declared the editors of *Art in New Zealand* in 1928.²⁹⁷ Keith and Brown centre their own book within the discourse by declaring that, since 'the appearance, some thirty years ago, of Dr. E. H. McCormick's book *Letters and Art in New Zealand* there has been no substantial work published on New Zealand Painting'.²⁹⁸ Directed at a more specific art historical readership, the *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History* was positioned as 'the first of its kind to appear in New Zealand'.²⁹⁹ In similar fashion, the inaugural editorial in *Art New Zealand* asserts 'there has been no regular New Zealand journal devoted entirely to the visual arts since the end of the forties'.³⁰⁰ These publications – with the exception, perhaps, of the *Bulletin* – did not go to great lengths to address the narrowness of their outlook. As the preceding chapters have shown, such narrowness had significant ramifications for women artists, who were relegated to secondary status, or ignored altogether. Though the 1970s did see a widening of the arts discourse, feminist challenges to gendered marginalisation had only occasionally been translated out of the pages of feminist publications and into the pages of art history.

²⁹⁶ Anne Else, 'Association of Women Artists,' accessed 3 May 2019, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/women-together/association-women-artists>.

²⁹⁷ 'Ourselves,' 5.

²⁹⁸ Brown and Keith, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1967*, 9.

²⁹⁹ Green, 'Editorial,' i.

³⁰⁰ Webb, 'Editorial,' 7.

The 1980s, however, gave rise to an increasing proliferation of arts publications, representative of a broader range of voices. While previous decades were dominated by a handful of familiar, recurring names, the 1980s gave rise to an expanding polyvocality. More women writers joined the ranks of those discussing art in public forums, many of whom had sharpened both their writing skills and political positions in the pages of *Broadsheet*. Under the editorship of William Dart, an expanding group of women became regular contributors to *Art New Zealand*, frequently covering the work of contemporary women artists. *Spiral* feminist art magazine continued publication, if somewhat infrequently, throughout the 1980s, providing a ‘forum for women’s ideas and work to be presented in a more caring and sympathetic way than most of the conventional male avenues available’.³⁰¹

This growth in women writers contributing to arts publications such as magazines and journals was accompanied by a number of books written by women which specifically addressed the work of women artists. Anne Kirker’s *New Zealand Women Artists: A Survey of 150 Years* and *Women and the Arts in New Zealand*, written by Elizabeth Eastmond and Merimeri Penfold, were both published in 1986. Each of these books presented alternative histories of the development of art in New Zealand: histories that centred upon women artists. Taking a slightly different approach was *A Woman’s Picture Book: 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)*, published in 1988. Rather than highlighting the contributions of women perceived as absent from mainstream national art histories, this book presented the work of a range of contemporary women artists.

The expansion of the arts-specific discourse in Aotearoa was extended more broadly by the continued commitment to covering the work of women artists by feminist publications such as *Broadsheet*. In fact, several women writers – such as Cheryll Sotheran and Priscilla Pitts – wrote regularly for both *Art New Zealand*, and *Broadsheet*. Sotheran was also a driving force for the introduction of feminist politics within the academic realm of art history. During her time as a lecturer in Art History at the University of Auckland she – along with Elizabeth Eastmond – conceived and taught the first Art History course specifically focused on women in the arts. A growing number of women writers became increasingly prominent during this period, writing across numerous outlets, and agitating for change. Close comparative examination of their writings across such contextually differing publications serve to

³⁰¹ Ruth Lawley, ‘Editorial,’ *Spiral Women’s Art Magazine*, no. 4 (1979), unpaginated.

illuminate the politicised characteristics of their engagement with the breadth of this discourse. Of course, not all women wrote from a specifically feminist perspective. Neither were women writers necessarily only interested in writing about women artists. Elva Bett's 1986 book, *New Zealand Art: A Modern Perspective*, focuses, not on gender, but on constructing a narrative for the 'modern' period of New Zealand painting. This narrative is a continuation of those nationalist teleologies which had come before, with the 'trinity of Angus Woollaston and McCahon' situated at 'the vanguard of the modern movement in New Zealand'.³⁰²

The increased representation of women within arts writing was reflective of shifting societal attitudes towards women. Precipitated by the agitation and dissent of the feminist movement, it appeared that the calls for gendered equality were being answered, even at legislative levels. In 1984, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was established, with legislation passed in March of 1985 cementing its existence as a separate government department. Now renamed as the Ministry for Women, the website today describes the Ministry as the 'only public sector organisation set up specifically to address the needs of New Zealand women'.³⁰³ Parliamentary legislation was not the only arena within the 'establishment' that appeared to absorb the lessons of the feminist movement. Academia, too, was to be shaped by the politics of gender, with the University of Otago teaching the 'first postgraduate course on women's history' in 1984, the same year as the *Women's Studies Journal* was established.³⁰⁴

As the study of women consolidated in universities, the subject itself fragmented: 'woman' became myriad women from different class, ethnic, educational and regional backgrounds. Similarly, the hope that Women's Studies would have a transformative effect on other disciplines began to be realised as more Humanities departments began to employ a generation of women whose feminist analyses informed their research.³⁰⁵

Provisions were also being made for women's studies to be accessible to those outside of the university system. The year 1985 saw the publication of *Women's Studies: A New Zealand Handbook*, produced by the Auckland Worker's Educational Association. Aimed at a wide readership, the handbook provided information for women to run their own community-based

³⁰² Elva Bett, *New Zealand Art: A Modern Perspective* (Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1986), 7.

³⁰³ Ministry for Women Minitatanga mō ngā Wāhine, 'Ministry for Women,' accessed 31 January 2019, women.govt.nz/about/new-zealand-women/history/ministry.

³⁰⁴ Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women*, 391.

³⁰⁵ Brookes, 391–92.

women's studies groups. Feminist in intent, it covered issues such as 'Language and Women', 'Women and Sexuality' and 'Images of Women'. Other books, too, took women as their subject. *The Smith Women: 100 New Zealand women talk about their lives* collated first-person accounts of all aspects of women's lives and presented them thematically. Though written by Rosemary Barrington and Alison Gray, the book is 'about the lives of 100 New Zealand women, seen largely by the women themselves'.³⁰⁶ Similarly, Sue Kedgley's *The Sexual Wilderness: Men and Women in New Zealand* presents a range of personal stories, written in the first person. Kedgley, a frequent writer in the pages of *Broadsheet*, writes from a feminist perspective and is reflective of the journey that she has taken in the decade and a half prior to the book's publication: 'A decade and a half later, many veteran feminists are battle-worn and weary and wondering where on earth the second wave of feminism is headed, or whether in fact it has peaked and is on the point of decline'.³⁰⁷

This desire to take stock and look back on the feminist movement is evident again in Christine Dann's 1985 book, *Up from Under: Women and Liberation in New Zealand 1970-1985*. The feminist position taken by both of these authors is unsurprising considering their involvement with *Broadsheet* during this period. While these books sought to evaluate and historicise the contemporary feminist movement, there were also attempts to write women into the pages of history. Eve Ebbett's 1981 book, *Victoria's Daughters: New Zealand Women of the Thirties*, is one such example. In the introduction to her book, Ebbett outlines her project as one concerned with a neglected history:

Much has been written about this country during the decade 1930-1940, with the emphasis on the Depression, but little has been written about the women of those years. This is an attempt to record the lives of the women, how they lived and coped in the years of the Depression between two world wars.³⁰⁸

On the surface, then, it would appear that the 1980s was a progressive decade for gender equality. Women's socio-political experiences were being taken seriously, both as the subject of published literature and in terms of legislative change. In addition to the formation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, other legislation passed during this decade contributes to the impression that attitudes towards gender and sexual equality were undergoing significant

³⁰⁶ Rosemary Barrington and Alison Gray, 'Prologue', in *The Smith Women: 100 New Zealand Women Talk about Their Lives* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd, 1981), viii.

³⁰⁷ Sue Kedgley, *The Sexual Wilderness: Men and Women In New Zealand* (Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1985), 5.

³⁰⁸ Eve Ebbett, *Victoria's Daughters: New Zealand Women of the Thirties* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd, 1981), unpaginated.

change. However, it is perhaps unsurprising that such changes were not met with unanimous acclaim:

... concerns about the erosion of family life were heightened further by the removal of spousal immunity from rape law in 1985 and the passing of the Homosexual Law Reform Act in 1986. The feminist onslaught, which threatened to undermine traditional marriage, appeared to conservatives to have won the day.³⁰⁹

How thoroughly, though, had the feminist onslaught ‘won the day’? This chapter focuses upon this question, offering a critical analysis of the most widely circulated feminist challenges to New Zealand’s art history that were published in the 1980s.

Writing by Women

The proliferation of publications written both by and about women during this period was significant. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, the biases and omissions of a discourse are reflective of those who have the power to write it. The increasing number of women writers during this decade did indeed precipitate a shift in the way in which women artists were represented. Books such as *New Zealand Women Artists: A Survey of 150 Years*, *Women and the Arts in New Zealand*, and *A Women’s Picture Book: 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)* presented a great deal of research relating to women artists. They made apparent the large number of women artists who had been – and continued to be – active within New Zealand. How, though, were women artists constituted in this literature? To what extent did they offer a viable critical challenge to the position that women artists had come to occupy in the existing discourse?

With the regular addition of women writers such as Priscilla Pitts, Anne Kirker, Cheryll Sotheran, Elizabeth Eastmond and Avenal McKinnon to the roster at *Art New Zealand*, the number of women artists to have their exhibitions covered in the quarterly review sections at the beginning of the magazine greatly increased. Women like Pitts and Sotheran, both of whom also wrote for *Broadsheet*, made a concerted effort to ensure women artists received fair and critical coverage. It is important to note that many of these women wrote from an intentionally feminist point of view, bringing this perspective into a more mainstream forum

³⁰⁹ Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women*, 379.

than that provided by *Broadsheet*. In the pages of *Art New Zealand*, feminist art criticism was not simply preaching to the converted; it could be read as a political act of discursive intervention. Their writings actively worked against the biases of a publication that they themselves had accused of limiting the coverage of women to those who are ‘nude – or dead’.³¹⁰

Writing in 1980, Pitts directly challenged the stereotype-laden discourse of the preceding decades when reviewing an exhibition titled *Women in the Arts*, held at Outreach in June of 1980. She writes:

The exhibition lays to rest, without a doubt, any lurking suspicions that most women are still painting pretty flower pieces or wishy-washy landscapes... This was an exhibition that revealed a wealth of imagination, talent and skill and proved that women are as important as they have always been in the New Zealand art scene.³¹¹

By the 1980s, then, publications like *Art New Zealand* were under a certain amount of pressure to demonstrate an awareness of the feminist challenges that were being posed – both nationally and internationally – to the field of art writing. In 1983, both *Art New Zealand* and *Broadsheet* produced issues dedicated to women artists. As the most widely distributed national publications in the fields of the visual arts and the feminist movement respectively, close analysis of each of these issues is illuminating. Never before had a mainstream New Zealand arts publication limited its focus solely to women artists. Why, then, was the choice made to do so in 1983?

‘Women have always been important in New Zealand art’.³¹² So begins Ross Fraser’s editorial in *Art New Zealand*’s ‘women artists’ issue (fig. 28). Such an unequivocal statement seems designed to assure the reader that women artists have long been taken seriously within a professional arts discourse. However, this simple statement belies the complexity of the gendered critical response to artists in Aotearoa. The editorial continues in a similarly simplistic vein, listing a number of women artists:

³¹⁰ Elizabeth Eastmond and Cheryl Sotheran, ‘In the Red, or, It helps if you are nude – or dead, an analysis by gender of articles, reviews and artists’ works discussed in *Art New Zealand*, issues 1 – 24,’ *Craccum* (September 1983), 13.

³¹¹ Priscilla Pitts, ‘Women in the Arts: A Multi-Media Exhibition,’ *Art New Zealand* 17 (Spring 1980), 23.

³¹² Ross Fraser, ‘Editorial,’ *Art New Zealand* 26 (Autumn 1983), 13.

Mina Arndt, Maude Sherwood, Grace Joel, D.K. Richmond, Grace Butler, Flora Scales, Rhona Haszard, Edith Collier, May Smith, Evelyn Page, Olivia Spencer Bower, Lois White, Rita Angus, Doris Lusk, Louise Henderson (to recall only a few names) have made contributions without which the body of New Zealand art would be immeasurably poorer.³¹³

What such a list seems designed to imply is that here, surely, is a publication against which the familiar feminist charge of omission cannot be levelled. However, the limitations of a single issue regarding women artists are also acknowledged by Fraser, who notes that such an issue ‘is of course in no way exhaustive. How could it be. We have published many articles on women artists before, and will continue to do so’.³¹⁴ Factual though this statement may be, it hardly reads as a feminist interrogation of the structural inequalities embedded in national art histories up to this point. Making no mention of the word ‘feminism’, nor the women’s movement, the editorial positions this issue as a celebration of women who have played a role in the arts landscape of New Zealand, women who have previously appeared in the pages of *Art New Zealand*, and will continue to do so. Though not positioning itself explicitly as such, this editorial stance reads as an act of self-vindication.

Standing in contrast to the political neutrality of the editorial framing of *Art New Zealand’s* ‘woman’ issue, is *Broadsheet’s* special feature on feminist art (fig. 29). Also published in 1983, this section takes up a substantial portion of the magazine’s 110th issue, and is introduced with an essay by Juliet Batten, titled ‘What is a Feminist Artist?’ This section is presented in the magazine as a self-contained feature, the beginning marked with a full-page black and white reproduction of a 1959 Jacqueline Fahey painting. The full-page image is overlaid with a bold title in block capitals: ‘New Zealand Feminist Artists’. The title alone makes evident the differing position that *Art New Zealand* and *Broadsheet* appear to be taking in relation to women artists. During the early 1980s, the word ‘woman’ implied an identity determined by birth and biology, whereas ‘feminist’ was a different type of identifier – one which came with a political ideological underpinning.³¹⁵ The *Broadsheet* collective’s intentional decision to focus on feminist artists staked out an explicitly political

³¹³ Fraser, 13.

³¹⁴ Fraser, 13.

³¹⁵ Subsequent decades have of course seen a shift in understanding regarding the nature of biological sex and gender, with the identifier woman (or womxn) becoming increasingly unmoored from biology in order to accommodate a more fluid spectrum of gendered positions. The heteronormativity implied by the oppositional relationship between man and woman at the heart of feminism is a difficulty which must be tackled by the feminist movement, as well as within this thesis.

position. In addition to politicising the issue, the specificity of the feminist identifier acts as a type of selection criteria.

Art New Zealand selected a number of artists who were active earlier in the twentieth century, during the period in which artists and critics alike were deeply concerned with identifying a unique national identity. Mainly active during this period, Olivia Spencer Bower, Evelyn Page, Rita Angus and Molly Macalister are all subjects of individually focused essays. These artists are positioned alongside contemporary women, demonstrating a continuity of sorts. By presenting writing on a range of women from throughout the twentieth century, the magazine's contents reinforce Fraser's initial statement, that 'women have always been important in New Zealand art.'

Similarly, the artists selected for inclusion in *Broadsheet* were selected in order to construct a genealogy. However, this lineage is considerably shorter, making clear the constraints which resulted in the lack of traction gained by explicitly feminist artists in the mid-twentieth century. In her introductory essay, Batten makes this point when introducing the two oldest women to have contributed to the issue:

First, there are two women in their early 50s: Jackie Fahey and Vivian Lynn. Each tells of her struggle to find her direction before the days of the women's movement. Each produced what might now be understood as feminist work, before such a definition ever existed. I found their testimonies moving.³¹⁶

Though both Fahey and Lynn are identified as precursors of the feminist movement, both were still relatively young, and were active practitioners at the time of *Broadsheet's* publication. Despite the newness of art history as an academic discipline in 1980s New Zealand, it is clear that a canonical discourse was, by this time, well established. A relatively uninterrupted history had been constructed, tracing its origins back to the point of first European contact. Despite Fraser's unsupported assertion to the contrary in *Art New Zealand*, it is evident that women had not been identified as playing a central role in this history. Time and time again, as we have seen, male artists were consistently positioned as the active driving force in a narrative of innovation and progress. Against such a backdrop, Batten's concluding statement is telling:

³¹⁶ Juliet Batten, 'What Is a Feminist Artist?', *Broadsheet* 110 (June 1983): 20.

It is my hope that 1983 may mark the beginning of a new movement, when feminist artists embark on a dialogue about definitions, connect more with one another, and give each other the strength to insist on serious attention both as artists and as feminists.³¹⁷

By urging feminist artists to come together in dialogue to form a new movement, she signals a desire for coalescence and unity. Despite the fractured feminist debate of the 1970s, Batten's hope for the future is contingent upon the ability of women to unify in order to mount a feminist challenge against a patriarchal art system.

This desire for cohesion is echoed in an essay published in *Spiral* the year prior, also written by Batten. First delivered as a paper at the 1981 Women's Studies Conference, the republication of this essay in *Spiral* ensured that it reached a broader audience than those present at the conference. Entitled 'Emerging from Underground: The Women's Art Movement in New Zealand', the essay demonstrates a historicising impulse through a search for feminist forbears and the construction of a – brief – history of the movement. Despite her desire to identify a history of feminist art-making in New Zealand, Batten appears to come up empty-handed:

Rita Angus and Olivia Spencer Bower may be the nearest we have got to cultural grandmothers; but even so their works are little more than tantalising suggestions, hints of a powerful current which does little more than surface for a moment before becoming resubmerged. It is disappointing to have to admit that among New Zealand women artists we have nothing equivalent to the consistent female imagery of Georgia O'Keefe [sic]...³¹⁸

Batten's frustrated desire to construct a coherent historical narrative around the emergence of feminist art in New Zealand is, from a certain perspective, understandable. However, in structural terms, such a project fails to pose a serious challenge to the writing of art history to date. In light of this, it is interesting to note Batten's open animosity towards *Art New Zealand*:

To be a declared feminist artist is to sign one's death warrant as far as the art establishment is concerned: this at least is the fear. When we note what misogynists hold the power in the art world (witness the anti-woman line of *Art New Zealand*), the fear becomes understandable.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Batten, 21.

³¹⁸ Juliet Batten, 'Emerging from Underground: The Women's Art Movement in New Zealand,' *Spiral Women's Art Magazine* 5 (1982), 24.

³¹⁹ Batten, 'What Is a Feminist Artist?', 20.

Putting to one side the ineffectiveness of name-calling as a critical strategy, how accurate is such an assertion, in reality? Though the pattern of women's inclusion in *Art New Zealand* has been shown to echo wider societal stratification, the dialogic specificity of the situation in 1983 is significantly more nuanced than Batten's characterisation would suggest.

Two women artists appear in both *Art New Zealand* and *Broadsheet's* special issues in 1983: Carole Shephard and Vivian Lynn.³²⁰ While the essays in the latter publication are responses written by the artists themselves, those in *Art New Zealand* are written from an external perspective. Judging from Batten's declaration of anti-woman misogyny, it would be fair to assume that there would be considerable discrepancy in the representations of Shephard and Lynn across the two publications. This does not, however, prove to be the case. The writers of the pieces on both Shephard and Lynn are women, both of whom are regular contributors to *Art New Zealand*.

In Elizabeth Eastmond's essay, 'Carole Shephard in Full Flight', feminist politics are placed front and centre. Opening with an excerpt from Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock's recently published *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, Eastmond integrates her locally-grounded discussion of Shephard's work into a wider international feminist methodology. Shephard's work is positioned as posing a critique of the structural manner in which gendered inequality shapes society. Eastmond effectively situates Shephard within:

...a growing network of feminist artists here and elsewhere who are not only articulating the different position and place within history and culture (from men) that women occupy, but are attempting at times to tackle this in a politically challenging sense. Understanding this intention is crucial.³²¹

Such an understanding is indeed crucial. That this position is expressed within the pages of *Art New Zealand* would indicate that there is no clear ideological dividing line between publications. Shephard makes clear her vociferous defence of women's experience within the art world when given the opportunity to present her own opinions in *Broadsheet*, writing that she has 'no hesitation in attacking any system that attempts to erase women's identities/experiences (City Art Gallery) and excludes these from the public's experience of

³²⁰ Vivian Lynn's name is incorrectly – and disappointingly – included as Vivienne Lynn in *Broadsheet*.

³²¹ Elizabeth Eastmond, 'Carole Shephard in Full Flight,' *Art New Zealand* 26 (Autumn 1983), 18.

feminist art.’³²² In this particular instance, in its discussion of Shepherd’s work, it would appear that *Art New Zealand* is not guilty of such a charge.

In *Broadsheet*, Vivian Lynn identifies feminist politics as central to her working practice, and indistinguishable from her subjectivity: ‘I’d say that my feminism and my work are one and the same thing. ... I’ve experienced enough to have become what some people call radicalized or, in other words, a feminist’.³²³ Anne Kirker, writing in *Art New Zealand*, may not specifically name Lynn’s work as feminist, but she certainly recognises and centres the challenge her practice poses to conventional societal understandings of gender:

Instead of striving to meet the requirements of a male system, Lynn reflects the priority of serious women artists in staking their claim to be truly themselves in their work. If in doing so the enormous backlog of pre-conditioning in our expectations of what art should be is threatened so much the better. Her efforts may contribute towards the balance between the sexes being more satisfactorily [sic] adjusted.³²⁴

What is interesting about Kirker’s discussion here is that it directly names a male ‘system’. She makes clear the correlation between a patriarchal societal structure and the ways that we define what actually constitutes art-making. Kirker’s reading of Lynn may appear to carefully evade an open acknowledgement of feminism. However, by positioning her artistic practice as one which challenges accepted methods of both art-making and gendered behaviour, she references the political charge of Lynn’s artistic practice. Kirker’s short article in *Art New Zealand* relates directly to the display of the large-scale mixed-media installation *G^uarden Gates* at the Janne Land Gallery in 1982. Consisting of seven individual works, arranged in cyclical series, *G^uarden Gates* take pairs of steel gates as their material starting point (fig. 30). Practical objects, both visually and physically familiar to New Zealanders, the gates are transformed by Lynn through their re-location. The work’s title points directly to this notion of transformation, simple garden gates are imbued with connotations of guardianship through the addition of the letter ‘u’. By including this ‘u’ in superscript, however, Lynn makes the familiar garden gate strange. Each pair of physical gates are similarly altered, their uniform lattice of rigid steel made unfamiliar through the incorporation of real and synthetic hair, paint, thread, silk, clay and a variety of other materials.

³²² Carole Shepherd in Batten, ‘Emerging from Underground: The Women’s Art Movement in New Zealand,’ 25.

³²³ Vivian Lynn in: Batten, ‘What Is a Feminist Artist?’, 32.

³²⁴ Anne Kirker, ‘Vivian Lynn’s G^uarden Gates,’ *Art New Zealand* 26 (Autumn 1983), 40.

These seven gates are designed to be displayed in an octagonal arrangement, with the entrance and exit point making up the eighth side. This absence creates the final gate – the threshold the viewer must cross in order to enter the environment created by Lynn. It is an environment which subverts the codified connotations of the industrial, agricultural gates. Strictly delineating ownership and access, such gates are considered utilitarian, practical, masculine. Hair, ungendered though it may be, has long been a site upon which social constructions of gender are writ large, its sexually loaded symbolism intentionally incorporated by Lynn through her decision to utilise it as a medium. However, such gendered connotations are not all that such a medium brings to her work. When severed from its human point of origin, hair becomes abject. What had been self becomes other; the sight and feel of cut hair provokes a response that is visceral and in many ways unintelligible.

Lynn, writing in *Broadsheet* in 1983, acknowledges her desire to provoke such a response: ‘in my hair pieces of 1982 [I] have come closer to the toxic object image I need. I want a toxic image that psychically shocks – the conscious levels are split open...’³²⁵ The physical materiality of severed hair, when entwined with the mechanical practicality of the steel gate, results in a shock of cognitive dissonance. As Lynn says of her works, they ‘either *subvert the status quo* or present *questions*.’³²⁶ Lynn’s desire to interrogate the status quo is deeply evident in *G^uarden Gates*, as is her desire to present questions, rather than answers. *G^uarden Gates* posed a challenge, not only to representations of narrative and gender, but also to the conventional limits of art-making itself. As Lynn expressed in *Broadsheet*:

I had a studio full of experiments in plaster, jelly and stockings but couldn’t do anything with them – they were not within a New Zealand art context and there was no existing feminist art context in which to place them.³²⁷

By 1983, however, a feminist art context was gradually being established. That Lynn’s 1982 *G^uarden Gates* were discussed in *Art New Zealand* can be read as evidence of this discursive shift. Much of the contemporary critical coverage of *G^uarden Gates* was written by women. This could be read as evidence of the expansion of the types of authorial voices contributing to art writing – evidence of the beginnings of a feminist art context. Conversely, it is conceivable that the dominance of women’s written voices could actually indicate a lack of

³²⁵ Vivian Lynn in: Batten, ‘What Is a Feminist Artist?’, 32.

³²⁶ Lynn in: Batten, 32.

³²⁷ Lynn in: Batten, 32.

compulsion by male writers to take seriously the work of women artists – in particular, women artists whose work is critical of a societal conditioning which has rendered women marginal players in the art world. It is also important to realise that a proliferation of women writers does not necessarily correlate with the expansion of a context of feminist criticality. Lynn herself had broadly considered the structural complexity of such issues, writing that she was interested in ‘looking at why women themselves have been conditioned to collude with this view’. Here, Lynn demonstrates an awareness of the fact that women, too, can contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchal systems of power.

In light of this, it is useful to analyse the extent to which the increasing visibility of women’s voices altered the ideological underpinning of arts criticism during the early 1980s. In the case of Lynn’s *Garden Gates*, the level of insightful criticism varies. Pam Corbett, writing in the *Evening Post*, provides a largely descriptive article, which attempts to simplify and make coherent the complexity of Lynn’s work: ‘Each gate, explained Vivian, reflects a stage in the development of human experience’.³²⁸ Newspaper columns are, of course, constrained by both brevity and the breadth of their target audience. While *Broadsheet* can assume a feminist audience, and *Art New Zealand* speaks directly to those already engaged with the visual arts, the coverage of art in mainstream newspapers is often pitched with less specificity. Corbett’s article presents Lynn’s work as challenging, stating that ‘whatever your prejudices, this unusual treatment of something as familiar as hair is likely to prompt reaction’.³²⁹ Despite the acknowledgement of the unconventionality of Lynn’s work, Corbett downplays the politicised engagement with gendered power. Though she does mention ‘feminism’ in the article, the manner in which she does so seems designed to neutralise the less broadly accessible elements of Lynn’s work, writing that: ‘Vivian does not see herself as an evangelist for the feminist cause’.³³⁰ Such language bestows a kind of irrational fervour upon feminists, with Corbett keen to distance both Lynn and herself from such a politicised identification.

Sue Thomas’s *Evening Post* review of Lynn’s *Garden Gates* operates in a similar manner to Corbett’s. It is at once descriptive and explanatory, whilst operating on a relatively superficial level. Thomas emphasises the unusual nature of the work in material terms:

³²⁸ Pam Corbett, ‘Hair Art Expresses Female Experience,’ *Evening Post*, 9 September 1982.

³²⁹ Corbett.

³³⁰ Corbett.

Lynn has used hair as a medium for a while but this show takes the cake. Called “Guarden Gates,” the exhibition hinges on those criss-crossed wire gates found on a farm. Intertwined with the wire is hair but it’s nothing like wool you can pick from a farm gate.³³¹

Though acknowledging the work’s unconventional use of everyday materials, this description actually demonstrates how entrenched are the connotations attached to those materials.

Thomas contrasts the accessible and understandable practicality of the farm gate with an alternative artistic interpretation that renders them unusual. Though the descriptive tone of the article does not make any explicit value judgements, there is a subtle inflection which separates the artist from the writer. Her work is ‘unusual’, it is labelled as ‘hair art’ which really ‘takes the cake’. The short segment ends with the statement: ‘All the works are based on social and feminist themes’.³³² This sentence demonstrates the lack of criticality evident in this brief article. Thomson neither suggests what such themes may be, nor does she interrogate the ways in which *G^uarden Gates* might engage with them. Such a cursory response is perhaps unsurprising within the context of a widely circulated daily newspaper.

Elva Bett, reviewing the work in Wellington newspaper *The Dominion* however, does engage with such themes, providing a more fulsome exploration of the work than either Corbett or Thomas. Rather than attempting to simply describe the unusual nature of the work, Bett focuses on the symbolism of *G^uarden Gates*, leading her reader through an interpretive journey of the themes she reads within the installation. Gate by gate, she constructs a narrative of female emancipation and self-discovery:

No 1 is Primal Matrix and holds index to the whole. The polarities of the feminine cultural experience. The steel bars of conformity restraining the unconscious energies. The hair, knotted and primitive with long shadows cast beyond the immediate bounds. . . . The final construction allows autonomy and self-expression as tresses are plaited and spread, woven and curled to suit individualism.³³³

Though Bett pays more than cursory attention to social and feminist themes embedded in Lynn’s work, her symbolic reading of *G^uarden Gates* is simplistic in its centring of a triumph of feminine individualism. In privileging this triumphant narrative, she flattens many of the

³³¹ Sue Thomas, ‘Plenty of Action in the Galleries,’ *Evening Post*, 8 September 1982.

³³² Thomas.

³³³ Elva Bett, ‘Lynn’s Gated Hinged on Symbolism,’ *The Dominion*, 16 September 1982.

complexities of Lynn's practice. However, it would be unfair to expect a more theoretically complex argument to appear in a short newspaper article. The fact that the symbolic oppression of feminine subjectivity finds expression within this context in 1982 demonstrates the wide-reaching impact of the feminist movement on mainstream coverage of the visual arts.

That Lynn's *Garden Gates* prompted such a breadth of responses from women writers is worthy of note. Not only does this point to the subjective response that art can engender, it also demonstrates that women writers do not constitute a unified discursive category. While the increasing number of women writers contributing to arts writing during the 1980s plays a pivotal role in expanding this discourse, it would be simplistic to argue that their presence alone can be read as a marker of feminist change. The inclusion of women's voices does not necessarily result in structural change. Having charted the development of New Zealand's art history and criticism through the mid-twentieth century, it is clear that there is a structural patriarchal bias built into the constructed narrative. Such biases manifest not only in terms of the artists singled out for sustained and serious attention, but also in the discrepancies of gendered treatment received by artists.

Vocal feminists such as Juliet Batten certainly brought the politics of gender into the arts arena. However, the approach she takes in *Broadsheet* – calling out the 'misogynists' who hold the power – does little to challenge the underlying ideological assumptions upon which the discourse is based. Gendered inequality does not result simply from the oppressive actions of the small number of individuals who hold power. Rather, inequality is perpetuated by repeated communal actions and beliefs, with social pre-conditioning and gender expectations acting to naturalise this patriarchal system of values. So, while writers such as Pitts and Eastmond were actively bringing feminist perspectives to bear within a mainstream arts publication like *Art New Zealand*, not all women were unified behind a desire to challenge women's position within the art world. In fact, some women explicitly denied the importance of feminist politics.

In 1984, Jenny Neligan curated an exhibition at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery titled *New Women Artists*, bringing together the work of eleven contemporary women artists working in Aotearoa. By 1984, as we have seen, precedents had been set for women-only group exhibitions in both national and international contexts. Such exhibitions were frequently

mounted from an explicitly feminist curatorial perspective. Neligan, however, takes a very different stance, using her brief catalogue text to argue against the need for feminist interrogation of the arts-world. She writes: ‘I do not think women are discriminated against in the visual arts today. ... There are many women working in the visual arts here as critics, in art schools and in galleries’.³³⁴ Neligan is re-treading familiar ground with this argument, pointing towards the presence of women across the discipline as evidence of a lack of discrimination. The stereotypical manner of women’s inclusion in New Zealand’s art history in the early twentieth century demonstrates that inclusion is not equal to non-discriminatory representation. Neligan’s position appears to be influenced by the divisive nature of feminist politics. Perhaps she is all too aware of the fear Batten referenced when she wrote that to ‘be a declared feminist artist is to sign one’s death warrant as far as the art establishment is concerned’.³³⁵ By placing her women-only exhibition squarely outside of the discursive frame of feminism, Neligan echoes the position taken by Anne Kirker and Eric Young in the 1975 exhibition *New Zealand’s Women Painters*, discussed in the previous chapter. Both exhibitions celebrate the talent of women artists, without engaging with the political framework that shaped the manner of their inclusion in the discourse. In structural terms, such an approach echoes that taken by Ross Fraser in his introductory editorial to the 1983 issue of *Art New Zealand* dedicated to women artists. Such exhibitions act as a sort of physical listing of contemporary women artists, echoing Fraser’s written list of a number of women artists to have appeared within the publication’s pages.

Writing directly in response to *New Women Artists* at the Govett-Brewster, Priscilla Pitts interrogates the efficacy – and even the purpose – of such an approach:

The question that keeps occurring to me in relation to the exhibition of *New Women Artists* at the Govett-Brewster exhibition is: ‘Is gender enough? Is the fact that all these artists are women a good and sufficient reason for grouping them together in a single show?’ If you believe that women artists get a raw deal from the art world and need compensating or alternative showcase from time to time, gender may well be enough; but Jenny Neligan, curator of *New Women Artists* does not believe this.³³⁶

Pitts gestures towards a densely complex set of issues here. By making Neligan’s stance clear, Pitts points out that *New Women Artists* does not attempt to redress an imbalance. Her

³³⁴ Jenny Neligan, ‘New Women Artists’ (Govett-Brester Art Gallery, 1984), unpaginated.

³³⁵ Batten, ‘What Is a Feminist Artist?’, 20.

³³⁶ Priscilla Pitts, ‘New Women Artists at the Govett-Brewster’, *Art New Zealand* 32 (Spring 1984)

wording also suggests that such an approach is not particularly effective anyway. When the purpose of women-only exhibitions is to compensate for mainstream exclusion, or provide an alternative showcase, the work of women remains within a structurally peripheral position. The emergence of feminist driven women-only exhibitions across New Zealand in the 1970s grew from a desire to challenge the hegemony of the mainstream arts discourse by providing alternative modes of organisation. Often organised collectively around thematic or political concerns, many of these exhibitions occupied alternative spaces. Exhibitions such as 1977's *A Season's Diaries* in Victoria University, along with the establishment of the Women's Gallery, were driven by a common desire to forge a space in which women could experiment with art-making free from the patriarchal constraints and conventions of mainstream gallery spaces. Neligan's exhibition was clearly not envisaged as a continuation of this emerging feminist genealogy. Pitts quite rightly challenges the purpose of organising a woman-only show within these parameters – what does such an exhibition actually say about the work of women?

There is a danger that, in exhibiting the work of women separately from that of men in professionally-run galleries, a hierarchical binary division is simply reinforced. The work must be shown under the banner of 'women's art' because it does not quite meet the required standard in terms of supposedly objective definitions of quality, merit and excellence. Though certainly not stated explicitly, there is an unspoken assumption that the work displayed in women-only exhibitions is unworthy of inclusion in a mixed show. As a result, exhibitions such as *New Women Artists* can be seen as tokenistic at best. Legislative change, and a shifting critical context regarding women's position in society, ensured that such issues needed to be taken seriously. Along these lines, exhibitions and publications dedicated to women artists can be interpreted as an easily attainable – and superficial – mode of inclusion. Such self-contained projects offer visible and irrefutable evidence of a commitment to women artists, without altering the fundamental parameters of judgement which shape editorial or curatorial practices. Neligan's rather unenthusiastic assertion that 'technical competence is evident' across the exhibition fails to counteract such a reading.³³⁷

Standing in comparison to Neligan's curatorial approach is that taken by Alexa Johnston in an exhibition of the same year, held at Auckland City Art Gallery. *Anxious Images* brought

³³⁷ Neligan, 'New Women Artists,' unpaginated.

together the work of ten artists under a broad thematic umbrella: ‘The principle concern of the artists included here is the expression and communication of powerful emotion: unease, anxiety, anger, fear and pain’.³³⁸ Only three women were included. From a purely statistical perspective, then, *Anxious Images* seems less engaged with feminist issues than *New Women Artists*. A closer examination of the substantial catalogue produced to accompany the exhibition, however, suggests a different interpretation. Johnston notes that ‘the social, political, domestic, sexual and spiritual unease confronted by these artists seems particularly evident in our age’.³³⁹ Rather than distancing art from the political sphere, Johnston asserts that the two are profoundly enmeshed.

Johnston is an art historian and curator, her critical writing on art appearing in *Art New Zealand* during the early 1980s. Her 1982 interview with feminist artist Alexis Hunter and a 1984 review of a collaborative exhibition by Gillian Chaplin and Barbara Tuck both demonstrate a commitment to the coverage of the work of women artists, in addition to an engagement with feminist politics and art making. Johnston brings such politics to bear in her interpretation of the works in *Anxious Images*, making clear the depth and breadth by which gender politics permeate the structuring of society. While Neligan claims there is no discrimination against women in society, Johnston strongly refutes such assertions:

The period surveyed by this exhibition (1969 – 1983) is one in which feminism has become more visible in western society. It has shown the reality of women’s continuing subordinate situation; the unremittingly patriarchal nature of all society’s institutions; the attacks on women, both verbal and physical...³⁴⁰

It is therefore unsurprising that the three women artists included by Johnston in *Anxious Images* all engage with feminist concerns in their work. Both Vivian Lynn and Jacqueline Fahey – the two precursors to the feminist art movement identified in *Broadsheet* – are present, alongside Sylvia Siddell. In each of the texts relating to these artists, Johnston foregrounds the political engagements with gender and sexuality evident in the work of these artists. Siddell’s work, she argues, ‘is very much the product of an intelligent artist who views women’s situation in the world today with a mixture of rage and humour’.³⁴¹ Fahey’s feminist position is discussed by Johnston, and is also articulated by Fahey herself in a series of

³³⁸ Alexa M. Johnston, ‘Anxious Images: Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art’ (Auckland City Art Gallery, 1985), 6.

³³⁹ Johnston, 6.

³⁴⁰ Johnston, 7.

³⁴¹ Johnston, 60.

quotations interspersed throughout the essay. The sophistication of Lynn's feminist position is made evident by Johnston, making clear the inseparability of institutional, social and gendered critique within her working practice:

Vivian Lynn's work articulates her distrust of the unholy alliance between contemporary art, art institutions and society's male power structures. She asserts her point of view as a woman artist, a point of view which is dismissed as irrelevant by those it threatens, and consequently is rarely acknowledged.³⁴²

Rather than presenting the work of Siddell, Fahey and Lynn within an exclusively women-only context, Johnston positions the work of these feminist artists in conversation with a range of male artists. In doing so, she makes clear that these issues are not peripheral or marginal. Rather, the politics of women's experiences are posited as equally urgent as those of men. By foregrounding the sexual politics which inform the working practices of the women whose work she has included, Johnston mounts a curatorial critique of the naturalised assumption that 'the experience of men has been seen to represent the experience of the entire human race'.³⁴³

Expanding this notion further still is the fact that Johnston's engagement with sexual politics is not restricted to her discussion of women artists widely considered to be feminist. Such political analysis is also brought to bear on the work of several of the male artists in the exhibition. She writes:

Barry Cleavin's depictions of women are caustic and savage, characterizing women as vain, empty-headed, and sexually voracious monsters. Peter Peryer, Michael Smither and Alan Pearson also make images of women in which their ambivalent feelings are clearly evident.³⁴⁴

For Johnston, then, the critical power of analysis must be aimed in multiple directions. Not only does she foreground the importance of critically engaged feminist art-making in shifting perspectives relating to sexual politics, she also demonstrates the importance of critiquing representations of women made by men.

By firmly embedding feminist critique into her curatorial approach for *Anxious Image*, Johnston demonstrates that such politics can in fact be compatible with professional, mixed-

³⁴² Johnston, 41.

³⁴³ Johnston, 7.

³⁴⁴ Johnston, 7.

gender group exhibitions. As writers such as Pitts and Eastmond brought feminist politics into mainstream arts discourse in the pages of *Art New Zealand*, curators working from a similar perspective were attempting something similar within the realm of art display. While publications such as *Broadsheet*, and women-only spaces such as the Women's Gallery, play an important role in nurturing feminist arts engagement, their separatist nature could easily result in their dismissal. The contribution made by writers such as Pitts, Eastmond, Sotheran and Johnston should not be underestimated. Writing across the breadth of the discourse, these women actively brought their feminist politics from the periphery to the centre, attempting to disrupt such false distinctions as they did so. The importance of this strategy was discussed in specific relation to art in an interview between Alexa Johnston and Alexis Hunter, published in *Art New Zealand* in 1982. Comparing the progress of feminist critiques of art in America and New Zealand, Hunter observes that, in America, feminist politics have:

...almost changed the whole mainstream, and that's what's really important. We need to change the way people look at art and that means that the mainstream has got to change. It's much more difficult than just slotting into the museums, and being tokenly accepted while it is fashionable. We need to make dealers, artists, teachers and the public look in a different sort of way. In America it's already happening.³⁴⁵

The increasing prevalence of feminist thought within arts-writing during the early 1980s does not, of course, indicate a unified set of beliefs. In September of 1980, *Broadsheet* reprinted an essay titled 'The State of Feminism' from the US publication *Off Our Backs*, and in doing so began a regular feature showcasing feminist theory from around the world. By exposing readers to alternative theoretical perspectives regarding feminist thought, *Broadsheet* demonstrated that there was no one-size-fits-all approach to feminism. The perceived need for such a column also pointed towards a desire to engender a more complex discussion of what feminism actually meant, beyond some vague utopian notion of supporting and celebrating women. This was reflected by Johnston in her interview with Hunter, when she states:

In New Zealand we have not really made a clear distinction between women's art and feminist art, and we are still caught in the dilemma of feeling that feminists should be supportive of women's efforts, but being aware of the need for strong, carefully selected shows.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ Alexis Hunter in: Alexa Johnston, 'Alexis Hunter,' *Art New Zealand* 24 (Winter 1982), 47.

³⁴⁶ Johnston, 46–47.

Publishing Women's Art Histories

It was against this backdrop that the first significant books dedicated to women artists in New Zealand were published in the late 1980s. The increasing prevalence of women writers in the pages of *Art New Zealand*, along with a strengthening network of feminist artists and writers facilitated by projects such as the Women's Art Archive and the Women's Gallery in Wellington, and groups such as the Feminist Art Networkers and the Association of Women Artists, ensured that there was sufficient appetite for such publications. 1986 saw the publication of Anne Kirker's *New Zealand Women Artists: A Survey of 150 Years*, as well as Elizabeth Eastmond and Merimeri Penfold's *Women and the Arts in New Zealand, Forty Works: 1936-86*. Two years later, in 1988, *A Women's Picture Book: 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)*, compiled and edited by Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie and Tilly Lloyd, was published.

The publication, within a two year period, of three books dedicated solely to women artists in New Zealand was a significant milestone in feminist art writing. Despite the continued publication of women-only exhibition catalogues, artist monographs and biographies, single issues of magazines such as *Art New Zealand* and women-only journals such as *Spiral*, these books remain the only 'survey' style mainstream art books to have been published about women in New Zealand. Close comparative analysis of the approaches taken by these three publications gives a clear indication of the status of writing about women artists within a mainstream context.

The organisational structure varies from book to book, presenting the work of women artists in a variety of ways. Kirker's book (fig. 31) takes the most conventional structural approach, producing a chronological survey of women's involvement in art-making in New Zealand from the 1840s through to the present. Viewed from this perspective, *New Zealand Women Artists* can be considered as a counter-narrative to the male-dominated art history put forth by Keith and Brown. Kirker reconstructs a journey, from early pioneers, through a series of expatriates, to the assertion of a national identity, and beyond. In light of this familiar developmental arc, it is perhaps unsurprising that the two artists singled out in the book's chapter headings are Frances Hodgkins and Rita Angus. A series of thematically organised chapters are presented in sequence to form a cohesive developmental narrative, shaped by a single authorial voice.

Eastmond and Penfold take a different approach, choosing to forgo a chronological or developmental organising structure. Rather, their book (fig. 32) presents forty individual works by forty different women artists, arranged alphabetically. Each work is reproduced as a single image colour plate, with the technical details listed on the opposite page. Such an approach grants equal space and attention to each work, while the alphabetical organisation presents a journey that is not defined in terms of chronological progression. Each artist is also represented by a brief text, written by one of the authors (or, in one case, by the artist herself). Again, each artist receives a roughly equal amount of textual space, with the texts organised alphabetically. This organisational structure is non-hierarchical, positioning the artists in a relatively arbitrary sequence. By taking such an approach, Eastmond and Penfold avoid ordering the sequence of works according to judgements of quality.

The editors of *A Women's Picture Book: 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)* (fig. 33) also took an approach which strives to be non-hierarchical. Like Eastmond and Penfold, the editorial team did not shape a coherent single narrative through the course of their book. Rather, Evans, Lonie and Lloyd presented the work of 25 women artists, in order of the artist's date of birth. Although this inevitably results in a loose chronology, it is one positioned in a contemporary, rather than historical, context, as each of the women selected was a practicing artist at the time of the book's publication. The key difference in the approach taken by Evans, Lonie and Lloyd is the relative restriction of their own authorial voice, instead allowing each artist to contribute to the book in the way they desire. Each section of the book – apart from two exceptions – begins with a photographic portrait of the artist, along with a brief biography and note on their contribution. The format of each woman's contribution varies: some take the form of interviews, some essays, or conversations. One artist contributes excerpts from a journal, while another chooses to present a text-based artwork, and yet another submits pages filled with handwritten text and drawings. By providing each contributing artist with relative freedom to present their practice in a variety of formats, the editors of *A Women's Picture Book* foreground the multiplicity of women's subjective experiences, presenting each personal experience as equally valid.

Each of these differing organisational approaches were, of course, motivated by a wider set of values. In each instance, the authors or editors take the opportunity to expand upon these motivations in their introductions. Kirker's introduction demonstrates her long working

knowledge of the New Zealand art landscape in which she played a role both as a curator – most notably at Auckland City Art Gallery and the National Art Gallery in Wellington – and art historian. She makes it clear that she embarked upon the book as a result of her awareness that ‘no comprehensive study existed on artists in New Zealand which gave anywhere near an adequate coverage of women’.³⁴⁷ As has been previously noted in this chapter, in an analysis of Kirker’s writing on Vivian Lynn, she had demonstrated a commitment to women artists prior to the publication of her book, as well as an awareness of the structural issues which determine women’s inclusion in the artistic canon. While her discussion of Lynn’s *Garden Gates* appeared to tread carefully around any direct reference to feminism, that is not the case in her introduction to *New Zealand Women Artists*, in which she refers to ‘feminist writers like myself’.³⁴⁸ Labelling her project as a feminist one, Kirker situates it within a global discourse.

A number of books have been published overseas in the last decade which make accessible the names and works of women artists from all periods in the history of art. This present study aims to build on that solid foundation to produce an analysis of women artists but also to show that their activities have been conditioned by a complex matrix which is social, political and psychological. The fact that an artist happens to be a woman rather than a man matters.³⁴⁹

Kirker’s project, then, rests on a foundation quite different to that expressed by Neligen’s *Women Artists Now* two years prior, or even *New Zealand Women Artists*, the exhibition that Kirker herself had curated with Eric Young a decade earlier. Here, Kirker situates her project within a context that is simultaneously local and global in its feminist intentions. By drawing specific attention to the matrix of conditions within which women artists work, she points directly to the structural nature of gendered inequality. This is reinforced through her assertion that the ‘ubiquitous male has more often than not set the parameters’ for the success – or lack thereof – of women artists.³⁵⁰ In her introduction, Kirker positions her project within a broader discourse of arts writing, explicitly outlining the intention for *New Zealand Women Artists* ‘to go some way towards redressing the balance’.³⁵¹ By framing her narrative in this manner, Kirker demonstrates the mutability of discourse. The position held by Kirker in 1975 does not remain unchanged a decade later – the interplay of art writing,

³⁴⁷ Anne Kirker, *New Zealand Women Artists* (Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1986), 2.

³⁴⁸ Kirker, 2.

³⁴⁹ Kirker, 2.

³⁵⁰ Kirker, 4.

³⁵¹ Kirker, 3.

social change and feminist activism can effect discursive change. Kirker's introduction closes with an expression of her hopes for the book: 'I trust ... that this account will increase the awareness and understanding of women as artists'.³⁵² Methodologically speaking, then, Kirker's approach in *New Zealand Women Artists* echoes that of the feminist strategy of consciousness-raising. Foregrounding the importance of visibility and awareness, consciousness-raising brought together women to share their experiences, in order to shed light on the political nature of personal oppression. Underlying such an approach was the belief that increased understanding and awareness would result in beneficial changes for women. Kirker, too, appears to share this belief. *New Zealand Women Artists*, then, is primarily intended to challenge the way that 'influential voices still downplay the very real achievement of women artists'.³⁵³

Eastmond and Penfold appear to take a similar approach. Though a shorter text, they also frame their project within terms of a broader movement. Eastmond writes: 'There certainly has been a significant outpouring of women's creativity during the seventies and eighties – but has it been adequately reflected in our general books on the arts?'³⁵⁴ She concludes that women continue to 'suffer discrimination by being omitted from major general shows and survey texts'.³⁵⁵ This book was posited, like Kirker's, as a corrective to such omissions. One key point of difference between these projects, though, is indicated by the strategy of dual authorship. Where Kirker presents a unified narrative, written from a single – admittedly subjective – perspective, the choice of two authorial voices is a politically strategic one. Importantly, both Eastmond and Penfold are introduced by means of short biographies in the book's frontispiece. These biographies serve to situate each author within a professional framework, and to position them in relation to each other.

Eastmond's biography focuses upon her academic career, both her training in the United Kingdom and her work in New Zealand. At the time of the book's publication, Eastmond was responsible for co-teaching the first course on women and the arts in New Zealand, in the Art History programme at Auckland University. Her authorship of a book dedicated to women artists in Aotearoa can be seen as an extension of an academic commitment to bringing a

³⁵² Kirker, 5.

³⁵³ Kirker, 2.

³⁵⁴ Eastmond in: Elizabeth Eastmond and Merimeri Penfold, *Women and the Arts in New Zealand, Forty Works: 1936-86* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1986), unpaginated.

³⁵⁵ Eastmond in: Eastmond and Penfold, unpaginated.

feminist perspective to bear on the country's art history. Producing a book that prioritises high-quality reproductions, accompanied by concise but informative textual information, enables Eastmond to reach a far broader and more diverse audience than those students who would be exposed to her ideas in a classroom. Similarly, Penfold's academic career is foregrounded in her biography. Of Ngati Kurii-Te Aupouri descent, Penfold held a position as senior lecturer in Māori Language at the time of the book's publication. She also 'teaches a course in Maori weaving and plaitwork'.³⁵⁶ The emphasis on Penfold's knowledge of te ao Māori, alongside Eastmond's art historical credentials, make clear the role each of these strands of knowledge ought to play in a consideration of women artists in Aotearoa.

The duality of this approach is emphasised by the fact that each woman wrote a separate introductory text for the book, highlighting specific areas of concern. Eastmond begins her preface with an outline of the history of the arts in New Zealand from the 1930s to the present, situating women at every stage of its development. Her discussion of the development of a predominantly 'Pakeha New Zealand art' is integrated into a broader socio-political context.³⁵⁷ Eastmond highlights the social and cultural factors which, through the twentieth century, have impacted on the ways in which women could pursue an artistic pathway:

In the past (and not-so-distant past), potential women artists have often had to make the choice ... between fulfilling society's expectations of women's primary role as nurturer and becoming a 'fulfilled *woman*', and making art a peripheral activity practised under conditions unlikely to further a career or, on the other hand, choosing to place *art* at the centre of a 'necessarily' isolating lifestyle...³⁵⁸

Eastmond goes on to outline the development of the women's art movement in New Zealand, discussing the manner in which it sought to interrogate these established beliefs. Penfold's introductions offers a counterpoint of sorts, expanding upon Eastmond's recognition of the narrowness of much previous art-historical writing. Central to Penfold's discussion is an assertion of the intersectional nature of much gendered inequality. Imbued with a sense of political engagement, Penfold's discussion begins, not with art history, but with the context of Māori activism:

Maori women are currently in the midst of a dynamic movement of identification with aspects of our culture which urban Maori in particular have neglected for the

³⁵⁶ Eastmond and Penfold, unpaginated.

³⁵⁷ Eastmond in: Eastmond and Penfold, unpaginated.

³⁵⁸ Eastmond in: Eastmond and Penfold, unpaginated.

past thirty or forty years. Women artists both traditional and modern have emerged from this context of the general revival of Maori cultural identity, with its growing awareness of the need to preserve and revive the language, the role of the marae and the culture as a whole.³⁵⁹

This foregrounding of Māori cultural activism is clearly reflected in the book's selection of artists, which is consciously based on population ratios to ensure a representative inclusion of Māori and Pasifika artists. This commitment to cultural inclusion also reflects a deeper commitment to the diversity of media than is evident in Kirker's book, which focuses predominantly upon painting and sculpture. The choice to include artists who work in traditional weaving and tivaevae alongside painters, sculptors and photographers proves the authors' intent to break down the 'Pakeha notion of the arts/crafts hierarchy'.³⁶⁰ *Women in the Arts in New Zealand* begins from a starting point which acknowledges the complex matrix of patriarchal and Eurocentric value systems in which artistic canons are forged. In light of the contextual positions articulated by Eastmond and Penfold, the diversity of artworks and artists presented is reflective of an 'inclusive approach [which] challenges most Pakeha notions of art gallery exhibition practice'.³⁶¹

Inclusivity was a central concern, too, for the editors of *A Woman's Picture Book: 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)*. As the format of their book makes clear, Evans, Lonie and Lloyd's intention was to provide a platform for women artists to represent themselves. This displacement of the authorial voice is furthered by the editorial decision not to write the book's introduction themselves, but to include a foreword written by the Human Rights Commissioner, Rae Julian. Evans, Lonie and Lloyd are, however, a constant presence throughout the book, their voices often included as interviewers or correspondents. *A Woman's Picture Book* also includes two substantial afterwords and an appendix, in which the editors reflect upon the process of the book's production, along with some issues it raised. While these texts will be discussed in some detail shortly, the introductory framing provided by the book's foreword is worth noting at this juncture. In comparison to the art historical context provided by the introductions to both *New Zealand Women Artists* and *Women and the Arts in New Zealand*, the foreword to *A Women's Picture Book* situates it firmly within the context of the feminist movement. Women's artistic practice is situated as a mode of self-exploration and expression, free from the constraints of art world conventions:

³⁵⁹ Penfold in: Eastmond and Penfold, unpaginated.

³⁶⁰ Penfold in: Eastmond and Penfold, unpaginated.

³⁶¹ Penfold in: Eastmond and Penfold, unpaginated.

Some feminists discovered their outlets through their creativity. This book tells the stories of a number of such women. It describes their pain, the obstacles that hindered their progress, and above all, it details their success. This was not necessarily success as measured by conventional artistic standards such as exhibitions in major galleries or increased sale of their works. It was rather success demonstrated by an ease of self-expression, the formulation of a coherent philosophy, and the acceptance of their work by feminists.³⁶²

The stories told in *A Women's Picture Book* have their roots in personal experience. Rather than proposing a narrative overview of the art of the period centred upon women, the editors have facilitated a collective document which gives voice to a range of individual subjectivities.

Each of these roughly contemporary books, though all dedicated specifically to women artists in New Zealand, take a distinctive approach to the presentation of their material. All enter into a dialogic relationship with existing arts writing of the time, though they each do so on different terms. How, though, are the ideologies underlying these varying approaches made manifest in the writing about specific artists included within them? An analysis of the way in which two key figures – Rita Angus and Frances Hodgkins – are discussed in this feminist literature is productive here. Critical consideration of the treatment of these artists will demonstrate the way in which this literature engages with the existing writing on New Zealand's two canonical women artists.

Discussion of Frances Hodgkins and Rita Angus has, inevitably, been woven throughout this thesis. The discourse surrounding each woman and her art has been previously examined, and it is against such a discourse that the feminist writings of the 1980s must be considered. The figure of 'Frances Hodgkins' that was constituted in the art writing of the mid-twentieth century was located at once within New Zealand's art history, and outside of it. Her status as an expatriate painter – *the* expatriate – ensured that the prestige of her European success could be conferred upon New Zealand's national art narrative, without disrupting the masculine development of cultural nationalism. In these terms, her success can be read as an addendum to the nationalist canon: this echoes that structural pattern of stereotypical language identified in Chapter One which identified the woman artist as addendum. As detailed in Chapter Two, Rita Angus' distinctive painted depictions of the New Zealand

³⁶² Rae Julian, 'Foreward,' in *A Women's Picture Book: 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)* (Wellington: Government Printing Office, 1988), ix.

landscape secured her a central place within the nationalist narrative. However, the fact of her gender was an inescapable element of critical commentary, consistently marking her as an exception and skewing attention away from her non-landscape works.

For women artists in the 1970s and 80s, it is clear that the characterisation of successful women artists in these terms continued to perpetuate a normative set of gendered behaviours. The visibility of Angus and Hodgkins positioned them as exemplars to women who strove towards an artistic career in Aotearoa. That their ‘cultural grandmothers’ – as Batten might identify them – forged such a contingent relationship to the narrative of New Zealand’s artistic development is fraught with difficulty. Anna Keir, writing in *A Women’s Picture Book*, makes clear the prohibitive impact of the discourse of exceptionality which surrounded women such as Angus and Hodgkins:

My feeling of art not being enough was tied up with the idea that it ... didn’t contribute anything to the world. And that it was in many ways a selfish activity. These ideas were very strong for me, for many years, and linger on still. ... Now since the women’s art movement, I see much of this idea of art not being enough as a symptom of the difficulties of trying to make art without a context and within an unsupportive, and often undermining culture. Without models of women who were artists – not ‘exceptional’ women such as Rita Angus and Frances Hodgkins who often seemed to me to have paid far too high a price, but of women around me who had children and other jobs and somehow integrated making art into that.³⁶³

The ‘undermining culture’ that Keir identifies can be seen exemplified in obvious ways – such as the under-representation of women in galleries and books. The pernicious repetition of biographical details of sacrifice, loneliness and poverty that characterise mainstream depictions of Angus and Hodgkins similarly contribute to a culture which undermines women who are led to believe that art is not enough. The format of *A Woman’s Picture Book* dictates the exclusion of Angus and Hodgkins. Rather than proposing a linear development from one exceptional artist to another, the editors instead posit a sprawling, tangled, densely personal network of peers. By centring upon the personal, and privileging the first-person account, Evans, Lonie and Lloyd bring the fullness of women’s lives into a discursive engagement with their artistic practices. This offers a compelling alternative to the discourse of

³⁶³ Anna Keir in: Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie, and Tilly Lloyd, eds., *A Women’s Picture Book: 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)* (Wellington: Government Printing Office, 1988), 157–58.

exceptionality, positioning women in relation to the realities of their social and political contexts.

Anna Keir's lack of identification with Rita Angus and Frances Hodgkins is the only mention of either of these artists in *A Women's Picture Book*. In contrast, Eastmond and Penfold include both artists in their selection of forty women. In addition, Eastmond mentions both artists repeatedly in her short introductory essay. As she outlines the development of art in the country, Eastmond highlights the prominent role each woman occupied in New Zealand's art history:

Rita Angus, was producing highly significant works throughout the thirties and forties, as was New Zealand's major expatriate artist, Frances Hodgkins. Women painters did not enjoy the same strong showing in subsequent decades until the later seventies and eighties...³⁶⁴

While it may appear that Eastmond singles out Angus and Hodgkins here, it is important to note the numerous women artists that she mentions alongside them. In fact, she appears to suggest that the visibility of these two 'exceptional' women artists in mainstream discourse has overshadowed the work of other practicing women. As Eastmond makes clear, many other 'women artists besides Rita Angus had embarked on their careers in or by the thirties'.³⁶⁵ She goes on to name Eve Polson [Page], Olivia Spencer Bower, Louise Henderson, Lois White, Flora Scales and May Smith. In addition to pointing out the fact that Angus was not, in fact, without peer, Eastmond also makes clear the structural exclusion of many women whose work did not align with a dominant set of artistic values. Exclusions are inherent in the formation of any canonical discourse, such as that which coalesced around New Zealand's national identity in the mid-twentieth century. In that instance, those exclusions were often both cultural and gendered:

The artists mentioned above, however, are painters and it is important to remember that there is often a rather different tale to tell of women's contributions to other media: in fibre arts women, both Maori and Pakeha – for example Rangimarie Hetet, Puti Rare, Zena Abbott, Judy Wilson – have displayed a consistently high profile.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ Eastmond in: Eastmond and Penfold, *Women and the Arts in New Zealand, Forty Works: 1936-86*, unpaginated.

³⁶⁵ Eastmond in: Eastmond and Penfold, unpaginated.

³⁶⁶ Eastmond in: Eastmond and Penfold, unpaginated.

Eastmond then goes on to mention women working in various ‘marginal’ disciplines: photography, sculpture, performance, installation and printmaking. By including women such as these alongside Angus and Hodgkins, Eastmond situates them as figures within a diverse network of artists, rather than as isolated, exceptional, figures.

Reclaiming Rita Angus

The image chosen by Eastmond and Penfold to represent Angus is an oil on canvas *Self Portrait* from 1936-37 (fig 0.4). In this striking painting, Angus has depicted her upper body turned at a 45 degree angle from the picture plane, her head turned slightly to face the viewer with a level, penetrating gaze. Her arms, folded across her torso, frame her face, simultaneously inviting our gaze and blocking access. In one gloved hand, she holds aloft a smouldering cigarette, while the other secures a green beret, draped across her arm. The tilt of her head causes her sharply delineated features to cast shadows upon her face. That harsh light so celebrated in landscape paintings, such the contemporaneous *Cass*, here works to elucidate the structural form of her features. The heightened contrast between light and shadow cast on her face creates a dramatic compositional centre, focusing our attention upon the sharp linearity of her eyes and the defiant red slash of her firmly pursed mouth.

The crystalline clarity with which Angus has depicted her own face is not evident elsewhere in the painting. The bulky coat with its dramatic collar is painted loosely, crisp line forsaken for dense tonal shading, creating an undulating landscape of fabric. The ripples and folds create an excess of material, refusing to articulate the shape of the body underneath. Around her neck a green, polka-dotted scarf is painted with such lustre and shine against the rough stipple of the coat that it is hard to imagine it is any fabric other than silk. Its green is echoed in a single round earring, and in the beret, cast aside in the painting’s lower corner, exposing her modern haircut. The painting’s background is a schematic urban horizon, the angularity of rooflines creating a silhouette against a narrow band of grey green sky, the low hanging horizontality of heavy clouds pressing down towards the buildings from above. The restricted colour palette, dominated by ochres and umbers is enlivened through flashes of colour: the green of her scarf, earring and beret, and the red of her lips. In contrast to the clarity of her face, and the textural richness of her clothes, the painting’s background is flattened, lacking perspectival recession. This flatness renders the background almost superfluous. This is no

landscape painting. Rather, it is a thoroughly modern act of self-representation; there is a defiance to be read in the crossed arms, in the burning cigarette and coolly dispassionate gaze.

It is deeply significant that Eastmond and Penfold have chosen this painting as the sole image to represent Angus in their book. In doing so, they position Angus outside the landscape tradition. In their short text addressing Angus, the diversity of her oeuvre is made explicitly clear:

The artist's work ranges from exquisitely delicate watercolours of flowers through what have come to be seen (to the Pakeha) as archetypal images of the New Zealand landscape, to surrealist imagery, and includes a large number of compelling portraits. She painted many self-portraits in different stages in her life...³⁶⁷

By selecting a self-portrait for reproduction within their book, and making clear the diversity of Angus' artistic practice, Eastmond and Penfold reveal the restrictive nature of the 'regional realist' label when applied to her work. Such a label is strategic, positing a certain type of painting – rightly identified here as being culturally specific – as a universal representation of New Zealand's landscape. By expanding the parameters of Angus' practice, and making clear her interest in a wide range of subject-matter, the authors work to expand the frame of art discourse in Aotearoa, stretching it beyond the narrow limitations of cultural nationalism.

Eastmond and Penfold also make reference to the first major retrospective exhibition of Angus' work, organised by the National Art Gallery in 1982, which played a significant role in cementing Angus' reputation nationally. This exhibition, simply titled *Rita Angus*, and coordinated by Luit Bieringa, went on to tour nationally in 1983 and 1984. The exhibition was accompanied by an extensive publication which included a collection of essays contributed by six authors, alongside a catalogue of works in the show, a chronology and a selection of plates of key works, reproduced in both colour and black and white. This exhibition, held twelve years after her death, was the first real opportunity for many to understand the diversity and breadth of her work. The political ramifications of this diversity were noted by Pat Rosier in *Broadsheet*, in an article discussing the exhibition and its catalogue in some depth. The article begins with a succinct description of the argument to come: 'Pat Rosier

³⁶⁷ Eastmond and Penfold, plate 3.

visited the Rita Angus retrospective exhibition and discovered we have been misled by the art establishment about the range and subject matter of this important woman artist'.³⁶⁸

The exhibition catalogue, bringing together six different authorial perspectives, is in itself a structural challenge to the unified narrative that had shaped the landscape-dominated discussion of Angus' work. The six essays that comprise the catalogue are: 'Biographical Essay' by Janet Paul, 'The Years 1908-1958' by Melvin N. Day, 'The Later Years 1959-1970' by Anne Kirker, 'Rita Angus Criticism 1930-1970' by Michael Dunn, 'Symbolism and the Generation of Meaning in Rita Angus's Painting' by Ronald Brownson, and 'Rita Angus Portraiture' by Anthony Mackle. Note, significantly, the absence of an essay devoted to her depictions of New Zealand's landscape.

Rosier, writing in *Broadsheet*, explains: 'I found this exhibition revelatory. Previously I had a limited knowledge of Angus' painting, one that had been prescribed by the art establishment, represented by writers of art books'.³⁶⁹ It is one thing for a feminist writer to make such an assertion within the politicised pages of a feminist magazine, noted for its desire to tackle the entrenched patriarchy of the 'establishment'. Rosier's position, however, is not unique in the literature surrounding this exhibition. In the catalogue essay, 'Rita Angus Criticism 1930-1970', Michael Dunn engages with a similar set of concerns, while historicising the critical responses that shaped Angus' artistic reputation. Rosier claims the 'art establishment' was responsible for moulding Angus into the archetypal figure 'Rita Angus'. So too does Dunn acknowledge the power of discourse in shaping perceptions:

Stylistically the works of Rita Angus, Colin McCahon and M.T. Woollaston are quite distinct. The grouping of the three was an invention of art writers who sought to give a more unified character to the life and work of these painters than had actually existed. Although well-intentioned and helpful to the reputation of Rita Angus, the grouping seemed to her to involve the theft of her real art history and its substitution with a myth.³⁷⁰

This mythic narrative shapes a powerful figure: she was the arch regional realist who sacrificed motherhood and financial stability in order to be considered alongside McCahon and Woollaston. Despite the generational, stylistic and ideological differences of these three

³⁶⁸ Pat Rosier, 'Rita Angus: The Woman in the Landscape,' *Broadsheet* 108 (April 1983), 19.

³⁶⁹ Rosier, 21.

³⁷⁰ Michael Dunn, 'Rita Angus Criticism 1930-1970,' in *Rita Angus* (Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1982), 66.

artists, this ‘unified character’ has proven a stubbornly appealing grouping. This is a story shaped by a dominant discourse committed to developing a cultural history for the nation. It is not a story that has been constructed through a fulsome examination of her oeuvre. The staging of a retrospective exhibition which cast light on the eclecticism of Angus’ practice, and foregrounded both symbolism and portraiture within her work, allowed writers such as Eastmond and Penfold to step outside the confines of this narrative when discussing her work.

Kirker’s treatment of Angus in *New Zealand Women Artists* follows a biographical framework, which is a pattern repeated throughout the book. Each artist’s biography is presented within a thematic chapter, with several significant paintings discussed in relative detail. It is telling that the chapter in which Angus appears is titled ‘Rita Angus and the Assertion of a National Identity’, situating her firmly within the dominant art historical narrative, while simultaneously positioning her as an exemplary figure within that narrative. That *Cass* is the first painting by Angus that Kirker discusses in some detail seems to confirm that assumption. However, she goes on to claim that ‘it is Rita Angus’s predilection for self portraiture which dominates her oeuvre’.³⁷¹ Kirker, despite her insistence on aligning Angus with the quest for an aesthetic expression of national identity, attempts to create a more complex picture of her working practice.

Each publication seeks to present Angus as more than a landscape painter, attempting to trouble the cohesive narrative which had coalesced around her. It is apparent that the anti-hierarchical structural choices made by Eastmond and Penfold are political in intent. So too the decisions made by Evans, Lonie and Lloyd to provide a platform for women artists to speak of their own subjective experiences. Kirker also acknowledges her desire to ‘redress the balance’ of art historical bias.³⁷² However, Kirker has largely stayed within the parameters outlined in her introduction: ‘In short, I wanted to answer the questions of what these women have done and who they are’.³⁷³ The three major publications dedicated to New Zealand’s women artists published in the latter half of the 1980s loosely fit this general characterisation. In focusing on the presentation of individual biographical narratives, largely descriptive in tone, all three books succeed in bringing attention to ‘what these women have

³⁷¹ Kirker, *New Zealand Women Artists*, 98.

³⁷² Kirker, 2.

³⁷³ Kirker, 5.

done'. They bring visibility and representation to women artists within a broadly published discourse.

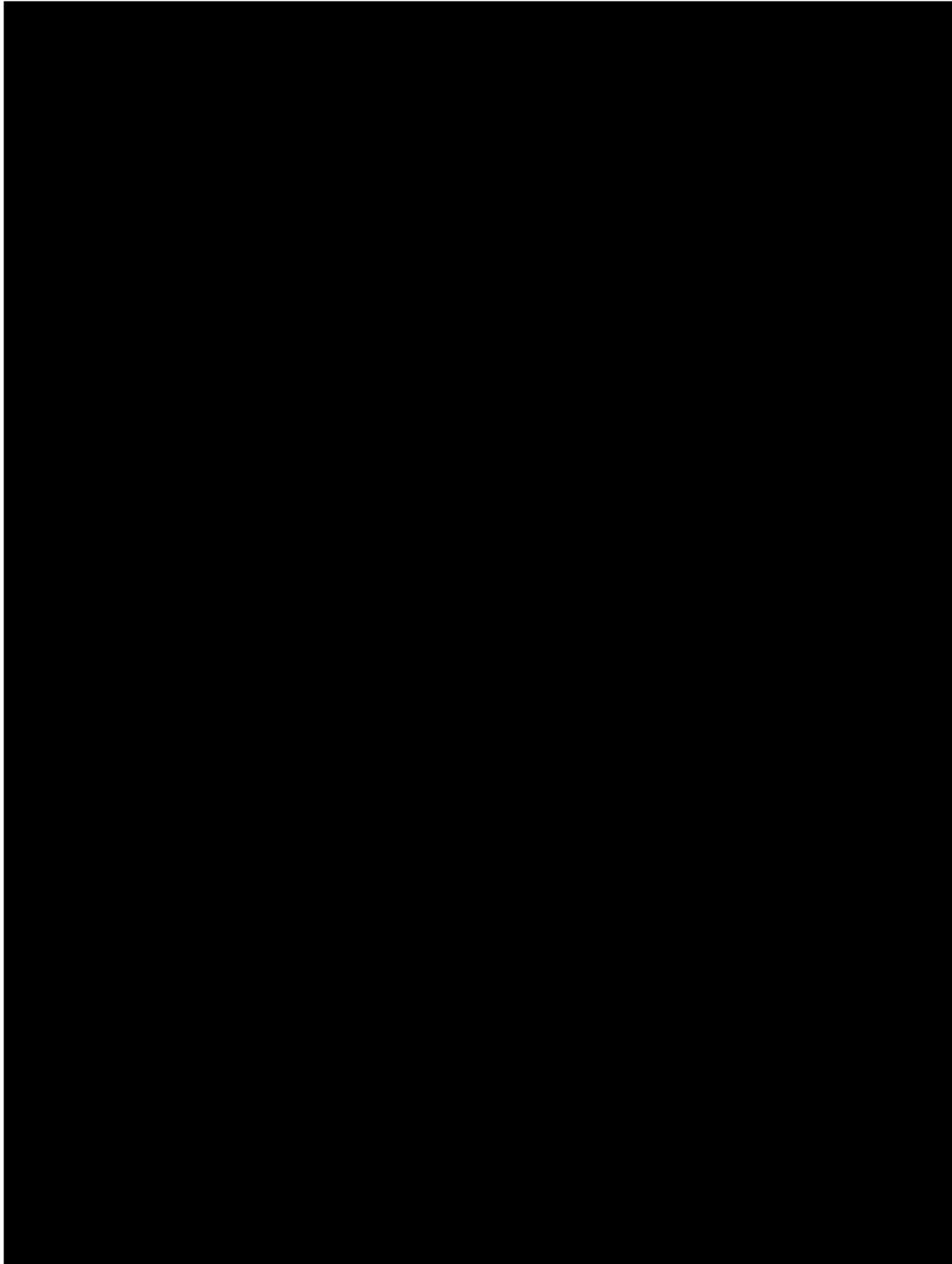


Figure 0.5: Vivian Lynn, *Span*, mixed media day book, 1982
(Estate of the artist)

Chapter Five

The 1980s: Deconstructing the ‘Woman Artist’

During the 1980s, the broadening arts discourse was informed by a variety of feminist methodologies. There is a temptation to categorise these methodologies into two divergent – and therefore oppositional – camps. First, is that feminist approach which sought equality for women within the existing arts infrastructure: the inclusion of more women in exhibitions, the coverage of more women in magazines and journals, and the publication of books celebrating the achievements of women artists. The overlap between such an approach and that of feminist consciousness raising is evident, and rests on a belief in the power of inclusion as a political strategy. Many of the publications examined in Chapter Four could be classified along such lines. The second categorisation is characterised by a desire to critically interrogate the ideological underpinning of the existing arts infrastructure itself. Informed by critical theory, this approach is often considered more sophisticated than the pursuit of visibility. Its proponents seek to challenge the patriarchal and phallogocentric structure underlying the writing of art’s history, and maintain that adding women to an existing discourse – making them visible – does nothing to actively challenge the gendered biases embedded in its structure. Such categorisations do bring a level of clarity to a complex set of positions. However, operating on the assumption that these tendencies are mutually exclusive and oppositional is a reductive approach. As this chapter demonstrates, this oversimplification is complicated by the fact that many artists and writers worked within a paradigm that traversed both, supposedly divergent, approaches.

As the 1980s progressed, critical theory came to play an increasingly central role in cultural criticism in the country. The analysis of language as a signifying system became increasingly sophisticated, allowing a structural interrogation of the manner in which discourse and representation shape subjectivity. The short-lived journal *And* provided a platform for such engagement in the pages of its four issues, published between 1983 and 1985. *And* was established by Leigh Davis, Roger Horrocks and Alex Calder, in response to a perceived ‘inability for the discourse of New Zealand literature to develop conceptually or theoretically’.³⁷⁴ While predominantly dedicated to an engagement with New Zealand

³⁷⁴ Leigh Davis, ‘Set Up,’ *And* 1 (August 1983), 5.

literature, *And* also reflected critically on the visual arts, with writers such as Wystan Curnow and Anthony Green publishing work within its pages.

Sprawling and elusive, postmodernist theory is notoriously difficult to define or unify, though at the project's core lies a critique of hegemonic structures of meaning. Writing in the late 1980s, Jonathan Culler, Professor of Comparative Literature at Cornell University, addresses the underlying structural concerns of the theoretical turn:

These theoretical investigations identify the literary not as a marginal phenomenon but as a pervasive logic of signification. ... If there is a unity to literary studies in this new dispensation it comes not from the canon: women's studies, black studies, and the various theoretical orientations I have mentioned have given us multiple canons and placed on the agenda questions about canon formation, its mechanisms, and costs. The unity, such as it is, comes from attention to mechanisms of signification in texts and text-like situations.³⁷⁵

This focus on the interrogation of canon-formation provides a clear overlap with the feminist critiques of art histories that were gaining traction during the 1980s. As we have seen, such critiques were beginning to impact mainstream arts discourse in New Zealand, with an increase in the visibility of women artists and writers. However, it is arguable whether the inclusion of more women actually altered the ideological structure upon which the discourse was built. In order to do so, an increasing number of writers – and artists – turned to these 'theoretical investigations' throughout the 1980s. *And*, committed to 'mild forms of sabotage and re-examination,' provided the first published forum for serious consideration of these ideas.³⁷⁶ The polyvocality alluded to by Culler is evident, too, in *And*, with Davis emphasising a nimble, diverse and experimental form of criticism over a desire to authoritatively form an exclusive, fixed canon. Pluralism and multiplicity lie at the heart of the critical project. A mainstream discourse, presenting its constructed parameters as given and neutral, must be challenged by alternative responses:

Such discourse has been able for a long time to carry, as a submerged code, the assumption that the literature discussed is approximately one literature, as writing of a certain stamp. For *And* the essential question is, what must now be said about New Zealand literature, because the picture has altered? Rigidities, inarticulateness, and lacunae have begun to extend. The information clamours and re-presents itself.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ Jonathan Culler, 'Poststructuralist Criticism,' *Style* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1987), 169.

³⁷⁶ Davis, 'Set Up,' 1.

³⁷⁷ Davis, 6.

Despite Davis' repeated use of 'literature' here, other modes of representation were presented and discussed within the journal's pages. It was within this context that the increasing impact of French poststructuralist thought on feminist thought began to gain visibility in New Zealand. In Issue 3, published in October of 1984, Elizabeth Eastmond contributed an essay in response to the work of the painter and photographer Alexis Hunter. The essay brings a linguistic-based analysis of signification into the realm of New Zealand art. Its title, 'The Snake Slid, some Signifieds Collided – in recent works by Alexis Hunter', makes clear the influence of this theoretical impulse.

Earlier that same year, in April, Eastmond had covered the same Hunter exhibition within the pages of *Broadsheet*. Both articles were written in response to the exhibition *An Artist Looking for her Muse*, held in October of 1983 at RKS Gallery in Auckland. Though each article discusses similar central concerns, the difference in approach taken by Eastmond in her writing demonstrates the expansion of the discursive context that a more specialist publication could provide. On a rudimentary level, an obvious difference between *Broadsheet* and *And* is one of physical space. The *Broadsheet* article appears within a regular section titled 'In a Feminist Sense'. This feature, situated towards the back of each magazine, reviews a number of cultural outputs – exhibitions, books, poetry and film – in a collection of short columns by a number of writers. In the April issue, ten columns are printed over a total of six pages, each column contributed by a different writer. Eastmond's discussion of Hunter's exhibition is the longest of the ten, covering roughly a full page, and including a single black and white image. In contrast, the long-form literary context provided by *And* provides space for Eastmond to expand considerably upon her thinking, contributing a 14 page essay which includes reproductions – albeit of relatively poor quality – of 17 artworks.

Both of Eastmond's discussions foreground Hunter's status as a feminist artist, though the critical context for this is quite different in each essay. In her text for *Broadsheet* – published first, and for a specifically feminist audience – Eastmond opens her discussion with the recognition that Hunter's series poses a challenge to feminist ideologies:

The Muse is a horned, devilish creature, grasping his huge erect penis with both hands. Hunter juxtaposes the searching artist figure on the left of the picture space with the results of the quest in the area to the right. Not quite the image of creative inspiration many women artists find inspiring. More like a slap in the

face, in fact, for feminists, because the expectations aroused by the title of the exhibition. Surely more anti-feminist than feminist in content?³⁷⁸

Writing within the context of *Broadsheet*, Eastmond's article is a considered response to this 'anti-feminist' interpretation. Though never explicitly using language that challenges biological essentialism, Eastmond does gesture towards a more complex understanding of visual signification. Hunter, she argues, 'rarely comes up with the calmly Utopian answer – conflict is central to her vision'.³⁷⁹ Eastmond makes clear the fact that Hunter refuses to construct a visual language 'independent of reference to the male principle'.³⁸⁰ This, Eastmond assumes, will be a source of disappointment for many feminist viewers of Hunter's work, and indeed for the readers of *Broadsheet*.

Not only does the essay in *And* allow for a considerably longer argument, the knowledge that Eastmond is not writing for a specifically feminist audience allows her to write within broader parameters. *And* was consciously positioned as a space to allow for 'loose and responsive' discussion, writing that enters 'in the middle of conversations already started'.³⁸¹ Unlike the position of singularity declared by the editors of *Art in New Zealand* or *Art New Zealand*, Davis makes clear the discursive network within which *And* sought to operate. This editorial position provided Eastmond with more open-ended parameters within which to write than those defined by *Broadsheet*. Though her essay for *And*, published six months later than that for *Broadsheet*, re-treads similar terrain, it does so from a more critically engaged perspective.

Writing in *And*, Eastmond seems to gesture towards her earlier feminist defence of Hunter when she writes:

Interestingly one reading of the images some viewers took from this exhibition demonstrated the very real risks and problems involved in the re-visionings and appropriations necessary in constructing alternative modes for the representation of women and of our 'attributes'. ... In other words, impossible for some, given a title using the word 'Muse' and an image involving a female figure, to

³⁷⁸ Elizabeth Eastmond, 'An Artist Looking for Her Muse, Alexis Hunter at RKS Gallery, Auckland, October 1983,' *Broadsheet* 118 (April 1984), 42.

³⁷⁹ Eastmond, 43.

³⁸⁰ Eastmond, 43.

³⁸¹ Davis, 'Set Up,' 2.

disassociate the image of the woman from the notion of the Muse with all its traditional signifieds.³⁸²

On a surface level, such a reading could be attributed to Eastmond's own writing six months prior. However, the theoretical complexity only gestured towards in *Broadsheet* is explored in depth here, expanding the interpretive field. Such a discussion layers these different contexts upon one another. Eastmond's essay in *And* engages in linguistic theory and feminism, signalling a strand of feminist criticism which became increasingly prevalent in the 1980s. In fact, Eastmond makes such a link explicit, positioning her interrogation of Hunter's work precisely within this intersection. Her engagement with the thematic investigations contained within *An Artist looking for her Muse* opens – not with a statement of its feminist intent – but rather with linguistic analysis. The series' title, Eastmond asserts, ensures that:

... a position of textual openness is clearly articulated. The on-going present tense of its active 'looking for' in relation to its object 'Muse' carries with it the notion of the quest's emphasis on the priority of process over promises of perfect products. This notion hints at connections with an impulse postmodernism shares with feminist theory: a distrust of the formulation of new absolutes in place of the old...³⁸³

The feminism referenced here is not one that seeks to replace the patriarchy with a matriarchy, to replace Gods with Goddesses and male dominance with that of women. The feminism Eastmond refers to here is one that is informed by theory, a feminism already cognisant of the importance of challenging 'modes of representation' themselves.³⁸⁴ As the 1980s progressed, this deepening engagement with theory grew to exert an increasingly powerful influence on cultural commentary. Writing in *And*, film theorist Roger Horrocks was already aware of the political implications of feminist critique on contemporary discourse:

Feminist art is now a large field incorporating work of many types. There is art in a realist style; there is art that is not realist but very concerned with notions of reality; there is ritual and exorcism (the magician as witch) and there are 'language' experiments. All this activity has (or should have) made us all the more aware of the politics involved in reading and of the way in which a 'frame' can shape and exclude.³⁸⁵

³⁸² Elizabeth Eastmond, 'The Snake Slid, Some Signifieds Collided - in Recent Works by Alexis Hunter,' *And* 3 (October 1984), 35.

³⁸³ Eastmond, 33.

³⁸⁴ Eastmond, 32.

³⁸⁵ Roger Horrocks, 'The Invention of New Zealand,' *And* 1 (August 1983), 21.

Here Horrocks acknowledges the multiplicity of feminist art, while also demonstrating an awareness of the implications of such critiques on broader discourse. By acknowledging the politics of inclusion which shape our histories, Horrocks identifies a critical potential in feminism which overlaps with the poststructuralist interrogation of the author / reader relationship. *And* was not the only publication to appear in the 1980s which traversed the theoretical terrain which stretched between postmodern theory and feminist thought. Julie Ewington acknowledged the gains made by feminism in another such publication in 1986:

This is a fascinating, pivotal moment for feminism in the arts... In art, as in other aspects of social life, women have come to revalue the culture of femininity, and one of the most interesting cultural shifts in recent years has been seeing what was previously subcultural becoming acceptable within the dominant discourses of art. This work is a splendid gain of feminism.³⁸⁶

Ewington, an Australian art historian, made this observation in her essay 'Past the Post: Postmodernism and Postfeminism,' published in the inaugural issue of *Antic*. The cessation of publication of *And* in 1985 left a space in the critical terrain which the editors of *Antic* – Susan Davis, Elizabeth Eastmond and Priscilla Pitts – hoped to fill. Their magazine foregrounded theoretically engaged criticism and debate, 'dealing with recent directions in feminist and other theoretical practices often ignored by existing arts publications in New Zealand'.³⁸⁷ In the pages of *Antic*, feminism, as a critical strategy, was increasingly incorporated into a broader theoretical context. The richness of this contextual framework is explored by numerous authors in *Antic's* first issue, Ewington's essay was only one example which brought these two conceptual frameworks into direct conversation. Susan Davis and Margaret Meyer similarly make explicit the ideological affinities between feminism and postmodern critical theory in their discussion of American critical theorist Craig Owens:

...the work of feminist critics such as Kristeva and Nelly Furman is increasingly similar to much recent writing on postmodernism. Craig Owens for example suggests that the two methodologies have much in common: both seek to upset the reassuring stability of the mastering position, with their common insistence on difference and incommensurability, and both put the subject of representation in crisis.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ Julie Ewington, 'Past the Post: Postmodernism and Postfeminism,' *Antic* 1 (1986), 16.

³⁸⁷ 'Editorial,' *Antic* 1 (June 1986), 3.

³⁸⁸ Susan Davis and Margaret Meyer, 'Silence and Animosity: Futures in the Gender Debate,' *Antic* 1 (1986), 137.

While a number of writers in this first issue drew out the important sites of intersection between these two strands of theoretical thought, it was Lita Barrie who brought these issues to bear on the local specificity of New Zealand. First presented as a paper at the Criticism Symposium held at the National Art Gallery in 1986, Barrie's essay, 'Remissions: Toward a Deconstruction of Phallic Univocality,' took feminist artists and critics in New Zealand to task for failing to keep up with critical theoretical developments in feminist thought. The essay was also published in a 1986 issue of the Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand (AGMANZ) Journal. However, it was its inclusion in *Antic*, along with a second, related essay in the following edition, which provided Barrie with the most widespread circulation for her argument. In these essays, Barrie offered a locally situated argument within the internationally engaged context of *Antic*. Her appraisal of the situation in New Zealand was not positive, declaring:

What has not yet emerged in New Zealand is feminist work which plays upon the ambivalences inherent within the socio-historic determinants of 'femininity'. That is to say, CRITICAL feminist art, which challenges cultural codes which create women's repression.³⁸⁹

This dismissal of the criticality of New Zealand feminist art in its entirety is an aggressively sweeping statement. As previous discussions of artists such as Alexis Hunter and Vivian Lynn demonstrate, Barrie's conclusions seem to be refuted by the evidence.³⁹⁰

Lynn's 1982 work *Span* (fig 0.5) provides a particularly powerful rebuttal to Barrie's statement, interrogating the authority of the book, the boundaries of materiality and the structural power of language. Described by Lynn as a day book, and made between 1982 and 2008, *Span* consists of a number of 'pages' which, like her earlier *Book of Forty Images* resist simple categorisation. Each of these works challenge the narrative linguistic authority of the book, adopting its form in order to subvert its power. *Span* operates on shifting terrain, it is at once – but neither – book, sculpture and painting. Each skin-like page is texturally imperfect, warped and rippled, and frequently fringed with hair, the page's materiality both artistic and bodily. The reference to the human body is extended further through the inscription of fragmentary words and phrases often overlaid upon Rorschach-like smears of pigment which

³⁸⁹ Lita Barrie, 'Remissions: Toward a Deconstruction of Phallic Univocality,' *Antic* 1 (1986): 99.

³⁹⁰ See Chapter 2 of: Kirsty Baker, *Inhabiting the Threshold: The Women's Gallery as Liminal Space in New Zealand's Feminist Art History* for further analysis of the inaccuracy of Barrie's argument.

give the pages an organic symmetry. One such page is predominantly free from text, apart from five words inscribed on the page's lower portion in a careful cursive hand:

nature		culture
	mind	
culture		nature

The words 'nature' and 'culture' are densely codified, reaffirming the binary oppositions which underpin socially constructed understandings of gender. Nature – the feminine – is frequently positioned as less valuable in relation to culture. Culture – the masculine – is defined by the intellect: it can tame and control nature, shaping the world through the power of the human mind. Nature is bodily where culture is cognitive, it is emotional where culture is rational. Lynn, by proposing and inverting these binaries, gestures towards their interchangeability. The inclusion of the word 'mind' in a central position implies that such distinctions are not bodily, they are not determined by some essential fact of biology. Language itself plays a structural role in the imposition of such reductive categories. However, by inscribing these words on a page which is tangibly material – skin-like, fringed with occasional strands of hair – Lynn points towards the inescapability of human physicality. *Span* seems to work to refute the notion of biological determinism, while simultaneously drawing attention to the constructed nature of binary oppositions often taken for granted.

Lynn's conceptual and material negotiation of these complex issues are one example of an artist working through – in Barrie's words – 'the ambivalences inherent within the socio-historic determinants of "femininity"'.³⁹¹ *Span* interrogates such ambivalences, while also critiquing the discursive power of language, and the way they are harnessed to construct reductive narratives.

It was not only artists that Barrie declared theoretically lacking; art writing drew similarly sharp criticism. She argued that arts writing in New Zealand:

... fails to acknowledge the complexities of authorship and of audience reception as they are constituted outside the artwork, by sets of social relations deriving from the ideological determinants. Through this omission, New Zealand art criticism consistently fails to locate art as a social practice and fails to recognize the subversive potential within criticism itself... by avoiding the inter-relations

³⁹¹ Barrie, 'Remissions: Toward a Deconstruction of Phallic Univocality,' 99.

obtaining between art, subject and their historical conjunction, criticism can only hope to provide entertainment.³⁹²

It should be evident, from the examination of criticism by writers such as Sotheran, Pitts, Eastmond and Hunter in this chapter, that Barrie's assertion is inaccurate. As she herself admits, her 'intention is to be provocative'.³⁹³ However, it was not only in *Antic* that criticism was turning its attention to the areas that Barrie claimed it was ignoring. These issues were also referenced in *Art New Zealand* – a significantly more mainstream publication with wider circulation. In a 1988 essay, Jonathan Smart acknowledged, via Craig Owens, the fact that 'feminism certainly, is "one of the most salient aspects of our postmodern culture"'.³⁹⁴ A number of exhibitions were also held during the late 1980s which sought to address such issues. The National Art Gallery of New Zealand's 1986 exhibition, *Content/Context: A Survey of Recent New Zealand Art*, was clearly marked by such theoretical influences. Curated by Luit Bieringa, the exhibition was accompanied by a publication which, although dominated by reproductions of the works exhibited, also expanded upon its curatorial approach. The influence of postmodern thinking – particularly in relation to the deconstruction of master narratives – is clearly evident in the publication's introductory text:

Content/Context provides some patterns of signification/content rather than a single, exclusive meaning and in so doing its broad setting/context will, I trust, reveal and emphasise the notion of the visual and thus the role of the artwork or art activity. The framework of those concerns and meanings can be revealed or accumulatively provide the viewer with a system of signs or individual ordering.³⁹⁵

Two years later, in 1988, an even more explicitly theoretical exhibition was organised at Auckland's Artspace, curated by poet and art critic Wystan Curnow, in association with the artist Mary-Louise Browne. Both Curnow and Browne share a sustained interest in language and the role of spectatorship. Such influence is clear in the organisation of *Sex & Sign*, with Curnow emphasising the textual aspects of representation in the exhibition's accompanying catalogue:

The works here are presented as texts for readers. Not so much paintings or sculptures, but variously works-on-paper involving a variety of processes and

³⁹² Barrie, 91–92.

³⁹³ Barrie, 87.

³⁹⁴ Jonathan Smart, 'Havin' a Ball: A Show by Mary Kay,' *Art New Zealand* 47 (Winter 1988), 66.

³⁹⁵ Luit Bieringa, 'Introduction', in *Content/Context: A Survey of Recent New Zealand Art* (Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1986), 9.

materials which serve to link signs to their production, reproduction and consumption.³⁹⁶

Curnow and Browne framed *Sex & Sign* as an artistic interrogation of the arbitrary and contingent manner in which language structures meaning. In so doing they situate the viewer – or reader – as the site at which that meaning is generated. Rather than descriptive or explanatory texts relating to each artist, the catalogue extended the textual field. Each artist was asked to contribute a number of theoretical quotations which they feel reflect upon the theme of the exhibition. Like *Content/Context*, then, *Sex & Sign* refused to present a unified, or ‘exclusive,’ meaning, instead providing viewers with a dense network of signification, leaving the onus upon them to ‘read’ the exhibition as they saw fit. As *Antic* posited a close relationship between feminist and postmodernist or poststructuralist theory, so too did these exhibitions. Bieringa points directly to the role of women writers in the discursive expansion of the 1980s, listing a number of the writers whose work has been discussed in this chapter, crediting them with making important contributions to ‘the wider debate and analysis of a less hierarchical cultural environment’.³⁹⁷ The correlation between these schools of thought is stated in more theoretical terms by Curnow in his catalogue essay for *Sex & Sign*:

There is a relation between language, the symbolic order, and the construction of gender. This follows on from a recognition, new in this century, that there is no experience unmediated by language and that our subjectivity, gender included, is inextricably bound into the system of language, and the other signifying codes that make up the symbolic order.³⁹⁸

This is one of the earliest instances of a relation between language and the construction of gender playing out within a New Zealand art context. As we have seen, this terrain was explored in the pages of theoretically engaged publications such as *Antic*, and also through exhibitions such as *Content/Context* and *Sex & Sign*. Other exhibitions held during this period which addressed these issues were *After McCahon: Some Configurations in Recent Art* curated by Christina Barton at the Auckland Art Gallery in 1989, and *Nobodies: Adventures of the Generic Figure* curated by Robert Leonard for the National Art Gallery in 1989.

³⁹⁶ Wystan Curnow, ‘Sex & Sign’ (Artspace, 1988), unpaginated.

³⁹⁷ Luit Bieringa, ‘Content/Context,’ in *Content/Context: A Survey of Recent New Zealand Art* (Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1986), 12.

³⁹⁸ Curnow, ‘Sex & Sign,’ unpaginated.

During the late 1980s, Merylyn Tweedie undertook a rigorous interrogation of these issues within her artistic practice. Tweedie's work was included in *Content/Context, Sex & Sign, After McCahon* and *Nobodies*, as well being reproduced in the pages of *Antic*. Tweedie's writing also appeared in a 1986 issue of the AGMANZ Journal, and a piece entitled 'Dora re-constructs a debate about the vaginal vs. the clitoral' appeared in Issue 4 of *Antic*. An examination of Tweedie's work makes apparent the way that her work actively challenges the limiting power of written discourse. Consistently interrogating the limits of language and the division between art and writing, Tweedie's practice ranges across disciplines. By actively participating in an unfolding theoretical discourse – as both author and subject – Tweedie's work interrogates issues of authorship.

Tweedie's contribution to *Antic 4* sits at the intersection of artwork and writing. The work is part essay, part artist's pages. Throughout the piece, Tweedie destabilises meaning and utilises erasure as a function of authorship. Though attributed to Tweedie in the issue's index, the text work is an early example of a prolonged exploration of authorial displacement. In this early instance, Tweedie assumes the voice of 'Dora', a pseudonym for Ida Bauer, the subject of Freud's 1905 book, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*. The work positions sections of disjunctive text in an alternating columnar arrangement (fig. 34). Text taken from Freud's writing occupies the first and third column on each page and utilises a large font. While, on one hand, a hierarchy of size ensures readers interpret these columns as the primary – or 'master' – text, the large font size also works to subvert this notion, edging parts of words off the narrow line, disrupting their coherence. For example, the upper portion of text on the work's second page reads as follows:

the
girl
into
the
situati
on of
the
Oedipu
s
comple
x.⁵³⁹⁹

³⁹⁹ Merylyn Tweedie, 'Dora Re-Constructs a Debate about the Vaginal vs. the Clitoral,' *Antic 4* (October 1988), unpaginated.

The numerical insertions in this text – such as the ‘5’ seen in this example – refer directly to the alternating columns of text, in significantly smaller font headlined with the title ‘Notes’. These columns of notes are pieced together from the texts of numerous writers, including Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. In addition to these quotations, Tweedie / Dora has also quoted quotations: Toril Moi is cited as quoting Luce Irigaray, Jacqueline Rose is quoted quoting Hélène Cixous. The mesh of quotations that ‘Dora’ weaves together function to continually defer both authorship and meaning, the text becoming a site of perpetual slippage and elision. Further exacerbating the reader’s desire to decode or close the text are the numerous examples of textual erasure. Not only are the fragmentary quotes decontextualized, and re-contextualised in conversation with each other, significant portions of the ‘notes’ are *sous rature* – literally under erasure. This strategy involves scoring through words while retaining their legibility. As Madan Sarup explains, in his book *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, this technique, though derived from the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, became a significant strategic device in Jacques Derrida’s work of deconstruction:

To put a term ‘*sous rature*’ is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. The idea is this: since the word is inaccurate, or, rather, inadequate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary it remains legible. ... For Derrida the sign cannot be taken as a homogeneous unit bridging an origin (referent) and an end (meaning)... The sign must be studied ‘under erasure’, always already inhabited by the trace of another sign which never appears as such.⁴⁰⁰

Tweedie’s frequent usage of this strategy in Dora’s ‘reconstruction’ of Freud’s debate ensures that words become inadequate linguistic signs, rather than definitive carriers of meaning. By creating a dissonant linguistic collage of engagement with Freud’s text, Tweedie / Dora emphasises multivocality and a constantly shifting subjective position. Grappling with the construction of gender in language and society, the citational commentary makes structurally apparent the impossibility of positioning a coherent female subjectivity through existing systems of linguistic representation. Consider the following ‘note’, taken from Luce Irigaray’s 1985 landmark book, *Speculum of the Other Woman*:

⁴⁰⁰ Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 33–34.

6. It becomes a question of how can these relations of meaning be challenged and changed while the woman remains locked within phallogentrism:

~~“Woman”~~
~~within~~
~~patriarchal—~~
~~systems~~
~~of—representation—~~
~~is~~
~~everywhere~~
~~signified, written~~
~~and read as~~
~~the~~
~~fantasmic—cause—~~
~~and~~
~~support of~~
~~male~~
~~desire~~
~~and~~
~~everywhere—~~
~~negated~~
~~and—repressed—~~
~~as~~
~~speaking subject.~~⁴⁰¹

The usage of *sous rature* in conjunction with Irigaray’s text here acts as a visual manifestation of a complex theoretical contradiction. Women are ‘everywhere negated and repressed as speaking subject’ – the language available to them does not allow them to forge a way out of this negation. In order to attempt to take up the position of speaking subject, women can use only the tools available to them. Both linguistic and visual representation are themselves tools of a patriarchal system which structurally relegates them to a position determined in relation to the male centre. By scoring through Irigaray’s attempts to articulate this contradiction, Tweedie / Dora uses the visual shock of the scored-through text to demonstrate that, though these words are all we have, they are not enough. The language women utilise in attempts to articulate their subjectivity is at once necessary and inadequate.

⁴⁰¹ Tweedie, ‘Dora Re-Constructs a Debate about the Vaginal vs. the Clitoral,’ unpaginated.

Tweedie takes existing writing as her subject matter and material, weaving together a shifting, multi-vocal mesh of re-contextualised meaning. Using the written word as a starting point – as medium as much as message – the expectations of page layout are subverted. By aligning the text in the columns marked ‘notes’ to both left and right margins, sporadic large gaps are formed between words. Visually, these white spaces become imagined erasures, gaps into which alternative signifiers could conceivably be slotted. Arranged in alternating columns, and intentionally unpaginated, the text leaves the reader unmoored. Do we follow the dominant text from start to finish, and then move on to the smaller text? Or do we consult the notes as they are numerically referenced, causing us to jump from column to column, page to page, and voice to voice? By forcing the reader into an awareness of these readerly choices, their illusions of neutrality are punctured. In asking the reader to navigate the text in this manner, the artifice of narrative logic is rendered an obvious construct.

The porous nature of linguistic meaning is again emphasised by the text’s formal layout. Following the nine pages arranged in this format are a further eight pages of text. Here, the words are utterly adrift, liberated from the confines of the column’s structure (fig. 35). Gone, too, are the numerical note references affixed to the text, attributing the writing to a named writer within a locatable source. Here, individual words and phrases float freely on the negative space of the blank page. Text varies in font style and size. Words are again scored through and left visible – no clear meaning can be discerned, whether or not we include them in our reading. Linguistic repetition becomes a powerful device in this portion of the text. Multiple speaking positions are referenced repeatedly: ‘her’, ‘her’, ‘her’, ‘the speaker’, ‘she’, ‘the reader’, ‘girl’, ‘her’, ‘I’, ‘mother’s’, ‘girl’, ‘you’, ‘her’, ‘mother.’ By isolating the repetitive pattern of these subject labels as they occur across the last eight pages, a notable absence emerges: that of a specifically male speaking position. Tweedie’s strategy here is reminiscent of Julia Kristeva’s assertion, as introduced by Ann Rosalind Jones:

Women’s strategy should be neither to adopt masculine modes of power nor to flee encounters with the symbolic, but to assume ‘a *negative* function: reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society. Such an attitude puts women on the side of the explosion of social codes: with revolutionary movements’.⁴⁰²

⁴⁰² Julia Kristeva quoted in: Ann Rosalind Jones, ‘Inscribing Femininity: French Theories of the Feminine,’ in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 86.

As the reader progresses through Dora's re-construction, the correlation between text and meaning disintegrates further and further. The work becomes a process through which 'everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning' is rejected, its signifiers reconfigured into something permeable, slippery and elusive. By removing attribution in the second portion of the text, and presenting a shifting network of female speaking subjects, Tweedie refuses to adopt 'masculine modes of power'. The refusal of a single locatable speaking subject is a strategic feminist approach, which subverts the dominant discourse. While 'Dora re-constructs a debate about the vaginal vs. the clitoral' can be considered a textual and artistic working-through of this strategy, Tweedie outlined this position more explicitly in an essay published two years prior, in *AGMANZ Journal*. She asks: 'Can we counter the Western cultural hegemony in its ceaseless and generally unquestioned production of meanings, and if so how far has the project of deconstructing male-defined universals proceeded?'⁴⁰³ By explicitly linking the interrogation of assumed meaning to a male-defined cultural hegemony, Tweedie makes clear the feminist politics underpinning the strategic embrace of pluralism and fluidity of meaning.

It is perhaps unsurprising that Tweedie was not included in *A Woman's Picture Book*, a book which placed great importance on the authenticity of the woman artist's voice. By privileging the first person perspective of each artist, the book's structure affirms the power of the personal narrative as a tool by which the reader can gain insight into each woman's work. The politicised resistance to authorial authenticity central to Tweedie's practice makes her an uncomfortable fit for such a project. Not only does her work challenge the authorial voice of the artist, so too does her working practice. Tweedie's deployment of a shifting array of pseudonyms – masculine and feminine, individual and collective – culminating in the formation of the anonymous collective et al., was already underway in the mid-1980s. This experimental authorial evolution resulted in the dematerialisation of the artist as identifiable individual. As this experimental refusal of a stable identity advanced, the name 'Merylyn Tweedie' was rendered increasingly absent.

In 1986, however, it was prevalent across artistic discourse. Though absent from both *A Woman's Picture Book* and *New Zealand Women Artists*, Tweedie was included in Eastmond and Penfold's *Women and the Arts in New Zealand*. The structure of the text relating to her

⁴⁰³ Merylyn Tweedie, 'Feminist Issues in NZ Art (with Particular Reference to Imaging of the Nude Female/the Naked Woman),' *Art Galleries and Museum Association of New Zealand Journal* 17, no. 1 (Autumn 1986), 11.

follows the pattern set throughout the book: the first half consists of a brief biography, while the second portion addresses her work. The factual tone of the biography presents 'Merylyn Tweedie' as a clearly defined figure, briefly covering personal, professional and political terrain. This approach embeds a contradictory tension into the text, the nature of Tweedie's work refuting the simplicity of a narrative biography. Describing the work chosen for inclusion, Eastmond and Penfold write:

'the artist prepares' is a book work in which Tweedie employs her characteristic skill at choosing a curious image with a message that both baffles (the artist prepares ... to hunt ...) and challenges notions of who 'the artist' is.⁴⁰⁴

Eastmond and Penfold acknowledge the centrality of Tweedie's deconstruction of artistic singularity here, yet the challenge posed by her approach presents an impossibility. In their biography of Tweedie, they literally assert 'who the artist is', identifying her politically – 'Merylyn Tweedie is a feminist' – and personally – 'but with two small children did not return to regular exhibiting until 1983'.⁴⁰⁵

The catalogues for both *Content/Context* and *Sex & Sign* manage to evade this pitfall by focusing on the work, rather than the artist, though both do so only briefly. Bieringa's introductory catalogue essay for *Content/Context* avoids the biographical, presenting instead a socio-political context for the exhibition. Using a series of subheadings, Bieringa introduces the key concerns which have shaped the curatorial approach, beginning with 'The New Zealand Context'. As we have seen, the specificity of place had long dominated artistic discourse in the country, the almost relentless pursuit for a distinctive New Zealand identity dominating much arts writing. By 1986, however, this desire for collective national certitude appeared to have dissipated. Bieringa writes: 'The generation of artists represented in this exhibition (even the older ones) would scarcely, if at all, consider the question of defining a New Zealand Art as worthy of (further) pursuit'.⁴⁰⁶ Though initially this perspective seems to have little bearing on feminist politics, the theoretical and methodological impetus he cites for this change is reminiscent of the position from which Tweedie works. Bieringa identifies the rejection of a nationalistic discourse as stemming from the fact that such a narrative 'requires a hierarchical attitude which the majority of artists do not accept or even

⁴⁰⁴ Eastmond and Penfold, *Women and the Arts in New Zealand, Forty Works: 1936-86*, plate 38.

⁴⁰⁵ Eastmond and Penfold, plate 38.

⁴⁰⁶ Bieringa, 'Content/Context,' 11.

contemplate'.⁴⁰⁷ This rejection of hierarchy is clearly evident within Tweedie's artistic and written practice, to the extent that Bieringa directly quotes her AGMANZ article when discussing the importance of feminist critique in shaping a 'less hierarchical cultural environment'.⁴⁰⁸

While the notion of challenging cultural and gendered hierarchies is central to *Content/Context*, intention does not necessarily equal reception. Writing in response to the show in *Art New Zealand*, Michael Dunn addresses this point:

Despite the equality of numbers between men and women exhibitors, male artists like Jeffrey Harris appeared more prominent because of the scale, the assertiveness and the position of their works. In practice, the show, in this respect, seemed less progressive than Bieringa's remarks led one to believe.⁴⁰⁹

Dunn's comment demonstrates the extent to which elements conventionally attributed to masculine artistic authority – large scale and assertiveness – continue to hold sway. While the exhibition intentionally sought to disrupt qualitative hierarchies, the artistic discourse remains stratified along hierarchies of medium and scale. The continual prioritisation of painting within the spheres of arts writing and display in New Zealand – and throughout the Western world – cannot easily be undone. The discursive context that elevated certain artists to canonical status provides an accessible and readily accepted framework for audience understanding. Experimental or subversive deviations from these conventional parameters often prove inaccessible to a viewing public. Dunn cites Tweedie's work in *Content/Context* as an example of this when making reference to:

... some of the more interesting and adventurous selections of *Content/Context*. For example, the inclusion of the small-scale, near ephemeral works on paper by Merylyn Tweedie is a case in point. However, whether such works can operate successfully in the environment of this kind of exhibition is debatable. There was insufficient information available to make the specific content of such works accessible to the viewer.⁴¹⁰

Dunn's response to the inclusion of these works is supportive, citing them as interesting and adventurous. However, his desire for explanatory information is telling. Though he values the

⁴⁰⁷ Bieringa, 11.

⁴⁰⁸ Bieringa, 12.

⁴⁰⁹ Michael Dunn, 'Content/Context: A Survey of Recent New Zealand Art,' *Art New Zealand* 42 (Autumn 1987), 42.

⁴¹⁰ Dunn, 42.

work's inclusion, he also expresses a belief that the work can only be considered successful if it is made accessible and understandable. According to such parameters, the artwork's meaning must be made clear to the viewer in order for it be considered to function effectively. In this instance, however, the refusal of such parameters is at the heart of the work's creation. This is made clear in Bieringa's catalogue description of Tweedie's work, in which he describes the conjunction of disjunctive images and text as an experimental foray into 'forming the basis of a new language'.⁴¹¹ At a fundamental level, the patriarchal logic of existing linguistic structures acts as a conceptual barrier to Dunn's ability to 'access' these works. As Kristeva might put it, Tweedie's work enacts an 'explosion of social codes'.⁴¹²

Tweedie's inclusion in *Sex & Sign*, two years after *Content/Context*, further demonstrates this desire to explode such social codes; codes which construct both gender and our definitions of art. *Entering Commercial Distribution 1987*, Tweedie's contribution to this exhibition, can be considered an artist's book of sorts (fig. 36). As we have seen, the self-published artist's book was, by this time, an oft-utilised resource for feminist artists. Such 'publications' were often a conscious attempt to resist both the incorporation into a dominant narrative and the capitalist model perpetuated by the commercialisation of the art market. The act of naming places this work in a contradictory position, the linguistic signification of the title alluding to a level of accessibility and uniformity that is explicitly resisted by the work itself. Consisting of nine individual pages, each measuring 550mm x 1200 mm, the work is strategically reminiscent of 'Dora re-constructs a debate', in that text is the key visual component. Here, though, the untethering of meaning from language is further exacerbated, the disintegration of signification increasingly apparent. The page reproduced in the catalogue is practically indecipherable. Rather than sections of text, we see a page scattered with individual words, some *sans rature*, some more literally erased with thick smears of white correction fluid. The speckled textural surface of the paper is thickened with resin, creating a physical fixity which contradicts the work's linguistic evasiveness. Certain words are repeated again and again – 'desire', 'she', 'her', 'woman', 'body', 'of', 'in', 'and', 'the' – though at no point do they coalesce to form a fully coherent sentence. Close reading proves insufficient in the face of the textual omissions and repetitions.

⁴¹¹ Bieringa, 'Content/Context,' 13.

⁴¹² Kristeva in: Jones, 'Inscribing Femininity: French Theories of the Feminine,' 86.

As Curnow states in his introduction, the artist is not defined in the catalogue by a text or biography. In place of this convention, each artist has selected a number of quotations to be included alongside the reproduction of their work. Tweedie has chosen three quotations, each of which shed conceptual light on her theoretically informed work. The first of these quotations, taken from Geoffrey Hartman's 1981 *Saving the Text*, is perhaps the closest the reader gets to a description or explanation of the work: '...quotes and ibids, then "remain". We also call them, more elegantly, overdetermined words or floating signifiers, at once the symbols and the ruins of other texts'.⁴¹³ The specificity with which Tweedie has chosen her restricted palette of words is significant in this regard. Her selected vocabulary appears to consist largely of socially 'overdetermined words', words which are burdened with the weight of referencing the female body as object of male sexual desire. However, Tweedie's reconfigured text appears as an attempt to strip some of this overdetermination from the gendered concepts she represents. The lack of visual images relating to these words works to evade the masculine gaze, while their isolation works to unshackle these signifiers from the apparent logic of language, refusing to position women in relation to a named male desire. The theoretical complexity evident in Tweedie's work is a demonstration of that affinity – frequently identified by writers in the 1980s, particularly in the pages of *Antic* – between feminist and poststructuralist theory. Rather than exploring this affinity from a purely theoretical perspective, Tweedie incorporates these politics into her acts of making, incorporating theory with practice.

Tweedie's practice offers a sharp rebuttal to Lita Barrie's assertion that New Zealand lacked any theoretically informed feminist art making or criticism. In fact, Barrie herself acknowledges the complexity of Tweedie's theoretical criticality in a review of her work published in *Art New Zealand*, to the extent that she disregards her own strident dismissal. 'In view of the intellectual creativity of Tweedie's recent work ... my former argument that "critical" feminist art had not yet emerged in New Zealand is no longer relevant'.⁴¹⁴ Despite the retraction of her earlier assertion, it is clear that Barrie maintains a strict division between feminist work that can be considered critical and that which cannot. The danger of this position is that it reduces a complex multiplicitous range of feminist positions into a binary opposition, one that is also articulated by Anne Maxwell in her *Antic* essay 'Poststructuralist

⁴¹³ Geoffrey Hartman, quoted in: Curnow, 'Sex & Sign,' unpaginated.

⁴¹⁴ Lita Barrie, 'Beyond Aesthetics: Readings in Cultural Intervention,' *Art New Zealand* 46 (Autumn 1988), 101.

and Feminist Literary Theories: The Problematic Relation'. In this essay, Maxwell addresses a 'major division amongst Feminist theorists. This division is represented on one side by what has become known as New French Feminism(s), and on the other, by American mainstream Feminism'.⁴¹⁵ This division, geographically characterised here as French / American, reflects Barrie's division between critical and non-critical work. Such oppositional distinctions shaped the critical terrain. As we have seen, the increasing level of theoretical feminist engagement throughout the 1980s expanded out from the pages of theoretically specific publications, into exhibition and gallery spaces, and even more mainstream publications.

The qualitative judgement implied in the construction of this narrative development towards criticality is exemplified in a review written in *Art New Zealand*. In 1986, the year that her essay dismissing New Zealand feminist arts criticism appeared in *Antic*, Lita Barrie wrote a review of Anne Kirker's *New Zealand Women Artists*. Despite an acknowledgement of the 'scrupulous research which informs the book', Barrie is largely dismissive of Kirker's publication.⁴¹⁶ As noted in Chapter Four, Kirker's book is based largely on an individual biographical structure, attempting to make these women visible within an existing discourse. It is on these grounds that Barrie bases her largely negative review, positioning Kirker's book within her broader dismissal of the critical standard of art writing in New Zealand, and criticising her for taking an 'untheoretical approach'.⁴¹⁷ Barrie's review concludes with expression of an important structural concern. She writes:

To the general reader the book will undoubtedly fulfill [sic] an important function as a dictionary of women artists in New Zealand. My own concern is that it does so, by simply inserting women artists into existing patriarchal structures and orthodoxies, without questioning or challenging the ways by which these structures created difficulties for women attempting to produce meanings of their 'own', in an art language which is based on masculine privilege.⁴¹⁸

Insightful and accurate though this criticism may be, Barrie's review – much like her argument in *Antic* – throws the baby out with the bathwater. In strongly condemning Kirker's 'untheoretical' approach, and relegating the book to nothing more than a dictionary, Barrie

⁴¹⁵ Anne Maxwell, 'Poststructuralism and Feminist Literary Theories: The Problematic Relation,' *Antic* 1 (1986), 59.

⁴¹⁶ Lita Barrie, 'New Zealand Women Artists by Anne Kirker,' *Art New Zealand* 42 (Autumn 1987), 83.

⁴¹⁷ Barrie, 83.

⁴¹⁸ Barrie, 85.

fails to consider the discursive power of a broader network of feminist arts writing. A book like Kirker's redressed a significant imbalance in the mainstream discourse, presenting a vast amount of rigorous research into women artists. Previously, much of this material was relatively inaccessible – certainly, it was not locatable in a single resource. There is no doubt that Barrie's methodological and structural concerns are justified. However, dismissing such work as the 'wrong' kind of feminism draws too harsh a delineation, hobbling the growth of feminist art history before it has a chance to develop. The expansion of this feminist artistic discourse throughout the 1980s was significant and multifaceted. The overly simplistic division between critical and non-critical feminist art writing, which played out during the 1980s, overshadowed a number of significant exclusions within the broader arts discourse. Such exclusions are made apparent in another review of Kirker's book, written by Pat Rosier and published in *Broadsheet*. Rosier critiques Kirker, writes:

She also says, "Writing within the limitations of a Pakeha perspective, I leave it to other more appropriate authors to discuss the art of Maori women evolving within their own tradition." This doesn't seem good enough today. Why not a chapter on the Maori women working within the Maori tradition, guest written if necessary? Why not include the "New Ways of Seeing" of women like Maureen Lander, Toi Maihi, Emily Karaka, Robin Kahukiwa and others in the chapter of that name.⁴¹⁹

Why not indeed? The following chapter will consider these questions in an alternative chronology of the 1980s. Chapters Four and Five traced feminist expansion of the discourse of art writing through a theoretical, euro-centric, heterosexual lens, the following chapter will challenge those parameters in order to offer a critique of the exclusions enacted by this feminist expansion.

⁴¹⁹ Pat Rosier, 'New Zealand Women Artists, Anne Kirker,' *Broadsheet* 146 (February 1987), 44.

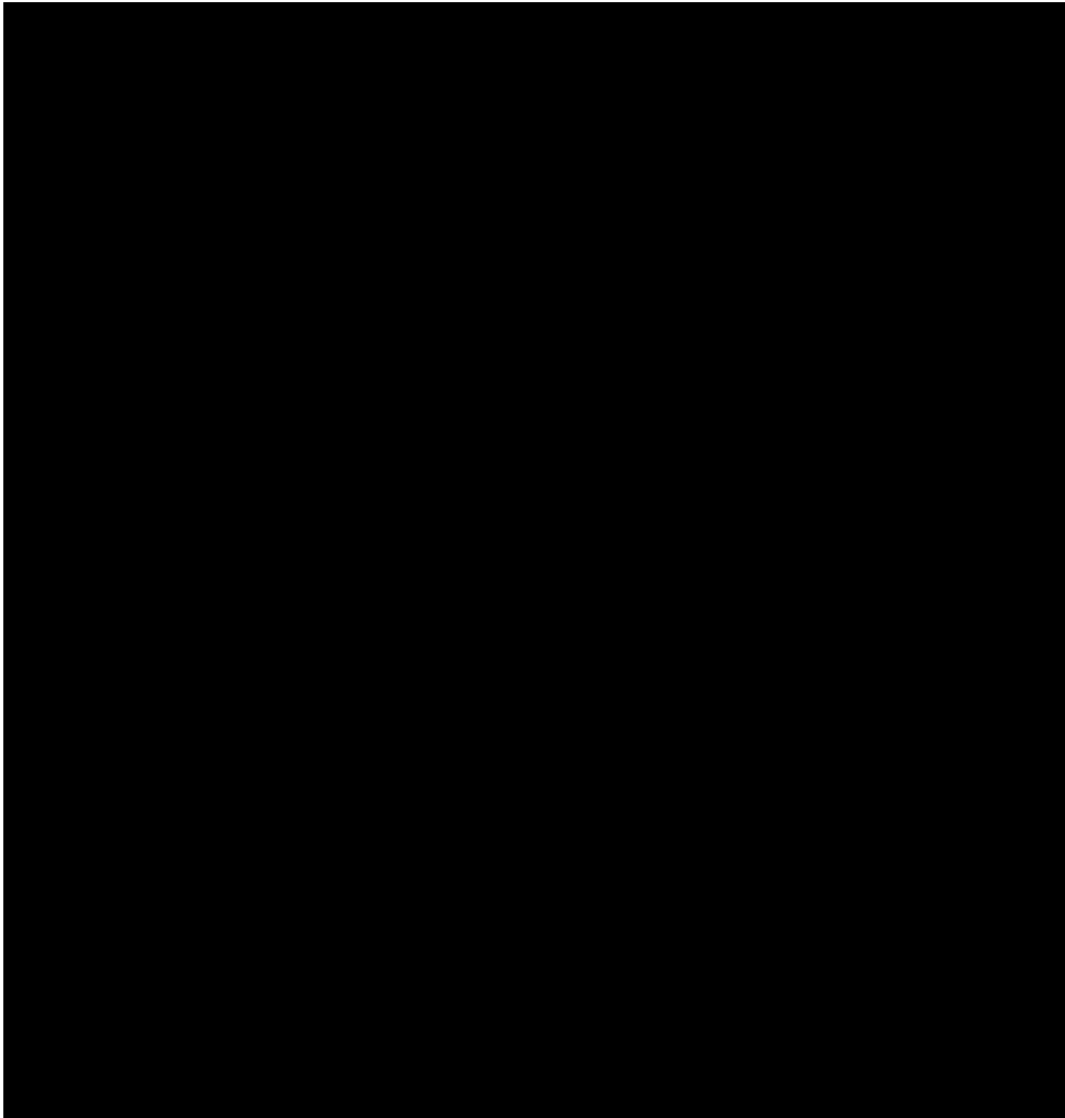


Figure 0.6: Fiona Clark, *Living with AIDS*, photograph album, 1988 (Te Papa Tongarewa)
Facsimile of albums reissued as a suite of three books by Michael Lett, 2018

Chapter Six

The 1980s: Discursive Multiplicity

The proliferation of feminist writings which emerged throughout the 1970s and 80s was grounded – like the suffrage movement before it – in a desire for gender equality. However, the longevity of the ideological notion of subsumed difference which underpinned the suffrage narrative was such that it pervaded even these writings. The feminist discourse that I have examined thus far has challenged the marginalisation of women, identifying the dominant arts landscape as one structured upon a patriarchal model. Mounting such a critique inevitably rests upon a binary assertion of gender as a marker of difference. As I have shown, the increasingly fractured nature of feminist activism and art-making in Aotearoa has demonstrated the tensions inherent in assuming gender as a unifying force. The desire to declare a ‘unified sisterhood’ often functioned in a reductive manner, flattening the myriad differences *between* women.

Here, I offer an alternative reading of the 1980s, taking subsumed difference as a starting point. This chapter embeds a reading of the multiplicity of woman’s subjectivity through close examinations of Fiona Clark’s 1988 project *Living with AIDS* and the 1986 exhibition *Karanga Karanga*. In doing so, this chapter analyses the way that these issues were navigated within the context of art writing in the 1980s. This chapter re-visits the preceding decade, drawing out threads which have been largely invisible, in order to destabilise its parameters. It is an attempt to re-navigate the cultural and political tension of arts writing in this decade, from a perspective of multiplicity, rather than binary opposition. My identity as a heterosexual Pākehā woman necessitates a continual negotiation of the way in which I engage with the work of artists and writers whose cultural, gendered and sexual identities differ from my own. This chapter, therefore, is not an attempt to ‘explain’ the way Māori women’s art, or queer art practices, unfolded in the 1980s in order to tell the stories which have been largely excluded from mainstream art historical and feminist discourse. Rather, it seeks to draw out several of these strands in order to inhabit the space of tension between subject and researcher, continually interrogating the power dynamics at stake in the production of any written history.

Colliding Urgencies: Identity and Division in Feminist Art Publications

In her 1984 essay, 'Maori and Feminist: My View', Ngahua Te Awekotuku articulates the complex multiplicity of her own subjectivity:

As a Maori lesbian, I am often compelled to consider the colliding urgencies of my life. ... I move within many worlds, yet share the confidence and security of my community of tribal women, and a branching global network of lesbian sisters. ... Frequently, the contradictions of my life are harrowing, but I refuse to reject any one facet of myself. I claim *all* my cultures, all my conflicts. They make me what I am; they will shape what I am becoming.⁴²⁰

The fragmentary division of the feminist movement, as it has been tracked through the 1970s and 80s in this thesis, occurred along such lines of categorisation. Māori, lesbian, feminist: these terms increasingly came to categorise a political separation. Te Awekotuku, through an expression of her own multifaceted identity, effectively subverts the logic of such divisions. Rather than Māori *or* feminist *or* lesbian, she simultaneously occupies all of these positions. Te Awekotuku acknowledges that her assertion of a multiplicitous identity is difficult – her sense of self is riddled with 'contradiction' and 'conflict'. However, her refusal to submit to a reductive defining logic that would categorise and minimise ensures that the active negotiation of her own identity becomes a political statement. The perpetual imminence of her 'becoming' may be shaped by conflict, but for Te Awekotuku this conflict is not an equation to be solved or a contradiction to resolve. Rather, conflict and contradiction are situated as forces shaping an evolving negotiation, harnessing both the 'confidence and security' of Māoridom, and the 'branching global network of lesbian sisters'. Difference here is no longer subsumed but harnessed.

One important instance of women declaring the specificity of cultural identity in an artistic context, is the book *Wahine Toa: Women of Maori Myth*, published in 1984 (fig. 37). *Wahine Toa* consists of representations of eight Māori myths, each centred upon atua wahine – or goddess figures. The book is starkly visual, predominantly structured around a series of eight oil on board paintings, and a number of pencil drawings, all created by Māori artist Robyn Kahukiwa. The artworks are accompanied by text written by the successful Māori author Patricia Grace. Kahukiwa and Grace had collaborated previously when Kahukiwa provided

⁴²⁰ Ngahua Te Awekotuku, 'Maori and Feminist: My View,' in *Mana Wahine Maori* (Auckland: New Women's Press Ltd., 1991), 20–21.

the illustrations for Grace's award winning 1982 children's book *The Kuia and the Spider*, one of very few examples of children's books at this time which depicted the lives of Māori in their pages. In *Wahine Toa*, Kahukiwa's bold, visual painting style was harnessed in order to 'redefine eight ancient myths of the Māori in visual terms'.⁴²¹ Though Kahukiwa's illustrations were made as large-scale paintings, the primacy of the book form is key to the accessibility of their project. Affordable and easily circulated, a book such as this can reach an audience that might not ordinarily visit an art gallery. Reviewing the book in *Broadsheet*, Ripeka Evans asserts its importance, writing:

Wahine Toa were the storehouses and donors of mortal and immortal forces. History does not record this fact but part of our struggle as Maori and as women is to reveal this truth... Wahine Toa warrants serious consideration as a major work.⁴²²

Evans's observation that the stories told in *Wahine Toa* are those that have been overlooked by history is central to its importance. Not only does the work centre Māori whakapapa as a method of transmitting history, it does so in a manner which positions women as active participants in such histories. Linda Tuhiwai Smith discusses the importance of these issues in *Decolonizing Methodologies*:

A critical aspect of the struggle for self-determination has involved questions relating to our history as indigenous peoples and a critique of how we, as the Other, have been represented or excluded from various accounts. Every issue has been approached by indigenous peoples with a view to *rewriting* and *rerighting* our position in history. Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own version, in our own ways, for our own purposes.⁴²³

Tuhiwai Smith asserts the centrality of indigenous agency within the rewriting of such histories. *Wahine Toa*, written by, about and for Māori women, is an example of an arts publication which firmly asserts such an indigenous agency.

To what extent, though, is this agency reflected in more mainstream arts writing in the 1980s? Standing as the most widely circulated and oft-cited examples of art writing about women in this period, *New Zealand Women Artists*, *Women and the Arts in New Zealand* and *A*

⁴²¹ Patricia Grace and Robyn Kahukiwa, *Wahine Toa: Women of Maori Myth* (Auckland: Viking Pacific, 1984), 10.

⁴²² Ripeka Evans, 'In a Feminist Sense: Wahine Toa Women of Maori Myth,' *Broadsheet*, no. 120 (June 1984), 42.

⁴²³ Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 28.

Women's Picture Book, provide an accessible way in to this terrain. A reconsideration of these books will examine the extent to which they situated a specific, restricted definition of the woman artist at work in Aotearoa. As Pat Rosier's criticism in *Broadsheet* made clear, Anne Kirker's *New Zealand Women Artists* is written from a Pākehā perspective, the limitations of which are acknowledged by Kirker herself. This acknowledgement in itself is important, despite Rosier's claim that it 'doesn't seem good enough today'.⁴²⁴ While Rosier's remedial suggestions are appropriate, she does not explicitly tackle the difficulty inherent in a Pākehā writer addressing the work of Māori women artists. Kirker's *New Zealand Women Artists* is an attempt to *rewrite* – and *reright* – New Zealand's art history, but it is an attempt which was written from a consciously Pākehā perspective. In re-telling the narrative of artistic development in New Zealand, Kirker told the stories from her own cultural perspective, rather than speaking for others. This decision highlights a paradoxical difficulty inherent in the methodological choice facing Pākehā women writers critiquing the patriarchal biases of art history. Should Kirker include Māori and Pasifika women artists in her narrative, writing from a perspective which positions these artists as 'other'? If not, does this mean that she should write only about Pākehā women, perpetuating the exclusion and relative invisibility of non-Pākehā women in New Zealand's art history? Kirker obliquely references this choice in her introduction, writing: 'I leave it to other more appropriate authors to discuss the art of Maori women evolving within their own tradition'.⁴²⁵ Kirker's exclusion of Māori artists from her narrative – only three of the more than 70 women she discusses in the book are Māori – is presented as the result of a desire to move forward in a culturally appropriate manner. Despite this, however, the end result is inevitably a book which perpetuates the centrality of the Pākehā artist within the arts discourse in Aotearoa.

The approach taken by the authors of *Women and the Arts in New Zealand* tackles the problem faced by Kirker head-on. By co-authoring the book, Eastmond and Penfold seek to resolve the issue, allowing for both a Pākehā and Māori perspective to be foregrounded, each woman actively tackling the gendered biases of New Zealand's art history from their own cultural perspective. As Kirker acknowledged the blind-spots in her narrative, so too do Eastmond and Penfold. Writing in her introductory text, Eastmond discusses the selection process, recognising that the process of inclusion is inevitably accompanied by a process of exclusion:

⁴²⁴ Rosier, 'New Zealand Women Artists, Anne Kirker,' 44.

⁴²⁵ Kirker, *New Zealand Women Artists*, 5.

In a book limited to forty images with only a brief text, the decision to represent a number of media as well as to attempt to present a cross-cultural selection has inevitably resulted in the omission of many important artists. ... Our ratio of Maori and Pacific Island works to Pakeha is based roughly on population ratios, which at the last census (1981) rated Pacific Islanders 2.9 per cent, Maori 9.7 per cent and Pakeha 87.4 per cent.⁴²⁶

Eastmond and Penfold employ strategies of numerically considered inclusion and cultural co-authorship. In practice, these strategies are attempts to work through – rather than evade – the complex issues of authorial authority which can work to perpetuate inequality. In addition to a concerted effort to produce a more culturally representative book, both in terms of numerical representation and authorial voice, they also interrogate the cultural biases which shape the hierarchy of medium. Not only do they challenge the ‘Pakeha notion of the arts/crafts hierarchy’ by including women who work across diverse practices and media, they also interrogate the gendered exclusion of women within Māori art contexts. Reflecting Te Awēkotuku’s ‘colliding urgencies’, Penfold addresses the compounding inequality that Māori women face, noting ‘the frequent marginalisation of women’s work in books and at exhibitions of Maori art’.⁴²⁷ *Women and the Arts in New Zealand* attempts to present a women-centred overview of New Zealand art from a bicultural perspective, recognising the complexity of identities which fall under the banner of woman. Here, difference is made explicit and visible, rather than subsumed under a reductive dominant narrative. In addition, the alphabetical approach taken by the authors can be seen as an attempt to deconstruct the hierarchy imposed by a progressive linear narrative. In structural terms, Eastmond and Penfold’s approach enacts its politics on a practical level, challenging the biases and inequalities shaping New Zealand’s art history by presenting an alternative, diverse picture of art-making in the country. However, the textual content of the book is relatively short, focusing on brief biographies of the women involved. Though the introductory texts traverse important terrain, articulating the political methodology which shaped the book’s production, they are too brief to mount a significant critical challenge to the mainstream discourse. Reviewing the book in *Broadsheet*, Pat Rosier concluded: ‘The more books by women about women artists that get published the better. This is one that I would buy for the pictures’.⁴²⁸ Rosier’s categorisation of the book as a visual resource demonstrates the ease with which the

⁴²⁶ Eastmond in: Eastmond and Penfold, *Women and the Arts in New Zealand, Forty Works: 1936-86*, unpaginated.

⁴²⁷ Penfold in: Eastmond and Penfold, unpaginated.

⁴²⁸ Pat Rosier, ‘Women and the Arts in New Zealand Forty Works; 1936-86, Elizabeth Eastmond and Merimeri Penfold,’ *Broadsheet* 146 (February 1987), 45.

political structure of the book's approach – which foregrounds women's multiplicity – can be overlooked.

Eastmond and Penfold made a concerted effort to dismantle cultural marginalisation in their project. So, too, did the editors of *A Women's Picture Book*. However, in the process of compiling the book, Evans, Lonie and Lloyd faced a situation in which the contradictory and colliding urgencies of lesbian visibility and Māori custom proved insurmountable. As discussed in the previous chapter, Kirker's *New Zealand Women Artists* and Eastmond and Penfold's *Women and the Arts in New Zealand* both included introductory texts written by the authors, acting as a conceptual frame for their projects. In contrast, the editors of *A Women's Picture Book* chose not to include this contextualising device. This choice was motivated by a very clear desire, reflective of their choice to foreground artist's voices over those of the editors: 'we didn't want to tell people what to think'.⁴²⁹ However, Marian Evans acknowledges that, despite this, 'there were some things we had to explain'.⁴³⁰ It was this need for further elucidation that motivated the inclusion of two afterwords and an appendix. Evans describes these texts as follows: 'This afterword is a compromise, some information about how the book happened and how it connects to the rest of our lives; it's followed by Tilly's afterword about lesbian art and an appendix about the Women's Gallery'.⁴³¹

In presenting these multi-authored texts at the conclusion of the book, Evans, Lonie and Lloyd cast a self-reflexive, critical eye back on the process of its creation. Their discussion of one sequence of events in particular is important in the current context, demonstrating the unintentional damage that can be caused by separatism within identity politics. The presence of those same 'colliding urgencies' that Te Awēkotuku identified within herself precipitated the withdrawal of a number of contributors. Evans, Lonie and Lloyd strove to produce an inclusive picture of the women working as artists in Aotearoa in the late 1980s. The artists who they invited to participate were considered carefully, 'ensuring a diversity of women was included within it'.⁴³² Despite these intentions, frictions between multiple cultural, sexual and political perspectives were exacerbated by the inclusion of a painting depicting menstrual blood. Divergent attitudes towards the visual depiction of menstrual blood threw sharp

⁴²⁹ Marian Evans in: Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie, and Tilly Lloyd, eds., *A Women's Picture Book: 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)* (Wellington: Government Printing Office, 1988), 228.

⁴³⁰ Evans in: Evans, Lonie, and Lloyd, 228.

⁴³¹ Evans in: Evans, Lonie, and Lloyd, 228.

⁴³² Evans in: Evans, Lonie, and Lloyd, 229.

differences between women into relief – differences that proved insurmountable in terms of negotiation. Explaining these failed negotiations, Evans writes:

The non-Maori compilers ... had to decide whether to ask the woman whose work prompted this difficulty to amend or withdraw her chapter. Because each contributor was told that her space was hers, to use as she wanted, we felt we could not do this.⁴³³

Though Evans does not mention the artist or artwork at the centre of this debate, it is clear that the painting in question is a watercolour by Sharon Alston. The work itself depicts a woman's left hand, stretching into the centre of the picture frame (fig. 38). The fingers are extended and held separate from each other, the hand held up for visual inspection. The index and middle fingers are red with blood, contrasting the inky blue watercolour of the textural wash which coats the paper. Titled *My bloody hand*, the work, by Alston's own admission, is not 'a particularly good painting'.⁴³⁴ However, it is, in her words 'definitely a 150 per cent lesbian image'.⁴³⁵ As Tilly Lloyd points out in her afterword concerning the publication of lesbian art, visible examples of 'affirmative lesbian artwork' were incredibly rare.⁴³⁶ For this reason, the deliberate inclusion of openly gay women, and work freighted with the political weight of lesbian feminism, was an important component of *A Women's Picture Book*. This stands in contrast to both *New Zealand Women Artists* and *Women and the Arts in New Zealand*. Lloyd does in fact take these authors to task for perpetuating the invisibility of lesbianism, writing:

We are not in the index of Anne Kirker's *New Zealand women artists...* Elizabeth Eastmond and Merimeri Penfold, in their book *Women and the arts in New Zealand: forty works 1936-86* do not mention lesbian artists either. ... even those who so many of us would regard as our closest neighbours – feminists – have not in the recent past acknowledged [us] overtly enough.⁴³⁷

The deliberate decision to challenge the heteronormativity of art writing, including that written by women, was central to the multivocal sense of subjectivity the editors strove to present. An unintentional consequence of this stance, however, was the withdrawal of the

⁴³³ Evans in: Evans, Lonie, and Lloyd, 237.

⁴³⁴ Evans, Lonie, and Lloyd, 134.

⁴³⁵ Sharon Alston in: Evans, Lonie, and Lloyd, 134.

⁴³⁶ Tilly Lloyd in: Evans, Lonie, and Lloyd, 243.

⁴³⁷ Lloyd in: Evans, Lonie, and Lloyd, 241–42.

majority of Māori women contributors to the book. In Māori culture, menstrual blood is considered tapu.⁴³⁸ As Hirini Moko Mead, the prominent Māori anthropologist, explains: ‘Blood is also very tapu and must be treated with care. When menstruating, a woman is especially tapu because of the flow of blood. There are restrictions placed on her at this time and dangers to be observed’.⁴³⁹ The inclusion of explicit visual imagery of menstrual blood led the majority of Māori contributors, in consultation with their kaumatua, to make the difficult decision to withdraw from the publication. In this instance, the editorial decision not to restrict Alston’s artistic freedom led to an act of cultural erasure, resulting in the loss of ‘association with Irihapeti [Ramsden] and the contributions of Hana Maxwell and Shona Davies, with other women of Tai Tokerau, of Jacqueline Fraser, of Keri Hulme and of Robyn Kahukiwa’.⁴⁴⁰ It is clear that this loss was both painful and personal to the book’s editors, Evans explaining that ‘the relationships with most of the women who withdrew go back years and are not superficial. Their contributions to this book were powerful. We miss them dearly’.⁴⁴¹

Despite the best intentions of each individual involved, cultural differences proved insurmountable. The unfortunate result of this ultimately-failed negotiation is that, in a book striving to represent the diversity of women’s art-making in Aotearoa, 23 of the 25 contributions were Pākehā. Here, the differences between women acted to largely subsume cultural markers of difference, for those of sexuality.

Queer Representation

Writing in *Broadsheet* in 1982, Sandi Hall articulates a desire to overcome an oppositional model of difference within the lesbian community:

At this time of writing, there is a sense of change and maturity in the firmly established lesbian community. This has been brought about for some by the solidarity among lesbians demonstrated during the Springbok Tour. ... Through the interviews and conversations with lesbians for this article on ten years of our

⁴³⁸ The word tapu is most commonly translated as sacred. For a more fulsome description of this complex term, see Hirini Moko Mead, *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori Values* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2003), 45.

⁴³⁹ Hirini Moko Mead, *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori Values* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2003), 49.

⁴⁴⁰ Evans in: Evans, Lonie, and Lloyd, *A Women’s Picture Book: 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)*, 236.

⁴⁴¹ Evans in: Evans, Lonie, and Lloyd, 237.

heritage, there was evident a strong and urgent call for cohesion, both between lesbians and non-lesbians...⁴⁴²

Cohesion was an issue which also raised its head during discussions surrounding Labour MP Fran Wilde's 1986 Homosexual Law Reform Bill. Previous attempts at the passage of a bill decriminalising homosexual sex between consenting men had failed due to a variety of reasons, including much debate over the appropriate age of consent. Initially, many women saw the bill as a 'gay men's issue. Many lesbians did not want to get involved'.⁴⁴³ Such gendered separation was relatively temporary in relation to this issue, with many women quickly realising that joining forces to present a coalition of support would be the most beneficial way forward. Discussing the evolution of lesbian involvement in support for the bill in Christchurch, Vicki Munro explains the two key elements which saw gay women becoming increasingly proactive in their support for the passage of the bill:

Firstly, the realization that one clause of the bill did affect us: the addition of "sexuality" to the Human Rights Commissions Act. Secondly, the widespread homophobia was not just directed at gay men, but at lesbians as well. All of a sudden we were sick, dirty and perverted. We had been silent too long. We had to stand up and be counted and be proud of what we were.⁴⁴⁴

During the 1980s, two exhibitions tapped into this desire from within the LGBTQI community to challenge silence and invisibility: 1984's *Queer Pictures*, organised by a group of eleven Elam students, and held in the crypt of St Pauls Church in Symonds Street, and *Beyond Four Straight Sides (Homosexual)*, self-curated by four male artists, and held at the CSA Gallery in Christchurch in 1988. Both of these exhibitions were discussed in *Art New Zealand*, though the focus was firmly on male artists. As within much of the public discourse around law reform, an assumption was made regarding gay men as being representative of the broader queer experience. Again, difference is subsumed. The increased visibility of gay male artists over women, in the case of *Beyond Four Straight Sides (Homosexual)*, stems directly from the all-male composition of the exhibition of work by Trevor Fry, Grant Lingard, Paul Johns and Paul Rayner. However, in her review of this exhibition for *Art New Zealand*, Anne Irving draws parallels between discrimination based on differences in gender and sexuality. Irving argues:

⁴⁴² Sandi Hall, 'A Different 10 Years: Lesbians in the Women's Movement,' *Broadsheet* 101 (August 1982), 45.

⁴⁴³ Vicki Munro in: Sue Fitchett et al., 'Collisions and Coalitions: The Lesbian Campaign for the Bill,' *Broadsheet* 137 (March 1986), 42.

⁴⁴⁴ Munro in: Fitchett et al., 42.

Homosexual artists occupy a very different position from that of women artists. They have long been prominent in the arts and have collectively provided an exceptionally rich contribution to the history of art. Although the 'taboo' aspect of their lives has been played down and cleansed by history, it does not seem to have hindered achievement. Of course, they have plenty to be angry about, but they can still make it in the art world by virtue of being male.⁴⁴⁵

By positioning the 'homosexual artist' in direct comparison with women artists, Irving conflates homosexuality with male gender, enforcing a rigid reading of both gender and sexuality onto her discussion. The ineffectual nature of the rigidity of gendered representation within arts discourse makes apparent an element of complexity which had, until this stage, remained relatively unexamined. Despite the assertion of feminisms as a plural rather than singular position, along with the lack of consensus among feminists as to a clear definition of the word, at their core all feminisms share an opposition to patriarchal dominance and oppression. Such opposition inevitably rests on the binary division of society along gendered lines. Irving's recourse to a hierarchical separation of marginalisation and discrimination rests, too, upon binary understandings of gender and sexuality, subsuming a spectrum of difference within oppositional polarities. The fragmentation of the women's movement stemmed, in great part, from such binary thinking. Concerted efforts were increasingly being made to acknowledge and grapple with the complexity of differences among all people. For example, Alison J. Laurie, writing in *Broadsheet*, recognised the:

... links between the different oppressions of heterosexism, sexism, racism, classism and able-bodiedism. ... it is essential that all oppressed groups co-operate within coalitions, and deal with our differences through political education as part of the process of working together. If we fail to do this we will be targeted and destroyed...⁴⁴⁶

By recognising the importance of coalition between various oppressed peoples, Laurie's approach is fundamentally different to that implied by Irving's stratification of marginalisation. Though the notion of coalition is a powerful one, the realities of enacting such a methodology are inevitably fraught. The mainstream media discourse, which plays a role in shaping normative behaviours and societal beliefs, often directly contradict efforts for such coalition.

⁴⁴⁵ Anne Irving, 'Seeing Double: Beyond Four Straight Sides,' *Art New Zealand* 49 (Summer /89 1988), 82.

⁴⁴⁶ Alison J. Laurie in: Fitchett et al., 'Collisions and Coalitions: The Lesbian Campaign for the Bill,' 41.

One woman, referred to only as Marika, writing in *Lesbian Feminist Circle* in 1985, referred obliquely to this when she observed that ‘the papers have generally managed to publish articles on homosexual law reform next to articles about AIDS’.⁴⁴⁷ By consistently publishing such articles in close proximity, newspapers entwine these narratives, the fearful panic regarding the spread of AIDS seeping into the public discussions relating to law reform. The nuanced lived realities erased through the promotion of such a one-dimensional discourse were brought front and centre in an exhibition titled *AIDS Now*, held at the Dowse Art Museum in 1989. Reviewing the show in *Broadsheet*, Sally Washington pointed to the importance of forging an engagement with such issues that is grounded in coalition, rather than separatism. She acknowledged the manner in which her particular political perspective informed her own perceptions of the gendered discourse surrounding AIDS:

I used to think that AIDS was a men’s issue which commanded resources and publicity denied to women-specific sexually transmitted diseases like cervical cancer. ... The fact is that AIDS is affecting women, both directly and as the people who end up doing the caring and support work.⁴⁴⁸

Issues of resources and care are just some of those touched upon in Fiona Clark’s powerful contribution to *AIDS Now*. Washington declared Clark’s photographic albums, *Living with AIDS*, the ‘most powerful part of the exhibition’, though complained that they were ‘disappointingly displayed. Locked into two unattractively bound books they could easily have been missed by viewers, if only because they couldn’t be bothered waiting for a turn to look through them’.⁴⁴⁹ However, the viewing process that Clark initiated through her decision to present her photographic project in book form was central to their conceptual power. Rather than discrete art photographs, framed and isolated on the gallery wall, Clark intentionally presented the works in album-form, again incorporating text written by the subjects into her images. Clark’s *Living with AIDS* albums, therefore, function in a manner that recalls Vivian Lynn’s *Book of Forty Images* and *Span*, Joanna Margaret Paul’s *Unwrapping the Body*, Robyn Kahukiwa and Patricia Grace’s *Wahine Toa* and Merylyn Tweedie’s ‘Dora re-constructs a debate about the vaginal vs. the clitoral’. Each of these works intentionally occupies a space which exists between artwork and written text, between the visual and the linguistic. Each of these works insist upon their own discursive power, reconfiguring the relationship between artist / author and reader.

⁴⁴⁷ Marika, ‘Media Coverage of the Bill,’ *Lesbian Feminist Circle* 44 (December 1985), 23.

⁴⁴⁸ Sally Washington, ‘Strokes and Art Attacks: AIDS Now,’ *Broadsheet* 167 (April 1989), 33.

⁴⁴⁹ Washington, 32–33.

In order to produce *Living with AIDS*, Clark established long-term relationships with a number of individuals living with an HIV diagnosis, who she photographed throughout the rhythm of their everyday lives. These photographs did not sit behind glass, framed and hung as revered objects on the gallery walls. Instead, they were enclosed within the albums. A chair was provided beside each, for the viewer to sit on while they read, initiating a private interaction. Like the personal family album, these albums had to be touched and held, their pages turned. They were books which told a deeply personal narrative, authored by both the photographer and her subjects.

Of the four people – three men and one woman – that Clark documented during the course of this project, all but one kept their faces obscured. Making their diagnosis public was considered a dangerous move during a period of overt discrimination, driven by misinformation, hatred and fear. Clark's images, however, do not focus on the horror, tragedy and paranoia which dominated the public discourse surrounding HIV and AIDS. Their focus, as her intentionally worded title would suggest, is on the everyday spaces in which individual lives are lived. These are not photographs of people dying, but of people living.

Alastair, sharply dressed and pictured seated at his dining table (fig. 39), provides a stark contrast to the deathbed imagery we might expect to see in documentary-style images of AIDS patients. The photograph is a study in quotidian detail: we see a man sitting at his dining table, his back turned to the viewer as he gazes out of the window. Markers of everyday life are captured within the image's frame. The curtains are pulled aside, allowing light to enter the room, houseplants thrive, a sideboard topped with drinks bottles occupies the right-hand side of the frame, while a cropped cushion protrudes into the lower left corner. This is a space which is lived in, pictured in a way that at first appears purely documentary. However, the compositional choices made by Clark bring a sense of dynamism into the interior space, enlivening both Alastair and his environment. Rather than aligning the camera's gaze with that of Alastair, as he looks directly out of the window, Clark has chosen not to depict the room 'square-on'. She positions her camera at an oblique angle, her standing position acting to tilt the shallow picture plane sharply upwards, the camera's lens transforming the space into a series of diagonal lines. The drape of the curtains, the corner of an internal wall, and the dining table all create angled lines which draw the viewer's eye

around the room's features. The effect of this simple compositional choice is to deny the interior space the stagnant immobility of a site of death.

This distinction between dying and living was heightened by Clark, who – as in her *Dance* series – extended the authorship of these representations to include the people that she pictured. The photographs are accompanied in the album by the subject's hand-written commentaries on the pages upon which the photographs were mounted. In the page opposite the dining table photograph, Alastair writes:

I love to share food
and happy times
at my table
there is always a place
for a friend
and one can look out at
the world feeling
much love
much aroha
in what we can share.⁴⁵⁰

Not only do Alastair's words communicate with the viewer as a linguistic expression of his lived experience, they also function to carry the haptic trace of the author's hand into the gallery space. As the visible hand of the artist carries with it the burden of authenticity, so too the hand of the HIV patient carries with it the burden of infection. Peter, the only participant to allow himself to be clearly identified in both photograph and text, is pictured in another photograph with his dog, outside his local shop (fig 0.6). The pattern of everyday life continues, though it changes in shape. Beside the image, Peter writes, 'The daily chores still need to be done'.⁴⁵¹ A chore as mundane as buying milk has the potential to be transformed if the people around you believe that, to touch you, or the things that you touch, is fraught with danger. Shrouded in a mythology of transmission by kissing, hugging and even sharing public spaces, touch becomes a charged gesture. As viewers held the albums in their hands, they touched and turned the pages that were touched by hands that social discourse had rendered dangerous. By presenting the works in this manner, allowing viewers to hold and turn the pages, Clark combines the visual, the linguistic and the material. More than simply allowing the subjects a subjective voice in their representation, Clark's decision to include

⁴⁵⁰ Fiona Clark, 'Living With AIDS 1988: Album II' (Michael Lett Gallery, 2018), unpaginated.

⁴⁵¹ Fiona Clark, 'Living With AIDS 1988: Album I' (Michael Lett Gallery, 2018), unpaginated.

their handwritten words in the albums produces an encounter between viewer and artwork that is intimate, personal, and materially tangible.

In a 1985 *Broadsheet* article, Jenny Rankine outlines the reaction to AIDS in New Zealand.

The media has pumped out all kinds of stereotypes and false generalisations. The *New Zealand Times* called it “the fatal, homosexual-related disease”, it was “the incurable homosexual’s disease” in an *Auckland Star* editorial; a *NZ Times* supposedly factual backgrounder was headlined “Straight sex could defuse the AIDS bomb”; and of course a *Tablet* editorial says that the “homosexual community must accept SOME of the blame for the development and spread of AIDS”. The homophobic assumptions behind all this mythmaking are breathtaking.⁴⁵²

Clark’s *Living with AIDS* project counters this homophobic fear-based narrative by presenting the human face of a socially marginalised group. It is clear from the diversity of opinion contained within the comments book, which accompanied the exhibition, that this approach was not universally successful. One visitor writes: ‘I admit I have prejudices about aids, but I now have a better understanding. Thanks for the education’.⁴⁵³ However, this is in stark contrast to another visitor, who has angrily scrawled across the page in large, heavy lettering: ‘Don’t idolize them “SHOOT THEM” + save the world’.⁴⁵⁴

Though the exhibition did not receive widespread coverage, much of the attention it did receive was sympathetic. Ten years prior, Clark’s *Dance* images were greeted with widespread condemnation from the mainstream media. The response to *Living with AIDS* suggests that, shortly after the passage of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill, attitudes had begun to soften towards diverse representations of sexuality and gender. Reviewing the exhibition in the *National Business Review Weekend Review*, Lawrence McDonald praises Clark’s ‘beautifully composed ... series of excellent domestic interior shots’.⁴⁵⁵ Not only does McDonald acknowledge the quality of the photographs as visual images, he also pinpoints the political importance of the work:

With these images Clark succeeds in showing that Aids is something people live with in their own houses rather than submit to passively in hospital beds; and the

⁴⁵² Jenny Rankine, ‘The Homophobia,’ *Broadsheet*, no. 129 (May 1985), 37.

⁴⁵³ Fiona Clark, ‘Living with AIDS 1988: Album III & IV’ (Michael Lett Gallery, 2018), unpaginated.

⁴⁵⁴ Clark, unpaginated.

⁴⁵⁵ Lawrence McDonald, ‘Living with AIDS Theme of Exhibition,’ *National Business Review Weekend Review*, 3 February 1989.

tranquil, relaxed qualities of these colour pictures suggest that this may open up meditative spaces in which these people may rethink their lives. Evidence of this rethinking is found in the various hand-written notes, letters and poems of the featured subjects, placed on the pages opposite the photographs.⁴⁵⁶

Similarly, Judy Webby, writing in the *Wanganui Chronicle* in response to the inclusion of *Living with AIDS* in the touring exhibition *Constructed Intimacies* at the Sarjeant Gallery in 1989, responded positively to the work. ‘The works are intensely [sic] moving and increase the awareness of the viewer of the urgency of being able to lead better and fuller lives as intended’.⁴⁵⁷

Clark’s artistic practice is deeply grounded in the formation of long-term human relationships, allowing her to construct spaces in which to present nuanced individual subjectivities. These tender and intimate depictions of people frequently marginalised and pathologised by societal discourse offer a powerful model for challenging the representation of difference. While *Living with AIDS* may not directly deal with conventionally recognised feminist issues, it can be positioned within a critical mode of artistic enquiry which interrogates the underlying structural biases inherent in both arts infrastructure and wider society. Harnessing strategies which position the art-object both as visual image and a trace of social discourse, Clark’s multi-vocal albums challenge the rigidity and convention of the representative frame. Utilising multiple first person voices to enrich her depiction of people living with AIDS, speaking with those she depicts rather than for them, Clark’s methodological approach is deeply collaborative.

Karanga Karanga: Collectivity and Self-determination

As the divisive fragmentation within the women’s movement makes clear, working effectively within a collaborative framework often proved deeply challenging. Despite this, the political potential of collaborative organisational structures remained a central tenet within much of the women’s movement. Elizabeth Eastmond, writing in the introductory text to *Women and the Arts in New Zealand* made clear the difficulty of navigating such an approach within the art world of Aotearoa when she acknowledged some omissions from her book:

⁴⁵⁶ McDonald.

⁴⁵⁷ Judy Webby, “‘Constructed Intimacies’ Thought-Provoking Display,” *Wanganui Chronicle*, 22 June 1989.

The focus on image has also led to the omission of feminist collaborative projects which have concentrated on process and education; and this (European) emphasis on isolated art objects devoid of context makes it equally difficult to capture the integral sense of process, sociability and function in traditional Maori and other Polynesian arts.⁴⁵⁸

Eastmond acknowledges some of the cultural shortcomings in *Women and the Arts in New Zealand* while also drawing our attention to the exclusions that are enacted at a structural level. In a book which focuses upon forty individual images, it is virtually impossible to subvert the centrality of individual artists and master works which dominate the inherited model of European art history.

During the 1980s, it became increasingly clear that these inherited models and their value systems marginalised, not only women as feminist critics had argued, but also tangata whenua. A series of exhibitions held during the 1980s challenged such Eurocentricity, with the landmark *Te Maori* leading the way (fig. 40). The exhibition opened in 1984 in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, after which it continued to tour the United States until 1987, when it returned to Aotearoa and toured the main centres. *Te Maori* was notable as the first exhibition of customary Māori art to be organised by Māori. Hirini Moko Mead, one of the exhibition's curators and Professor of Māori at Victoria University of Wellington, reflected upon the importance of Māori leadership regarding *Te Maori* in his essay 'From Obscurity to International Art'. He writes:

This was the first time in history that the Maori people were actively involved in negotiations for an international exhibition of our art. In this respect new ground was broken. It was the first time, too, that we called the tune and decided what had to be done.⁴⁵⁹

Te Maori proved hugely popular, drawing large visitor number both in the United States, and during its nationwide tour of Aotearoa. As Mead argued, 'the perception of our art as little, somewhat pagan, primitive, Maori art was turned upside down and inside out by the opening at New York. Suddenly it became big international art'.⁴⁶⁰ In the wake of such international – and national – recognition, many Māori artists began to make a concerted effort to challenge

⁴⁵⁸ Elizabeth Eastmond in: Eastmond and Penfold, *Women and the Arts in New Zealand, Forty Works: 1936-86*, unpaginated.

⁴⁵⁹ Hirini Moko Mead, 'From Obscurity to International Art', in *Magnificent Te Maori: Te Maori Whakahirahira* (Auckland: Heinemann Publishers, 1986), 11.

⁴⁶⁰ Mead, 11.

previous exhibition-making models, which had largely failed to include Māori in curatorial or creative roles. *Karanga Karanga* (fig. 41) was one such exhibition, acting as a provocation, challenging the cultural values embedded within systems of display in the country.

Karanga Karanga, the first exhibition organised by the Wellington-based Māori women's art collective Haeata, was held across three locations – Wellington, Auckland and Gisborne – in 1986. Though the membership of Haeata fluctuated – key members included Keri Kaa, Robyn Kahukiwa and Irihapeti Ramsden – it was undoubtedly one of the most significant art collectives operating in Aotearoa during the 1980s. As Chloe Cull (Ngāi Tahu, Ngāi te Ruahikihiki) writes:

Through their organisation, Haeata decolonised gallery spaces around New Zealand and made room for Māori women's traditional and contemporary work. Exhibitions such as *Karanga Karanga*, *Whakamamae* and *Mana Tiriti* responded to that need, wedging open a gap for Māori women's art to be celebrated and for Māori women's knowledge to be validated.⁴⁶¹

Haeata operated at the nexus of cultural and gendered identity, asserting the importance of their knowledge as both women and Māori. *Karanga Karanga* was ground-breaking. It asserted, not only the possibility, but also the strength and popularity of a woman-only collaborative approach to exhibition making, grounded thoroughly in te ao Māori. *Karanga Karanga* was devised, in part, as a response to the exhibition *Te Maori*, which represented New Zealand on the world stage through a very particular lens. The exhibition consisted 'entirely of ancient and traditional *taonga tuku iho* "treasures handed down from the ancestors", mainly carved in stone or wood'.⁴⁶² The elevation of carving over weaving was not a neutral one, the practices being strongly associated with men and women respectively. Te Awekotuku, in an interview with Eastmond and Pitts published in *Antic*, responded to the exclusion of women artists from *Te Maori*:

I was one of the people privileged to attend the opening of *Te Maori* in New York and one of the most noticeable aspects of that exhibit (which I nevertheless celebrate and certainly applaud) was the omission of the work of Maori women –

⁴⁶¹ Chloe Cull, 'Mana Wahine / Mana Māori / Mana Toi: Māori Women's Art within a Kaupapa Māori Art History 1980-1989' (Unpublished Masters Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2015), 12.

⁴⁶² Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, 'The Resurgence of Maori Art: Conflicts and Continuities in the Eighties,' *The Contemporary Pacific* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1995), 1.

and, you know, this hurt me, it not only bothered me, it puzzled me. At a deep level.⁴⁶³

Te Awekotuku was not the only Māori woman to frame a response to *Te Maori* in these terms. Katerina Mataira, (Whanau-a-Takimoana, Te Whanau-a Rakairoa, Te Whanau-a-iri-Te-Kura), writing in *Broadsheet*, also comments on the exclusion of women from the exhibition:

One of the things that really angered me in respect of the Te Maori exhibition was the exclusion of the traditional women's art forms. There was no weaving at all in the Te Maori exhibition – no cloaks or any other of the art forms that traditionally belong to maori women.⁴⁶⁴

Despite the importance of *Te Maori* for situating Māori art on an international – and thus national – stage, the absence of work made by women points towards a doubling of marginalisation for Māori women: rendered peripheral both within the predominantly Pākehā women's movement, and a predominantly male Māori renaissance. Kaa, Kahukiwa and Ramsden, who proposed the idea of *Karanga Karanga* at the City Gallery, offered a tangible alternative to this double marginalisation, conceptualising an exhibition that would present contemporary works by Māori women artists across the length of the country. Exhibitions were held in the Gisborne Museum and Arts Centre, Pakuranga's Fisher Gallery in Auckland and the Wellington City Gallery. The exhibitions ran between April and June of 1986, and, across the three venues, some 70 Māori women artists were involved.

The concept of karanga offers far more than a title to the exhibition; it is the concept out of which the entire project is grew. Karanga is often translated in its most simple form as a welcome call, or a ritual chant or call.⁴⁶⁵ Performed most often as a call to welcome visitors onto a marae, karanga is the first stage of a ritualised, formally structured protocol.⁴⁶⁶ In the words of Te Awekotuku, 'karanga remains an exclusively female practice'.⁴⁶⁷ In the introductory text to the catalogue which accompanied the City Art Gallery show, the extent to which the art of karanga informs the exhibition is made clear:

⁴⁶³ Ngahuaia Te Awekotuku, 'Ngahuaia Te Awekotuku in Conversation with Elizabeth Eastmond and Priscilla Pitts,' *Antic* 1 (1986), 44.

⁴⁶⁴ Katerina Mataira, 'Karanga Karanga,' *Broadsheet* 141 (August 1986), 36.

⁴⁶⁵ See Cleve Barlow, *Tikanga Whakaaro: Key Concepts in Māori Culture* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991), 39.

⁴⁶⁶ Karanga is followed by powhiri and wero, whaikōrero, hongi and ruru. For a detailed explanation outlining this process see: Ngahuaia Te Awekotuku, 'Karanga Te Ao, Karanga Te Po: Some Aspects Of Story-Telling by Maori Women,' in *Mana Wahine Maori: Selected Writings on Maori Women's Art, Culture and Politics* (Auckland: New Women's Press Ltd, 1991), 108.

⁴⁶⁷ Te Awekotuku, 108.

This karanga is many things, a calling out and a gathering in. And from there a journey which is a start for some and a continuation for others. It is a call to people made public and also a karanga for all those who join us with their art, including those who have gone before and those yet to come. The specific journey for this Exhibition has been one of a community of women working in groups to make their art. An art in which Maori women represent themselves, their own culture and concerns. An art in which we make the images, and seek to redefine ourselves through them.⁴⁶⁸

Underpinning the development and production of *Karanga Karanga* is this notion of a call or welcome. By bringing a contemporary collective of Māori women artists into a predominantly Western gallery context, the women of Haeata sought to extend the call out to other Māori women. There is a clear emphasis upon the ongoing nature of this process, and an acknowledgement that, rather than an end point, this particular exhibition is a step within an unfolding journey towards self-representation and self-determination. An article which appeared in the *Dominion* to mark the opening of *Karanga Karanga* in Wellington makes clear the work that is still to be done. The article quotes a participating artist, Janet Potiki, who says:

The exhibition is named Karanga Karanga because like the karanga – the first call, made by women to visitors to a marae it is, we believe, the first time Maori women have invited the public to an exhibition of their work... it is for some a culmination of a long struggle.⁴⁶⁹

The Wellington City Gallery iteration of *Karanga Karanga* represented the work of 26 women, through the presentation of 15 artworks (fig. 42). The collaborative nature of the work's production is made clear upon consultation of the catalogue, which lists each artwork on display: not a single artwork is attributed to an individual maker. Made collaboratively, using traditional and contemporary materials and techniques, the works in *Karanga Karanga* are contextualised in the catalogue through short accompanying texts, often outlining the mythologies and origin stories upon which the works draw. This focus upon collaboration and cultural context stands in contrast to the '(European) emphasis on isolated art objects devoid of context' identified by Eastmond and Penfold.⁴⁷⁰ Here, instead, the 'integral sense of

⁴⁶⁸ Haeata, 'Karanga Karanga: A Group Exhibition of Contemporary Work by Maori Women' (Wellington City Gallery, May 1986), 1.

⁴⁶⁹ Janet Potiki in: 'Cloaking up with 27 Dozen Mussels,' *Dominion*, 5 May 1986.

⁴⁷⁰ Eastmond and Penfold, *Women and the Arts in New Zealand, Forty Works: 1936-86*, unpaginated.

process, sociability and function in traditional Maori and other Polynesian arts' are brought to the fore.⁴⁷¹

Karanga Karanga was greeted with significant critical attention, across a broad range of literature. The exhibitions were reviewed in mainstream publications such as Wellington's *Dominion* and *Evening Post* and the current affairs magazine *The New Zealand Listener*, in addition to more specialist publications such as *Broadsheet*, *Art New Zealand* and *New Zealand Crafts*. The response to *Karanga Karanga* across this broad-ranging discourse was largely positive, much discussion centring upon the importance of three key aspects of the exhibition: that it was woman-only, that it was conceptualised and produced by Māori, and that there was a focus upon collaborative processes of production. That writers across mainstream and more specialist strands of discourse accepted – and celebrated – a collaborative, woman-only exhibition thoroughly grounded in Māori values points towards a paradigmatic shift occurring in the 1980s. Writing in the *Evening Post*, critic and curator Ian Wedde opens a review of *Karanga Karanga* with a discussion of the necessity of a nation-wide interrogation of the value systems underpinning the arts sector. He writes:

When Te Maori departed for America, it was clear that the exhibition's return to New Zealand would have enormous cultural and political implications for the arts here. ... Among these effects will be a realignment of the thinking, the priorities, the authority, of arts administration, particularly of museum and art-gallery administration.⁴⁷²

It is noteworthy that Wedde responded to *Karanga Karanga* in a manner which made evident the importance of challenging the art sector's organisational values and underlying biases. Wedde's intervention into the status quo was not only discursive. Four years later, he co-curated – with Gregory Burke – *Now See Hear! Art Language and Translation*, an exhibition which further explored these themes. Discussing the importance of *Karanga Karanga* more specifically, Wedde elaborates further upon the potential dissolution of exclusionary boundaries:

Karanga Karanga is an exhibition by a community of 27 Maori women... As well as having to rethink attitudes to art objects (an area where argument over "quality" and "value" is bound to continue), we have also to readjust attitudes to

⁴⁷¹ Eastmond and Penfold, unpaginated.

⁴⁷² Ian Wedde, 'Karanga's Way Paved by Te Maori Export,' *Evening Post*, 9 May 1986.

the spaces in which art is seen: for example, are conflicts between the spiritual and the consumerist dissolved by the lifting of tapu?⁴⁷³

As international voices more became increasingly persistent regarding the necessity of institutional critique during this time, Wedde makes clear the culturally situated critique required across Aotearoa.

Wedde was not the only commentator to engage with the Eurocentricity of the nation's gallery and museum infrastructure in his discussion of *Karanga Karanga*. Arapera Blank (Whanau-a-Hunaara, Whanau-a-Takimoana, Whanau-a-Hine-pare. Ngati Porou, Rongowhakaata, Ngati Konohe, Kahungunu), a Māori writer who participated in the Pakuranga and Gisborne iterations of *Karanga Karanga*, noted:

What I like about the exhibition was that these women have come out into a world that has been dominated by male artists. Also that we were invited to exhibit. It isn't as though we went along and drummed on the door, they invited us to the Fisher Gallery. People say, why the Fisher Gallery, out in Pakuranga, well it was because Maori women were asked to exhibit there. The director of the gallery rang the director of the Wellington City Gallery, who is a woman, to let her know that they wanted to exhibit Maori women's work. When I was asked why we weren't exhibiting at the Auckland City Gallery I said, "Because we haven't been asked. Simple."⁴⁷⁴

Blank's assertion makes evident the material ways in which galleries and museums act as ideological gatekeepers, reinforcing their pervasive exclusions. Blank also highlights the manner in which these boundaries can be stretched through representative change. The decision to explicitly state the fact that Wellington City Gallery's director was a woman points to the changes that can be made when people from under-represented social groups hold positions of power. The importance of the institutional support spearheaded by this woman director is directly noted in the *Karanga Karanga* catalogue: 'Keri Kaa, Robyn Kahukiwa, and Irihapeti Ramsden took the idea to the then-director of the City Art Gallery – Anne Philbin – who supported it'.⁴⁷⁵ This support was but one factor which led to the provocation laid down by Haeata. The presence of a Māori women's collective within gallery spaces deemed largely Eurocentric, brought frequently marginalised voices into a broader conversation.

⁴⁷³ Wedde.

⁴⁷⁴ Arapera Blank, 'Karanga Karanga,' *Broadsheet* 141 (August 1986), 35.

⁴⁷⁵ Haeata, 'Karanga Karanga: A Group Exhibition of Contemporary Work by Maori Women,' 1.

This conversation was both heard and extended by the wide range of writers who responded to the exhibition. As the previous chapter has demonstrated, the patriarchal nationalist narrative which had been established during the mid-twentieth century was, by the 1980s, being consistently challenged by a burgeoning feminist critical discourse. The enduring stereotypes of the woman artist, identified in Chapter One, were recognised as artificial, ideologically loaded constructions. A growing number of women writers – including Elizabeth Eastmond, Merimeri Penfold, Priscilla Pitts, Cheryll Sotheran, Juliet Batten, Lita Barrie and Alexa Johnston – were engaged in writing increasingly nuanced representations of the ‘woman artist’ into this body of literature. The critical response to *Karanga Karanga* relied, in part, upon this discursive expansion. Significantly, though, it also expanded this discourse further still, anchoring Māori subjectivity and expression firmly within the conversation.

The review of *Karanga Karanga* which appeared in the Wellington newspaper the *Dominion*, written by Rob Taylor, makes apparent the importance of interrogating and expanding the existing arts discourse. Taylor opens his review as follows:

The most important exhibition in Wellington at the moment in *Karanga Karanga* at the City Art Gallery. This is the first call, the first gathering-in, for the first public multimedia co-operative exhibition of contemporary art by Maori women. In our standard art texts New Zealand art starts with Sydney Parkinson on Cook’s Endeavour in 1769, or with Charles Heaphy arriving for the New Zealand Company in 1839. The Maori would provide a mine of rich subjects for art. But their own art, in these texts, would be neatly sidestepped and ignored as a sort of pre-New Zealand art.⁴⁷⁶

This article is notable in that it acknowledges more than just the significance of *Karanga Karanga* as an exhibition of work by contemporary Māori women artists. It is notable, too, for the fact that it challenges the dominant narrative shaping New Zealand’s art history. That a review in a widely distributed metropolitan broadsheet explicitly challenged the exclusion of Māori from a national art history can be considered a marker of discursive expansion. However, coverage of *Karanga Karanga* made clear that it was not only Māori who had been marginalised or excluded from these national histories. Katerina Mataira, responding to the exhibition in *Broadsheet*, asserts that the ‘exhibition for me is just a manifestation of the

⁴⁷⁶ Rob Taylor, ‘*Karanga Karanga* Historically Important,’ *Dominion*, 5 May 1986.

release of Maori women from the constraints that have been placed upon them, traditionally as Maori women, but universally as women'.⁴⁷⁷ Here Mataira, like Te Awekotuku, acknowledges the interrelated ways in which societal hierarchies of gender and culture are compounded to marginalise artists.

By acknowledging the challenge *Karanga Karanga* mounted to both cultural and gendered exclusion, the discourse that coalesced around the exhibition made clear the complex intersection of these markers of identity. As we have seen, utopian notions of a unified sisterhood of women become irreparably damaged during the splintering of the woman's movement in the 1970s. What comes to the fore in much of the discussion regarding *Karanga Karanga* is the multiplicity of subjective positions which the exhibition brought together. Janet Potiki, discussing the range of women involved in the exhibition, explains: 'some would call themselves feminists, while others would not. It is an enormously diversified group'.⁴⁷⁸ Potiki makes evident here the difficulty in attempting to subsume difference under a single unifying identifier. For, even within a group so specifically defined – Māori women artists – multiplicity is evident.

Multiplicity is evident, too, in the range of media and process presented across the three iterations of *Karanga Karanga*. Priscilla Pitts, writing in *Art New Zealand*, pinpoints this aspect as central to the methodological efficacy of the exhibition. The 'Pakeha notion of the arts/crafts hierarchy', identified by Penfold, was effectively challenged by the women of *Karanga Karanga*.⁴⁷⁹ Pitts notes:

The catalogue doesn't differentiate between the contributions of visual artists, 'craftswomen', musical performers and writers; such distinctions are essentially foreign to Maori culture and the organisers of *Karanga Karanga* wisely ignored them. Another 'difference' was the equal value accorded to skill in the traditional arts and in working traditional design... and to the more inventive work (which would be more highly regarded in Pakeha culture).⁴⁸⁰

The material assertion of a non-hierarchical approach to media and process echoed the wider feminist project which we have seen unfold through the 1970s and 1980s, subverting the dominance of painting and sculpture. Importantly, though, the critical response to *Karanga*

⁴⁷⁷ Mataira, 'Karanga Karanga,' 36.

⁴⁷⁸ Potiki in: 'Cloaking up with 27 Dozen Mussels'.

⁴⁷⁹ Merimeri Penfold in: Eastmond and Penfold, *Women and the Arts in New Zealand, Forty Works: 1936-86*, unpaginated.

⁴⁸⁰ Priscilla Pitts, 'Auckland,' *Art New Zealand* 40 (Spring 1986), 28.

Karanga highlighted the culturally loaded parameters through which pre-existing artistic value systems had been constructed. Pitts' assertion that 'such distinctions are essentially foreign to Māori culture' makes this particularly apparent. Darcy Nicholas, the Māori artist and writer, articulates a similar perspective when he argues for the important lessons that the broader art infrastructure ought to take from *Karanga Karanga*. Writing in the *New Zealand Listener*, the national current affairs magazine, Nicholas states:

The *Karanga* exhibitions are an important cutting edge for contemporary women's art. What I saw in the Auckland and Wellington exhibitions showed me that this movement needs vigorous support because of its importance in women's art internationally.⁴⁸¹

Karanga Karanga operates along the methodological lines drawn by Tuhiwai Smith in *Decolonizing Methodologies*. It is an example of indigenous women *rewriting* and *rerighting* their positions. As Tuhiwai Smith writes: 'Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own version, in our own ways, for our own purposes'.⁴⁸² Her words echo those of Haeata, written over a decade prior, when they forged a space for the creation and display of Māori women's art in a fine art context: 'An art in which Maori women represent themselves, their own culture and concerns. An art in which we make the images, and seek to redefine ourselves through them'.⁴⁸³ Though these are stories of self-determination, told by, about and for Māori women, their importance resonates through the breadth of arts discourse. The critical response framed by writers such as Pitts and Nicholas makes clear that *Karanga Karanga* sought to subvert the patriarchal Eurocentrism of the arts infrastructure of Aotearoa. Though this response is a vital one, it is not without its difficulties. Those difficulties are parallel to those acknowledged by Kirker who, in the same year as the exhibition, wrote: 'I leave it to other more appropriate authors to discuss the art of Maori women evolving within their own tradition'.⁴⁸⁴ Linda Tuhiwai Smith asserts that:

Under colonialism indigenous peoples have struggled against a Western view of history... We have often allowed our 'histories' to be told and have then become outsiders as we heard them being retold. ... Our orientation to the world was already being redefined as we were being excluded systematically from the writing of the history of our own lands.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸¹ Darcy Nicholas, 'A Calling out, a Gathering In,' *N.Z. Listener*, 12 July 1986, 33.

⁴⁸² Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 28.

⁴⁸³ Haeata, 'Karanga Karanga: A Group Exhibition of Contemporary Work by Maori Women,' 1.

⁴⁸⁴ Kirker, *New Zealand Women Artists*, 5.

⁴⁸⁵ Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 33.

Karanga Karanga was a successful example of Māori women artists – the appropriate authors – telling these histories from their own perspectives through the making and discussion of their art. By placing this work squarely in the frame of Aotearoa New Zealand’s art history, Haeata not only challenged the reductive narrative of that history; they challenged, too, the models of art history – and the feminist interventions within that art history – that enacted such exclusions. In order to forge an approach to art writing that does not rely upon subsumed difference, many histories, written by many people, must be told.

Conclusion

Archaeology is the method specific to the analysis of local discursivities, and genealogy is the tactic which, once it has described these local discursivities, brings into play the desubjugated knowledges that have been released from them.⁴⁸⁶

Michel Foucault

This thesis opened with a preface of sorts – an interrogation of a formative period falling outside the chronological parameters of this project. The narrative that coalesced around the woman’s suffrage movement in the late nineteenth century has continued to exert significant social and cultural influence in Aotearoa. The dominant narrative surrounding women’s enfranchisement tells of a progressive, triumphant march towards equality, centring upon key heroic figures. At the introduction’s close, I argued that the structure of this narrative was underpinned by a model of subsumed difference, asserting that this paradigm is reflected in the constitution of women artists within the art history of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The argument forwarded in this thesis has both echoed and expanded that put forward in the preface, through analysis of the published literature that has coalesced around the figure of the ‘woman artist’. Methodologically, Chapters One, Two, and Three function archaeologically, to critically analyse the ways in which the growth of a nascent national art history mapped a historically situated local discursivity. The model of subsumed difference, identified within both the late nineteenth century suffrage narrative, and New Zealand’s art history during this period, functions in Foucauldian terms. By subsuming difference, the dominant discourse works to subjugate networks of knowledge and subjectivity. The second half of this thesis, Chapters Four, Five and Six, function genealogically. By critically examining a range of feminist interventions into the mainstream art historical narrative, these chapters brought into play a series of desubjugated knowledges.

The figure of the ‘woman artist’ – as she has been constituted within the literature – has been the central focus of this project. The scope of my research was defined through the imposition of two significant parameters. The first of these was the decision to focus primarily upon the published literature produced in response to the visual arts in New Zealand. This choice was

⁴⁸⁶ Michel Foucault, *‘Society Must Be Defended’ Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey, 4th ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 11.

informed by the historiographical approach which underpins my research. By focusing upon the role played by the published record in constituting an arts-specific discourse, I could both trace the construction of that discourse, and critically analyse its underlying ideologies. The second of these parameters concerns the time-period addressed by the thesis. The inaugural publication of *Art in New Zealand* provides a logical start-point, providing as it does the first consistently-published, self-conscious attempt to record and define a cultural discourse within the country. *Art in New Zealand* marks the beginning of a concerted effort to produce an art history specific to New Zealand, a project that would continue, relatively unchallenged, until the 1970s.

The 1970s saw the socio-political conditions within the country come under increasing scrutiny. Artistic discourse was similarly subject to mounting critique, with critical interrogation of its boundaries and limitations occurring within a rapidly expanding discursive field. Feminist thought became increasingly prevalent in New Zealand through the 1970s, though it was not until the 1980s that the challenges posed by these politics were to be felt within the mainstream art world. The 1980s gave rise to a significant discursive shift, in which the ideological constraints placed upon women's position in the arts were vociferously challenged through publications, exhibition making, and artistic practice. The exponential growth of the arts discourse during this decade, in tandem with the strengthening traction of feminist thought, resulted in the 1980s giving rise to a highly visible proliferation of feminist challenges to the country's artistic discourse. By the close of the decade, however, increasingly fragmentary identity politics, along with a growing focus on theoretically informed practice, either pushed feminist critique – once again – into the margins, or radically altered its conceptual focus. For these reasons, the close of the 1980s provides the ideological and chronological end-point to this project. Tracing the shifting ways in which the 'woman artist' has been constituted in the published literature produced within this period has turned my critical focus to mainstream art history, and to the feminist critiques written in response to that art history. As a result, this thesis functions in two significant ways: firstly as a feminist critique of New Zealand's mainstream art history, and secondly, as a corrective to monolithic understandings of feminist art history.

In their book *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker assert: 'we have to reject the simple notions that women's art has been ignored, neglected or

mistreated by art history'.⁴⁸⁷ As my research has shown, this also holds true within the specific discourse of Aotearoa New Zealand's art history. Women artists have been consistently included in the writing of this history since its earliest days. Numerous women were exhibiting members of the early regional Arts Societies which, for a period during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, provided the sole outlet for the exhibition of art in the country. Women were present, too, as students in the country's art schools. This situation was quite different to that in Europe, indicating the importance of geographically and culturally situated discursive analysis. During the 1950s and 1960s the country's arts infrastructure became increasingly professionalised against the backdrop of a strengthening cultural nationalism. Statistical analysis of the patterns of women's inclusion in the writings produced during this period reveal a subtle, yet pervasive, filtering out process. The more 'elevated' the discursive forum, the fewer women were likely to be included. Women artists became increasingly correlated with amateurism, as a national canon of – predominantly male – professional artists was established and solidified. By the 1970s, the inclusion of women in the mainstream discourse of New Zealand's art history was, in fact, largely peripheral. The few women who were singled out for attention – most specifically Frances Hodgkins and Rita Angus – were considered exceptional for their gender.

While establishing such patterns of numerical inclusion is important, I argue that it is the quality – rather than the quantity – of that inclusion that functions ideologically to marginalise women artists. By interrogating the linguistic descriptions regarding women artists in New Zealand's nascent art history, this thesis demonstrates the extent to which such language has both shaped and perpetuated stereotypical perceptions of women. Through discursive analysis of the key writings published between 1928 and the late 1970s, several clear biases become evident, all of which support and naturalise the secondary status of women within the arts. Transcribed from a socio-political context in which women were defined in direct relationship to men, these stereotypical patterns of discursive engagement reiterate woman's structural position as marginal. Women are persistently positioned in direct – and inferior – relation to men. They are frequently characterised as wives, students or followers of male artists. It is these male artists who are repeatedly positioned as the sources of creative originality, or the drivers of artistic innovation. As cultural nationalism shaped an

⁴⁸⁷ Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, 2nd ed. (London, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2013), 169.

increasingly restrictive canon, structured around a progressive narrative that centred upon key male artists, the marginalisation of women artists was exacerbated.

Chapters One, Two and Three demonstrate the extent to which the construction of the dominant narrative of New Zealand's national art history worked to subsume difference. Within this progressive teleological narrative, a historical sequence of key male painters – predominantly European or Pākehā – are elevated to prominent positions. Brown and Keith's 1969 *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting* presents the apotheosis of this narrative, structured around a sequence of 'important' male artists: Charles Heaphy, William Fox, Reverend John Kinder, James McLachlan Nairn, Petrus van der Velden, Christopher Perkins, Mountford Toss will Woollaston, Colin McCahon and Patrick Hanly. The numerous women artists who were producing work contemporaneously with these artists are subsumed under this developmental narrative of male progress and innovation. Had Rita Angus consented to be included, a single chapter dedicated to an exceptional woman would not have significantly tipped the balance. Where Angus was included, it was in a manner which subsumed the difference in her own work. Her landscape paintings – which so clearly exemplify the 'harsh light' thesis – are repeatedly privileged over her goddess paintings, self-portraits and esoteric symbolism. This, inevitably, would have been amplified had she been the subject of a stand-alone chapter. This thesis argues that the relegation of women artists to a secondary role within this dominant narrative had an ideological function. Written representations of women artists provided a gendered comparison against which men could be positioned as the originators of meaning, progress, and national identity.

As the number of published platforms for art writing grew during the 1980s, an increasing number of women critics and art historians – many of them engaged with feminism – participated in its development. By the 1980s, a number of books addressing women artists in New Zealand were published in an effort to counter the gendered biases embedded in this canon. The feminist challenge to art history posed in these key publications rested largely on the charge of exclusion, resulting in publications which undertook the reclamation of 'lost' women from history. My critical analysis of these feminist writings demonstrates that such revisions were not, themselves, entirely inclusive. Written from a predominantly Pākehā perspective, the writers centred their own experience of female subjectivity. However, to characterise all feminist art writing of the 1980s in such a manner would be misrepresentative and damaging. In order to resist a monolithic understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand's art

history during this period, this thesis utilises a strategy which highlights the multiplicity of women's subjectivity, rather than attempting to subsume such difference within a linear narrative. As a result, the writings of the 1980s have been considered from three perspectives. This approach resists the imposition of a singular narrative, while also operating as a structural example of polyvocality.

Difference – along lines of gender, culture, sexuality and class – was largely subsumed within the development of the dominant art historical narrative. In contrast, the critiques of that narrative which began to proliferate extensively in the 1980s were often based upon the assertion of difference. Challenges to the singularity of the mainstream arts discourse operated from a broad range of perspectives and focused upon issues of gender, culture and sexuality. By traversing this territory across three chapters, with three different points of focus, this thesis demonstratively proposes an art historical methodology which situates critical multiplicity at its heart. Feminist art histories must resist and complicate the reductive structure of a universal narrative. Self-determination and subjective specificity are key methods by which this can be achieved.

This thesis argues that a number of women artists and writers have harnessed a variety of critical frameworks in order to enact their own, specific engagements with the arts discourse of Aotearoa. Artists such as Fiona Clark, Robyn Kahukiwa, Vivian Lynn, Joanna Margaret Paul and Merylyn Tweedie have all demonstrated the discursive power which can be harnessed when inhabiting the conceptual space between book and artwork. By challenging the conventional limits of both the artwork and the book, these women artists actively refute the reductive power of the universal narrative, while activating the discursive power of the artwork. Feminist writers and curators, including Elizabeth Eastmond, Alexa Johnston, Alison Mitchell [Allie Eagle], Merimeri Penfold, Priscilla Pitts and Cheryl Sotheran, brought feminist politics to bear on the critical terrain of both art writing and exhibition making. Collective organisations such as those responsible for *Broadsheet*, *Circle* and *Spiral*; along with the Feminist Art Networkers, Haata, the Women's Gallery and the Christchurch Woman Artists Group, facilitated the work of women artists, by activating new women-only exhibition spaces and publications. The diversity of critical positions evinced by these artists, writers and curators cannot be subsumed within a triumphant feminist narrative. Rather, they represent a range of specific discursive positions operating in negotiation with one another to destabilise the totalising power of a reductive dominant narrative.

The ideological shift indicated by this discursive position is reflected in a significant exhibition, held just after the close of the chronological period considered in this thesis. An introductory analysis of the woman's suffrage movement acted as a conceptual and ideological preface to the argument forwarded in this thesis. In a similar manner, a concluding consideration of the 1992 exhibition *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art*, functions as a critical epilogue.

The early 1990s marked a number of significant national milestones in New Zealand, most notably the sesquicentennial of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1990, and the centenary year of women's suffrage in 1993. *Headlands*, jointly organised by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, and the National Art Gallery of New Zealand, took place between these important commemorative years. While the exhibition organised to mark the Centennial Year of 1940, considered in Chapter One, reflected a strong historicising impulse, the tone of *Headlands* was quite different. Displaying the work of contemporary artists from Aotearoa, the exhibition was critical of the histories of which it was an inheritor. The exhibition was accompanied by a significant publication, in which participating curator Bernice Murphy acknowledged the national specificity of the exhibition. 'This exhibition involves thinking about and through the art of New Zealand'.⁴⁸⁸

Both the 1940 Centenary Exhibition, and *Headlands*, were concerned with questions of national identity. However, such questions were posed within contrasting cultural contextual frameworks. While the 1940 exhibition was firmly grounded within a colonial paradigm, proposing a specifically European history and present, *Headlands* was conceived from a consciously bicultural perspective. It was not just the art of New Zealand that this exhibition thought about and through, it was also the complex set of cultural histories which had shaped the contemporary moment. In order to navigate such terrain, the curatorial team responsible for *Headlands* adopted several strategies in order to elevate multiplicity over homogeneity. Rather than a single authoritative curator, *Headlands* was organised by a team of curators including both men and women, Māori and Pākehā. Those curators were Robert Leonard, John McCormack, Bernice Murphy, Cheryl Sotheran and Cliff Whiting. The implementation

⁴⁸⁸ Bernice Murphy, 'Figuring Culture: Introduction to *Headlands*,' in *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art Limited, 1992), 9.

of a curatorial group was ideological, rather than practical. Murphy explains that the curatorium hoped to:

reconsider many of the patterns of judgement and value that have settled into discernible structures within New Zealand's own received histories. Such aspirations could be fulfilled – it was also clear – only with the energetic collaboration of many people in New Zealand who might be engaged in an interactive exploration...we have sought to incorporate the dialectic of many points of view, of the multiple voices and experiences through which New Zealand art can be written and read.⁴⁸⁹

Headlands, then, consciously resisted the imposition of an authoritative national narrative. Murphy also acknowledges the reductive power of such narratives, structured as they are around heroic key figures. Chapter Two of this thesis presented a comparative analysis of the treatment of Colin McCahon and Rita Angus during the formative decades of cultural nationalism. Here, I argued that Angus's gender framed her inclusion within a set of normative beliefs, which worked to reduce her contribution in relation to that of McCahon. By 1992, McCahon's privileged position within the national canon was largely intact. However, Murphy demonstrates an awareness of the reductive power of elevating an individual artist. She argues that McCahon 'started to be cast as a lonely eagle who soared aloft from his culture, with all other artists diminished by his eminence'.⁴⁹⁰

Rather than perpetuating a similarly reductive narrative, the curatorium endeavoured to present a shifting array of discursive positions. In doing so, they made evident the colliding urgencies at play within the complex fabric of national identity. Through the inclusion of male and female, Māori and Pākehā artists, curators and writers, the exhibition and publication actively incorporated 'the dialectic of many points of view'. The publication played an important role in framing the exhibition within a specific critical context. Considering this, it is noteworthy that the impact of feminist thought on the development of New Zealand's artistic landscape is mentioned by a number of writers. In her catalogue essay, art historian and curator Christina Barton writes:

Women working in the late 1970s and early 1980s were also concerned with the recuperation of content, but to specific political ends. ... Picturing women's lives

⁴⁸⁹ Murphy, 12.

⁴⁹⁰ Murphy, 11.

called on a different experience, a particularity that challenged art's claims to universality.⁴⁹¹

The work of women artists – both Māori and Pākehā – was exhibited within *Headlands*. Significantly, the published literature that accompanied the exhibition also acknowledged the importance of feminist thought in critiquing the assumption that art-making is either universal or autonomous. ‘The importance of feminist theory in New Zealand is undeniable’, writes Barton.⁴⁹² She is not the only writer to make such an assertion in the publication. Tony [Anthony] Green also acknowledges the theoretical challenges posed by feminist thought.

By the mid-1980s theoretical interests in the formation of gender difference and inter-cultural relations began to be more visible. Among women artists especially a number of projects emerged, often involving photography, sometimes in painting, video and installation.⁴⁹³

Green's observation here is significant, pointing as it does to the inter-connectedness of a number of modes of critical thought. The interrogation of socially inscribed understandings of gender difference and inter-cultural relations are here allied with the subversion of artistic disciplinary boundaries. This echoes the approach to art-making taken by many of the women artists examined in this thesis, particularly those who work across a variety of media in order to interrogate both visual and linguistic modes of representation. Works such as Lynn's *Book of Forty Images* and *Span*, Paul's *Unwrapping the Body* and Clark's *Dance* photographs and *Living with AIDS* project, can all be considered discursive incursions. These works do not attempt to proclaim their own aesthetic autonomy. By incorporating a variety of voices and modes of representation, they interrogate the manner in which meaning is constructed. Such strategies work to disrupt the notion that artworks exist independently from the discourse that surrounds them. Francis Pound, writing in the *Headlands* publication, underscores the discursive power of such artworks, asserting ‘that the artwork is *itself* a form of criticism’.⁴⁹⁴

Occurring just after the close of the period examined in this thesis, *Headlands* appears to demonstrate a number of significant discursive shifts. Employing a collective curatorial

⁴⁹¹ Christina Barton, ‘Framing the Real: Postmodern Discourses in Recent New Zealand Art,’ in *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art Limited, 1992), 176.

⁴⁹² Barton, 178.

⁴⁹³ Tony Green, ‘Modernism and Modernization,’ in *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art Limited, 1992), 159.

⁴⁹⁴ Francis Pound, ‘The Words and the Art: New Zealand Art Criticism c.1950 - c.1990,’ in *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art Limited, 1992), 187.

strategy, the exhibition emphasises multiplicity over universality. Rather than proposing a singular canonical narrative, it highlights the importance of subjective specificity. The bicultural approach taken by the curatorium challenges the dominant national narrative, in which a male Pākehā perspective tended to subsume cultural difference. By acknowledging the impact of feminist thought and exhibiting the work of women artists – both Māori and Pākehā – the exhibition appears to indicate that feminist criticism had made an impact on exhibition making.

It is worth considering, however, the artists who were chosen for inclusion in *Headlands*, and reflecting a little further on the implications of those choices. *Headlands* was a large exhibition, presenting 130 artworks, made by 38 artists. Of those 38 artists, only 11 were women; of those 11 women, only two were Māori. Pākehā men were the most highly represented artists, responsible for 89 artworks, while Māori women were the least represented, with a total of two works exhibited in the show. Notably, a significant portion of the works by male artists have been loaned from institutional collections. In contrast, a greater proportion of the work of women artists are exhibited from the artist's own collection. Indicative of the acquisition priorities of significant institutions, this has both ideological and material ramifications. The acquisition and display choices made by institutions – whether publically or privately funded – are reflective of the value systems which act to stratify our assumptions of artistic quality. Acquisitions bestow artistic value, but more immediately, they bestow financial value, allowing artists to work professionally. If, as numerical analysis would suggest, women – and particularly Māori women – remain peripheral in these terms, their marginalisation will surely persist.

Important too, are the types of women's art-making not evident in *Headlands*. As the theoretical turn of the 1980s came to exert greater influence upon the arts landscape of Aotearoa, women artists who operated within this context were privileged over those whose feminist politics were more radical. Such clearly theoretically-engaged works were deemed important as they challenged the process of representation itself, at a conceptual level. This emphasis is made clear in Green's brief discussion of the work of two women artists whose work appeared in *Headlands*. He writes:

The riches of Lacan's writings and of French feminist theoretical writing for this process appear in the work of Merylyn Tweedie, both in video and in treatments of text and photography, and in Ruth Watson's play with cultural mapping of the

self. And among the men, Terrence Handscomb and Ralph Paine have entered a similar region of concern.⁴⁹⁵

It is clear that postmodern challenges to representation are not exclusive to the interrogation of gendered oppression and marginalisation. It was this set of theoretical concerns, largely untethered from the explicit politics of feminism, which were to shape much of Aotearoa New Zealand's artistic landscape in the immediate aftermath of the 1980s. The feminist and lesbian politics which gained prominence in the 1980s were largely subsumed within this discourse.

Such developments require extensive scholarly consideration, and fall outside of the limited parameters of this project. However, the scholarship presented in this thesis provides a critical foundation for the continuation of such research. The genealogy of Aotearoa New Zealand's art history traced here, provides the first critical consideration of the construction of the figure of the 'woman artist' within this art history. Through the presentation of a critical historiography of feminist art writing in New Zealand, this thesis counters reductive or monolithic readings of feminist art writing. By drawing out the discursive threads which constitute this complex terrain I argue that it is crucial to forge ways of writing about women artists that recognise – rather than subsume – difference between women.

In order to write art histories that do not constitute women as peripheral, they must be written from such a perspective. Such histories will always be partial, rather than exhaustive. They will always be written from a specific perspective, dictated by the subjectivity of the researcher. By acknowledging such partiality, art historical writings such as this thesis, act as discursive invitations, interrogating the gendered power dynamics of art history.

⁴⁹⁵ Green, 'Modernism and Modernization,' 159.

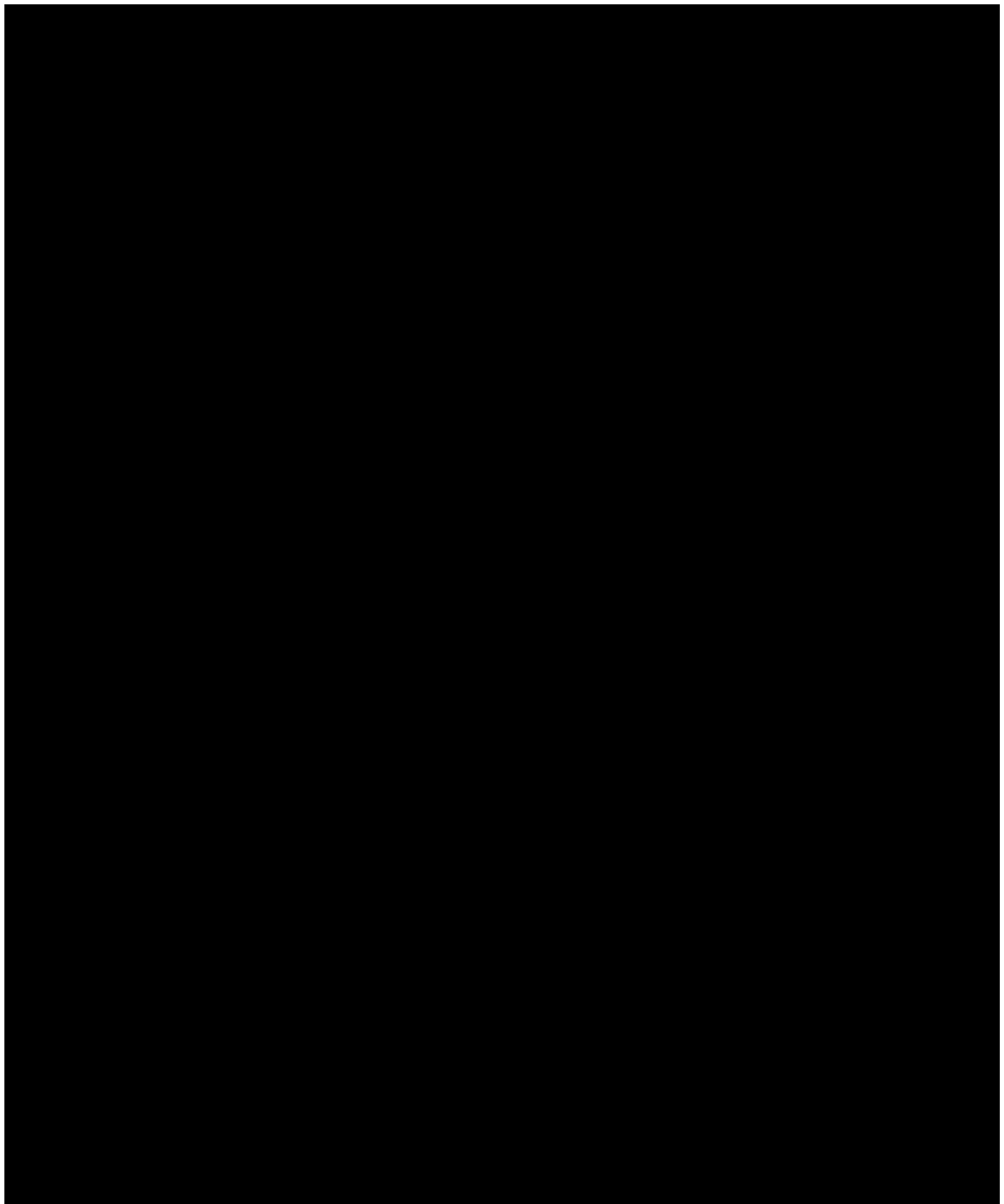


Figure 1. Cover of the first issue of *The New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, December 8, 1932

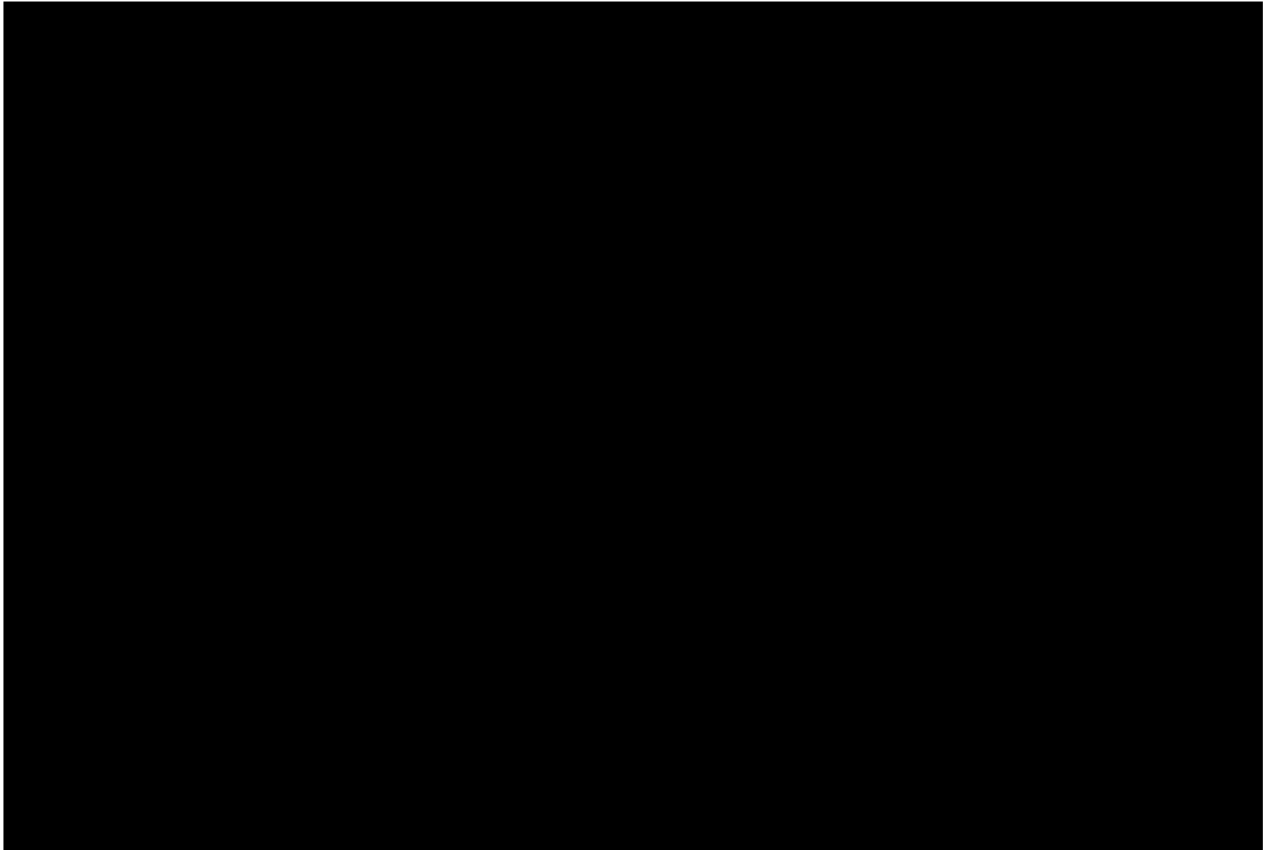


Figure 2. Pages 30 and 31 of the *First Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand*, 1945, depicting works by Vernon Brown and Doris Lusk

Edited by Howard Wadman

Published by H. H. Tombs Ltd.

Wellington, N.Z.



Figure 3: Vernon Brown, *Constitution Hill*, watercolour, 1945

(Location unknown)

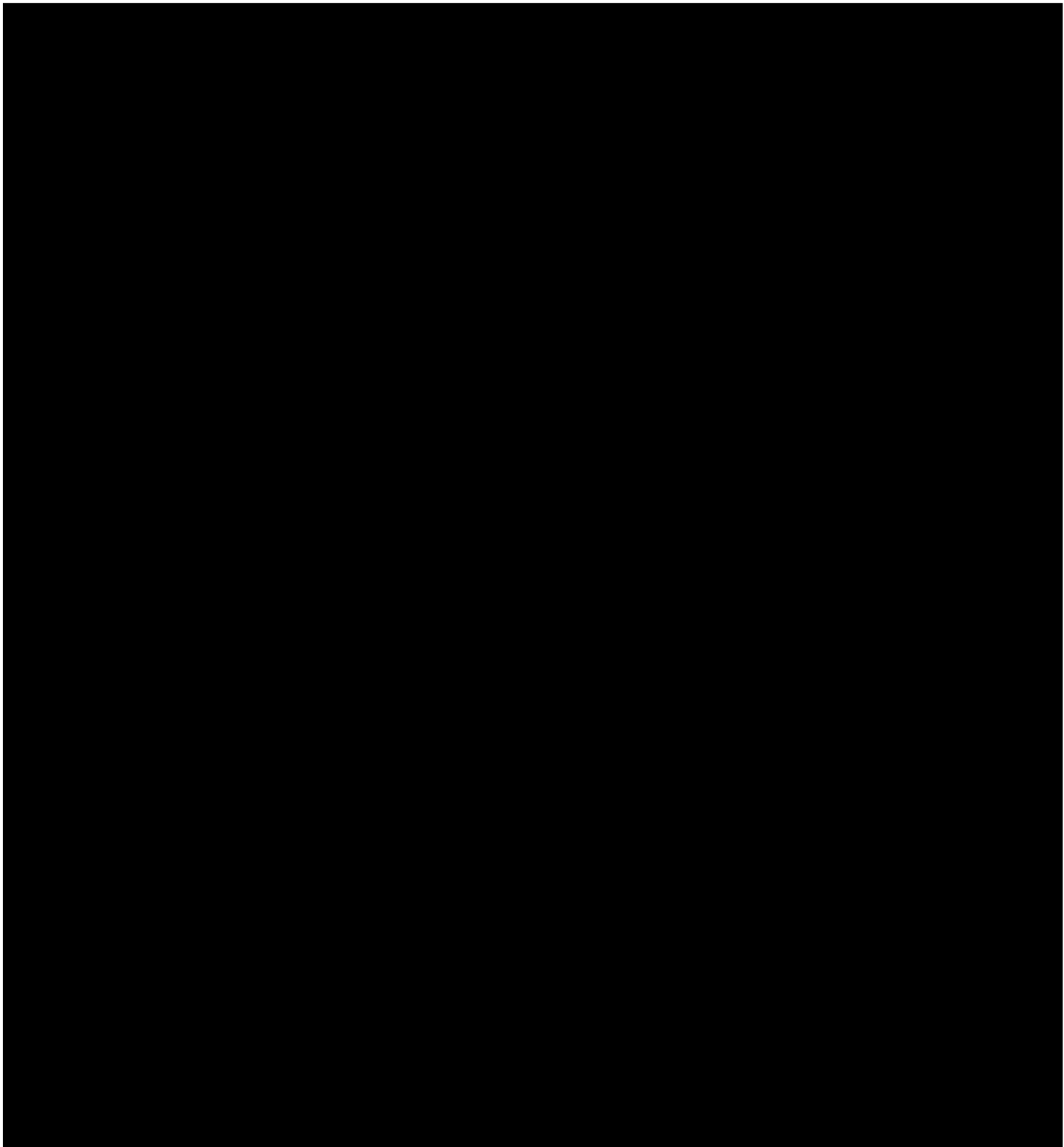


Figure 4: Doris Lusk, *The Avon River, Autumn, Christchurch*, oil

(Location unknown)

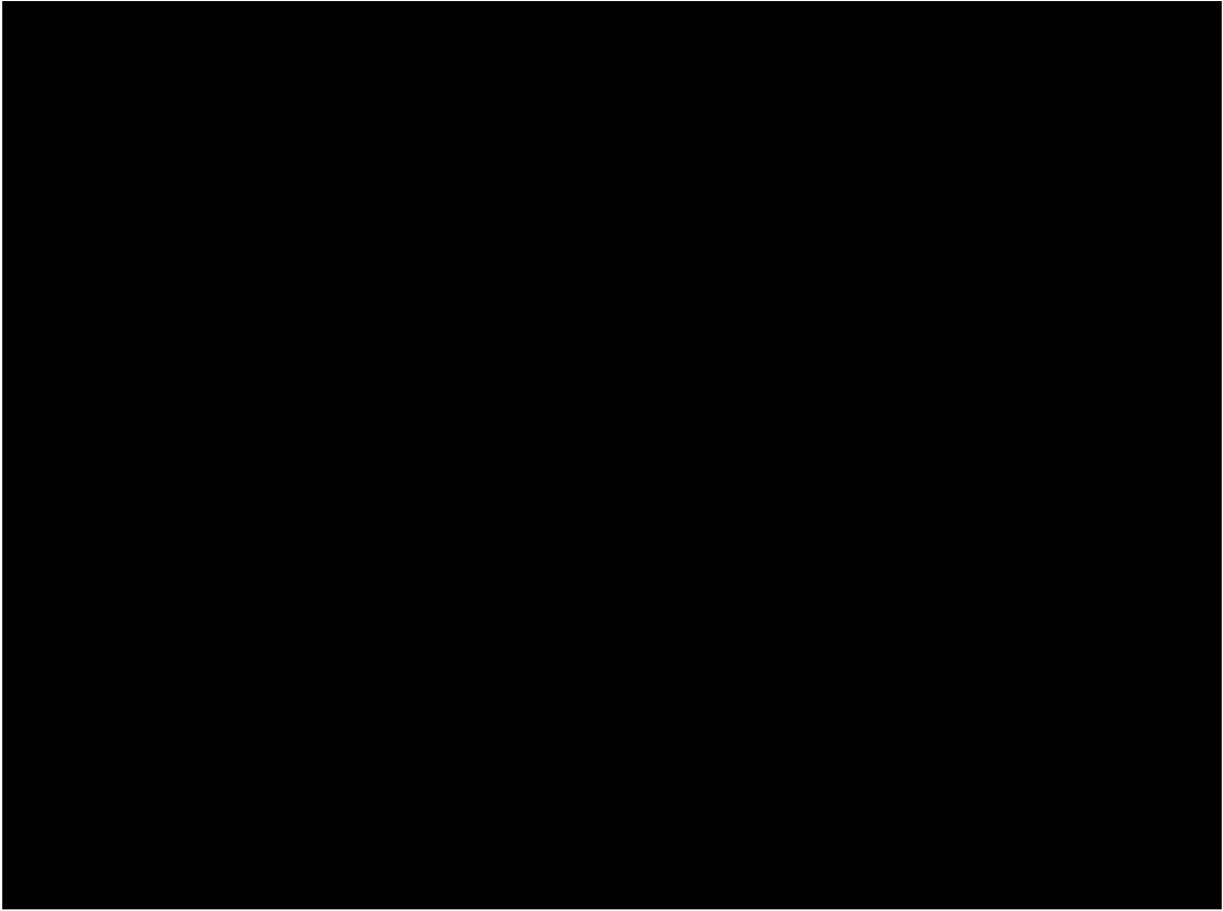


Figure 5: Rhona Haszard photographed in front of a display of her paintings at Victoria College, Alexandria, Egypt, in the late 1920s or early 1930s

(Alexander Turnbull Library)



Figure 6: 'Tragic Death in Cairo', *New Zealand Herald*, 25 February, 1931

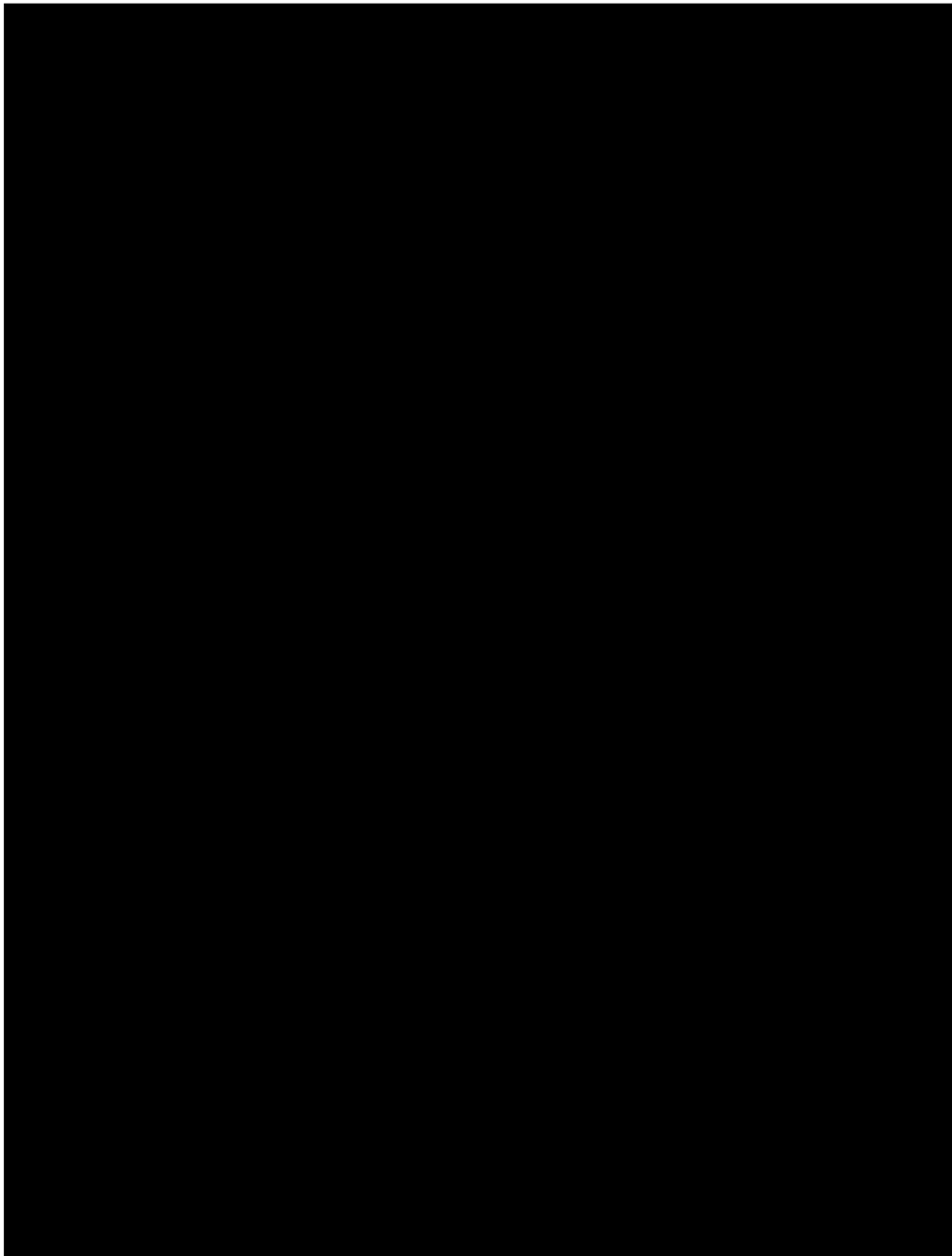


Figure 7: Cover of Gordon H. Brown and Hamish Keith, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839 – 1967*

(Auckland, Collins Bros & Co. Ltd., 1969)

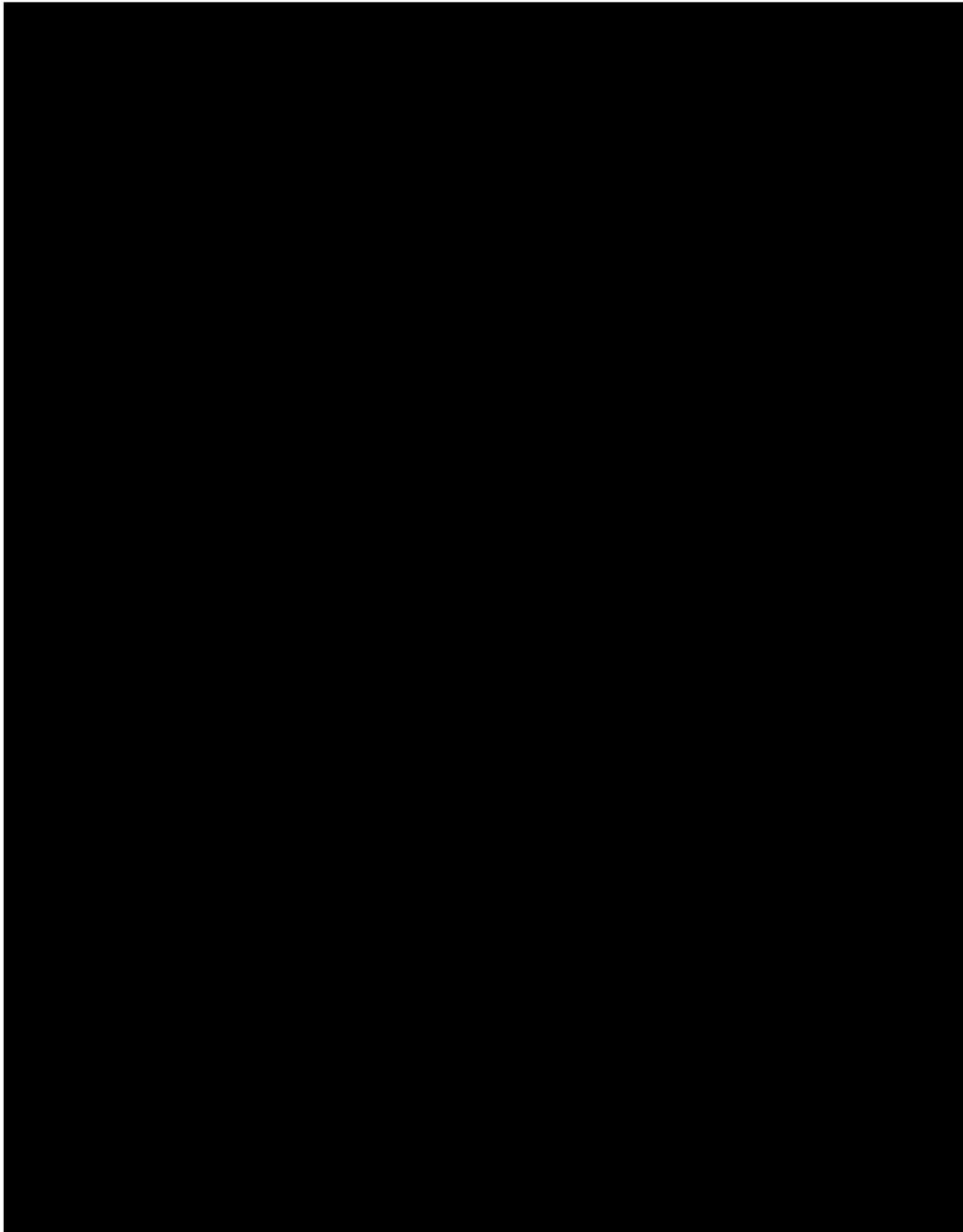


Figure 8: Louise Henderson, *Duravel no. 2*, oil on canvas, 1952

(Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki)

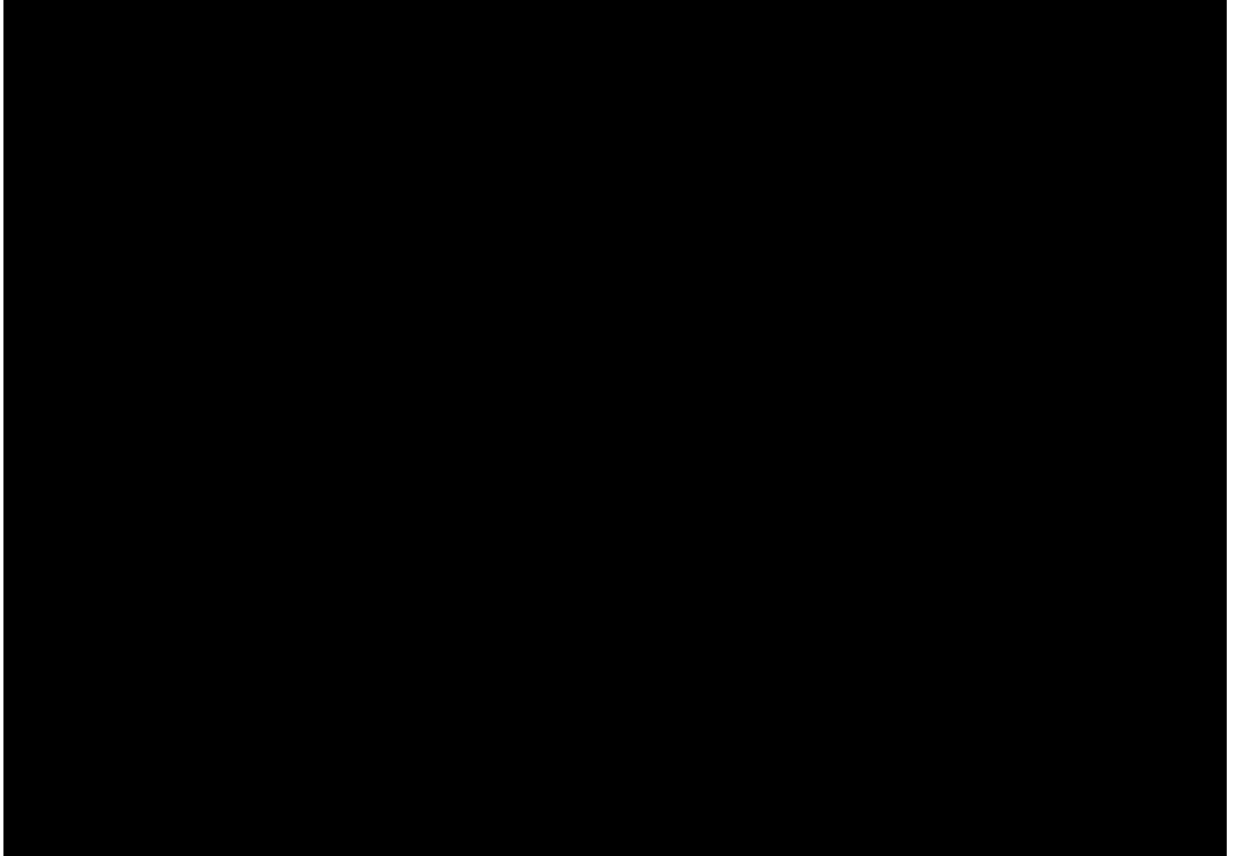


Figure 9: Installation view of *Object and Image* exhibition, Auckland City Art Gallery
November, 1954

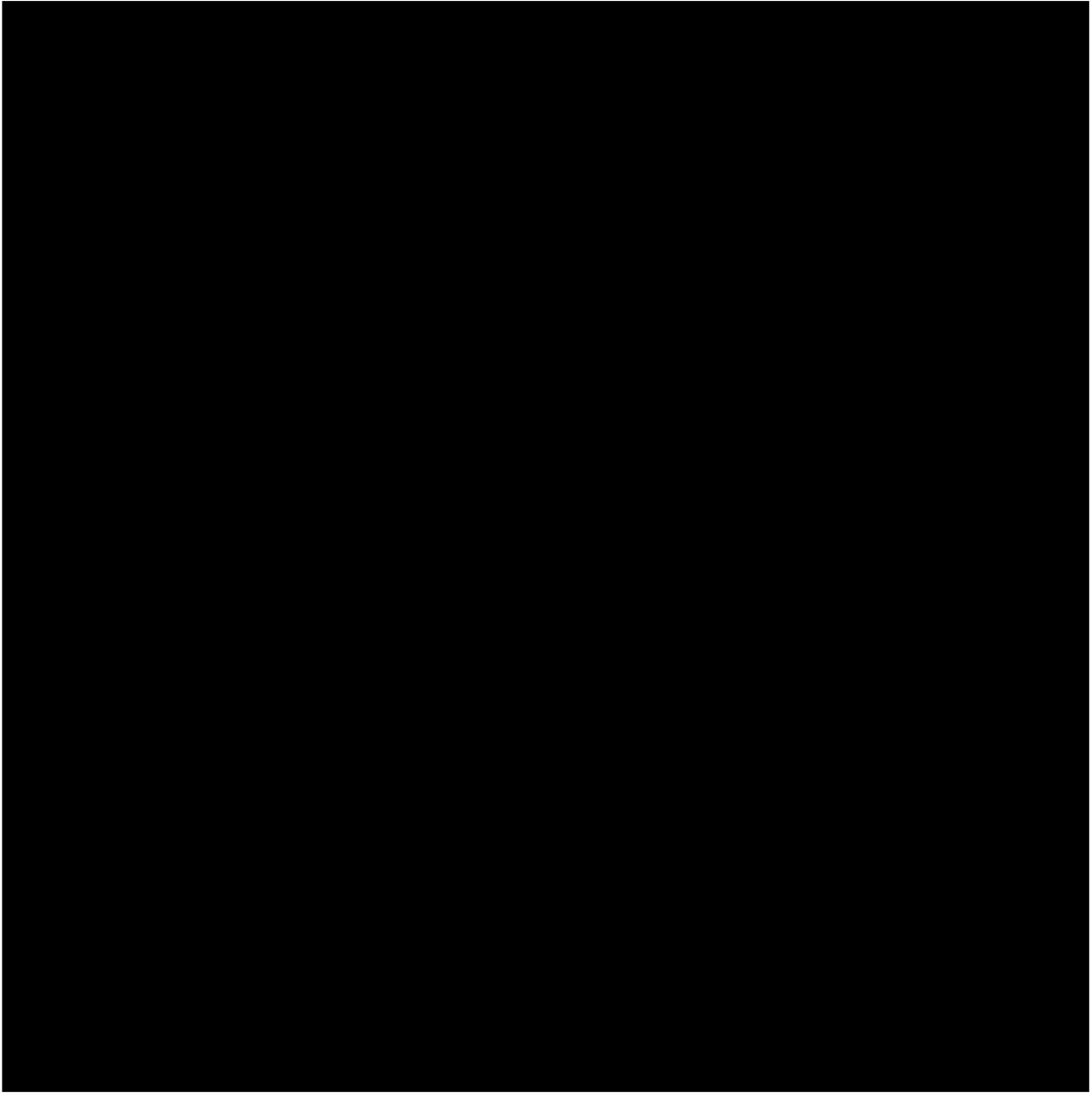


Figure 10: Portrait of Frances Hodgkins painting at an easel in her Bowen Street studio in Wellington, c. 1905

(Alexander Turnbull Library)

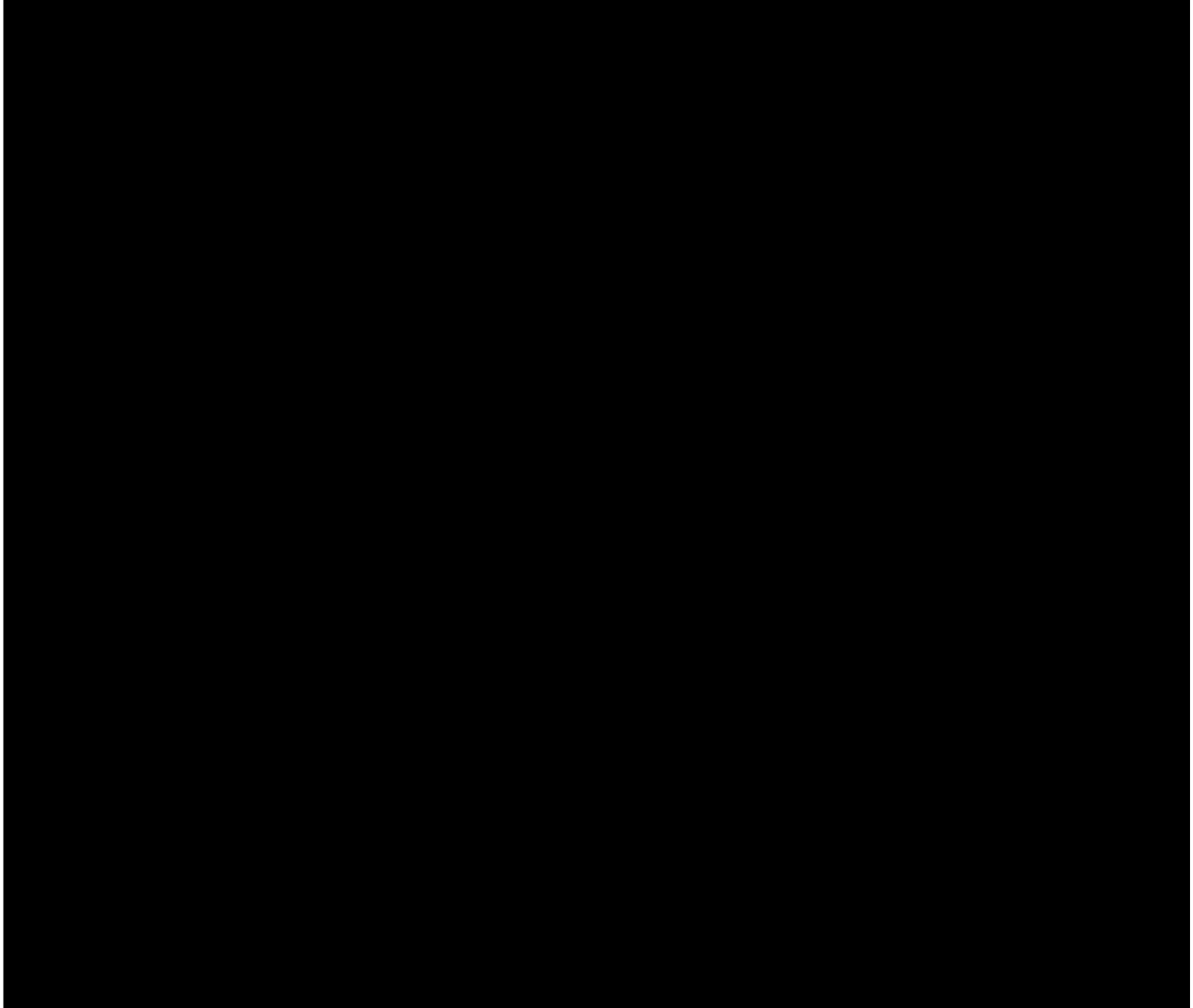


Figure 11: Rita Angus, *Central Otago*, oil on board, 1940

(Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki)

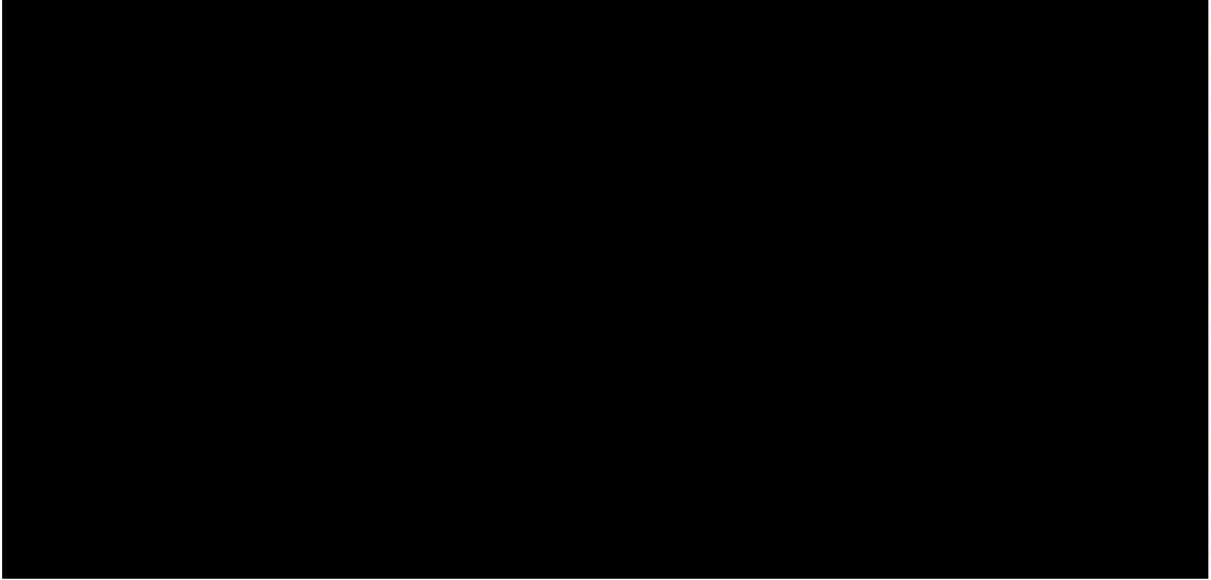


Figure 12: Colin McCahon, *Elias Triptych*, oil and sand on three hardboard panels, 1959
(Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki)

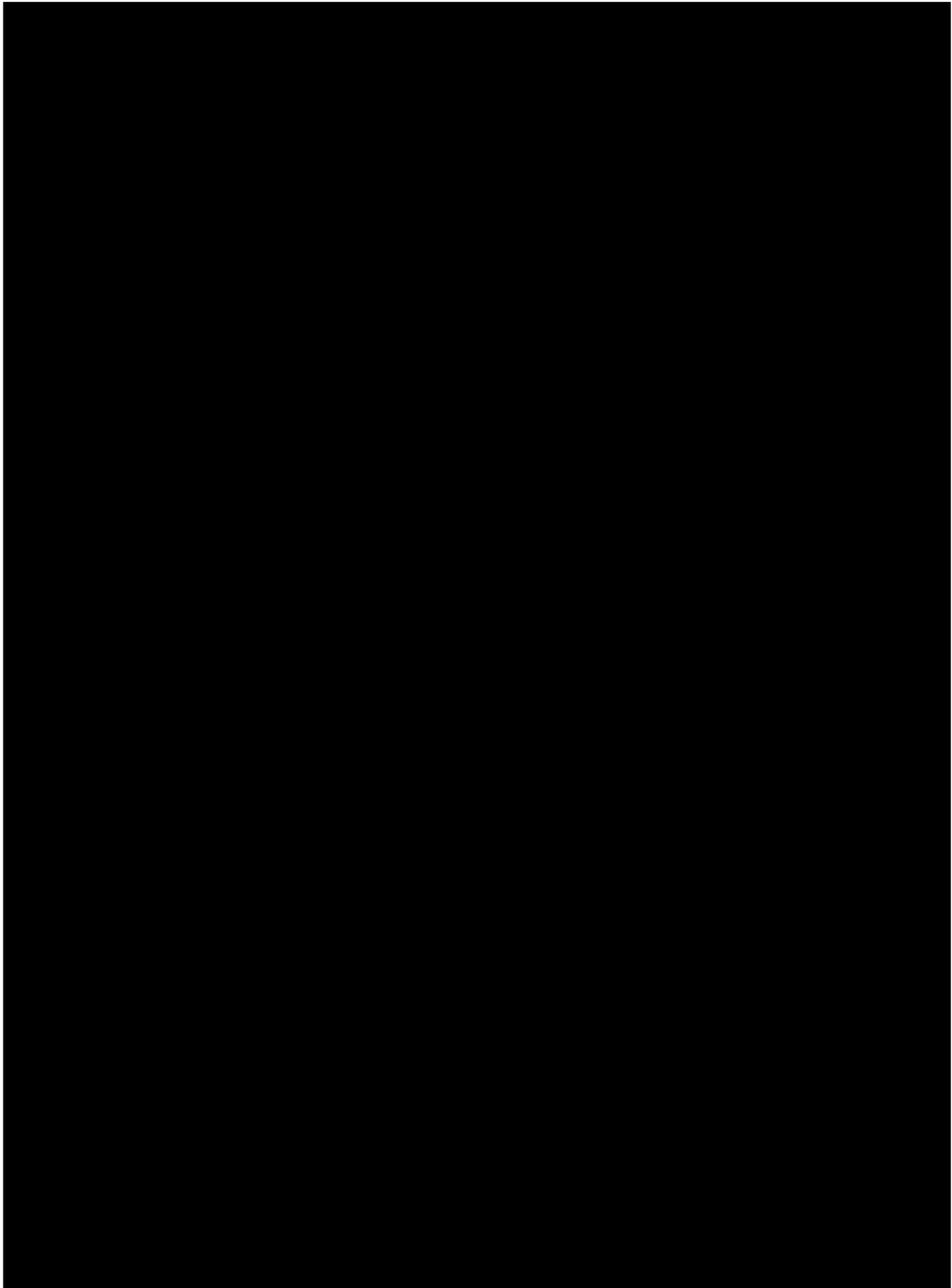


Figure 13: Cover of Issue 5 of *Ascent*, December 1969
Frances Hodgkins commemorative issue

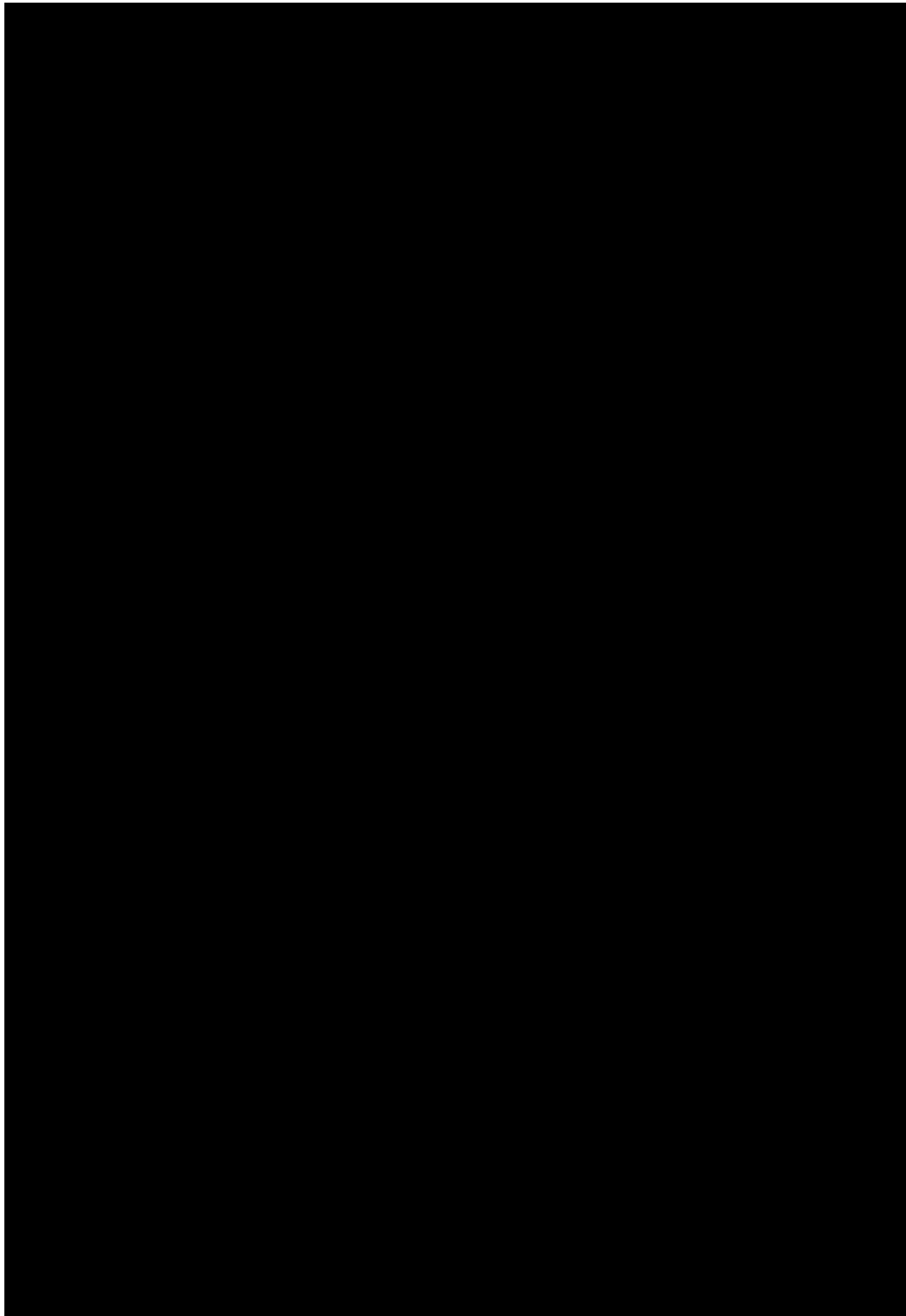


Figure 14: Louis John Steele, *Spoils to the Victor*, oil on panel, 1908

(Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki)

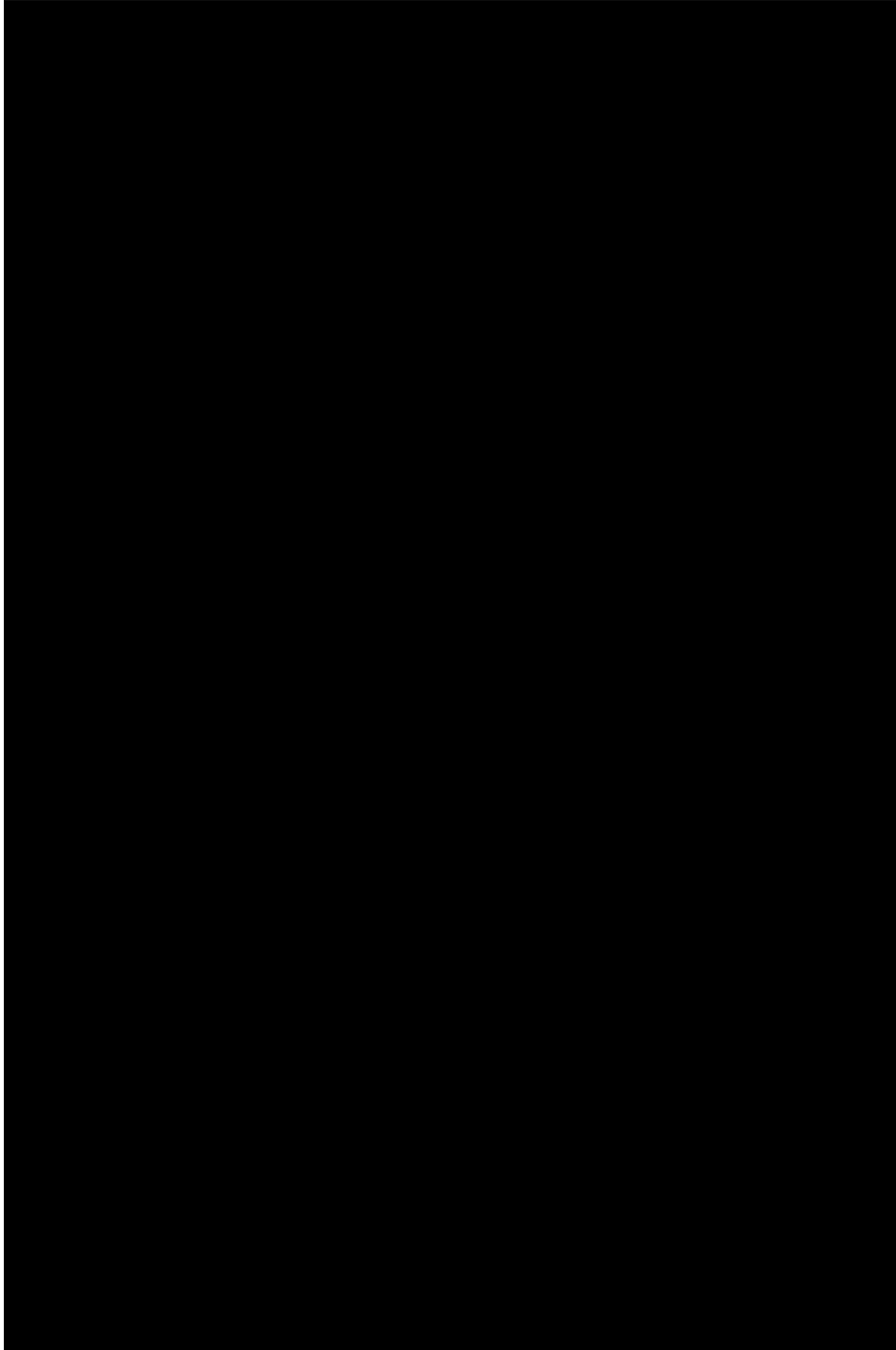


Figure 15: Cover of the first *Art New Zealand*, September 1976

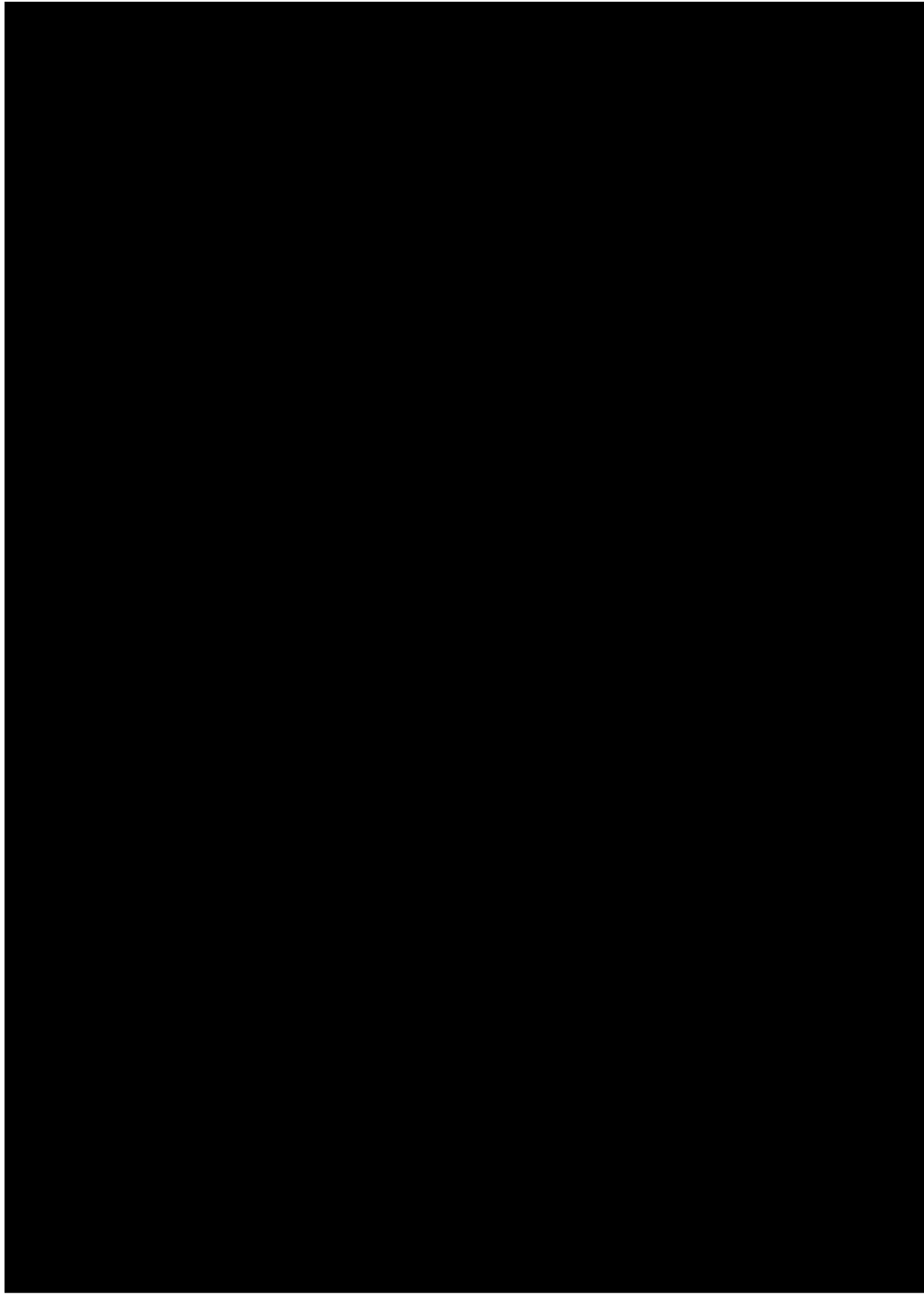


Figure 16: Cover of *Art New Zealand* no. 3, January 1976

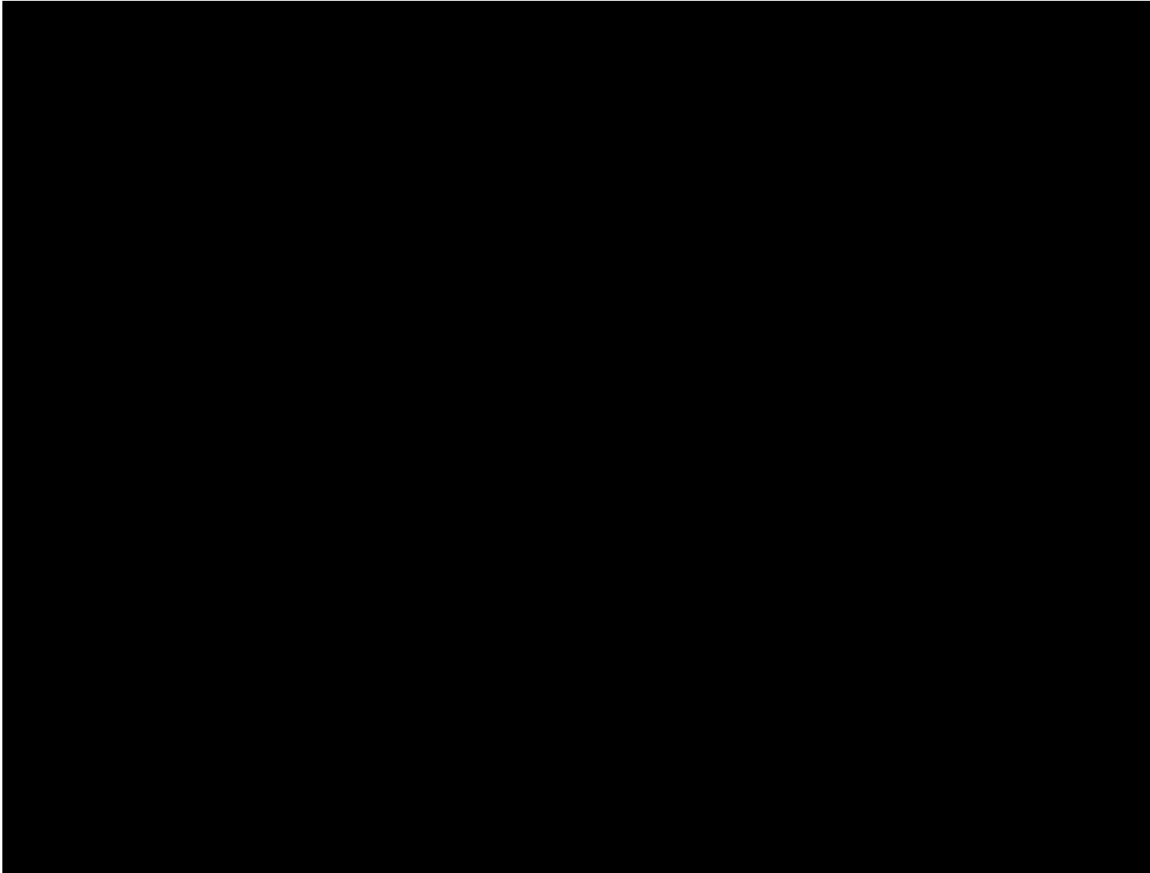


Figure 17: A selection of early *Broadsheet* covers

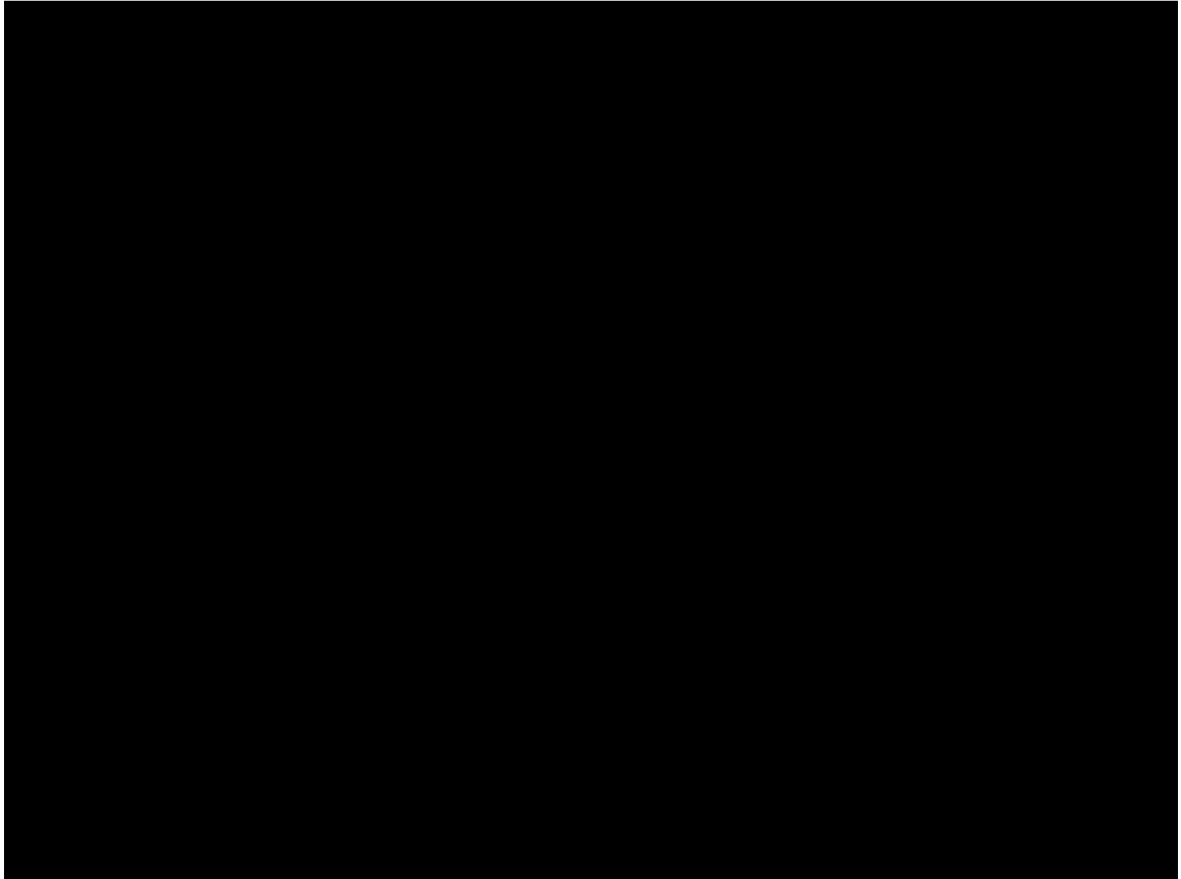


Figure 18: Illustration, credited to Angela, *But where are all the great women artists?...*
in *Broadsheet* no. 22, September 1974

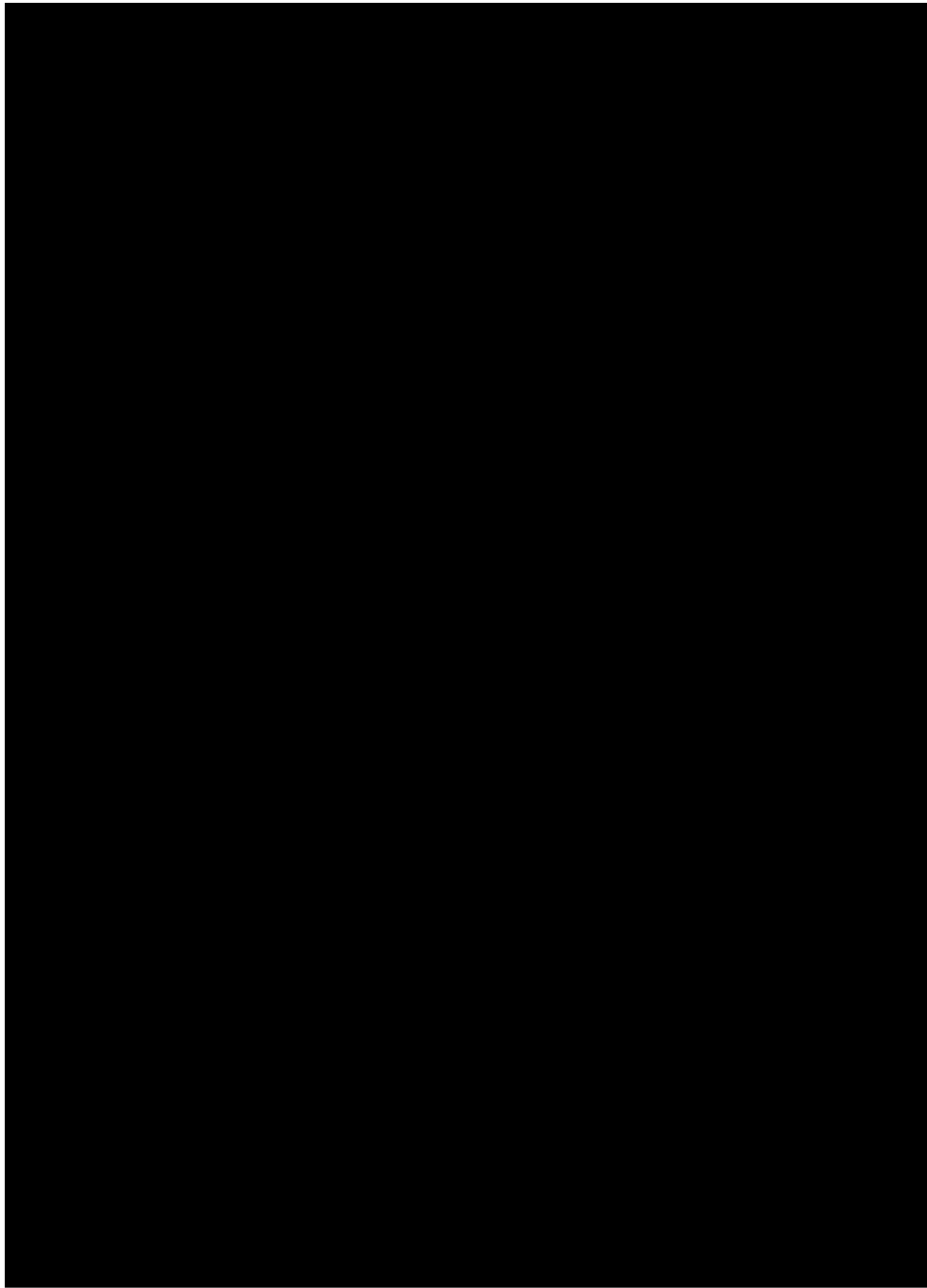


Figure 19: Cover of the first *Spiral*, 1976



Figure 20: Vivian Lynn, *Book of Forty Images*, silkscreen, vinyl cover, 1973 – 74

(Te Papa Tongarewa)

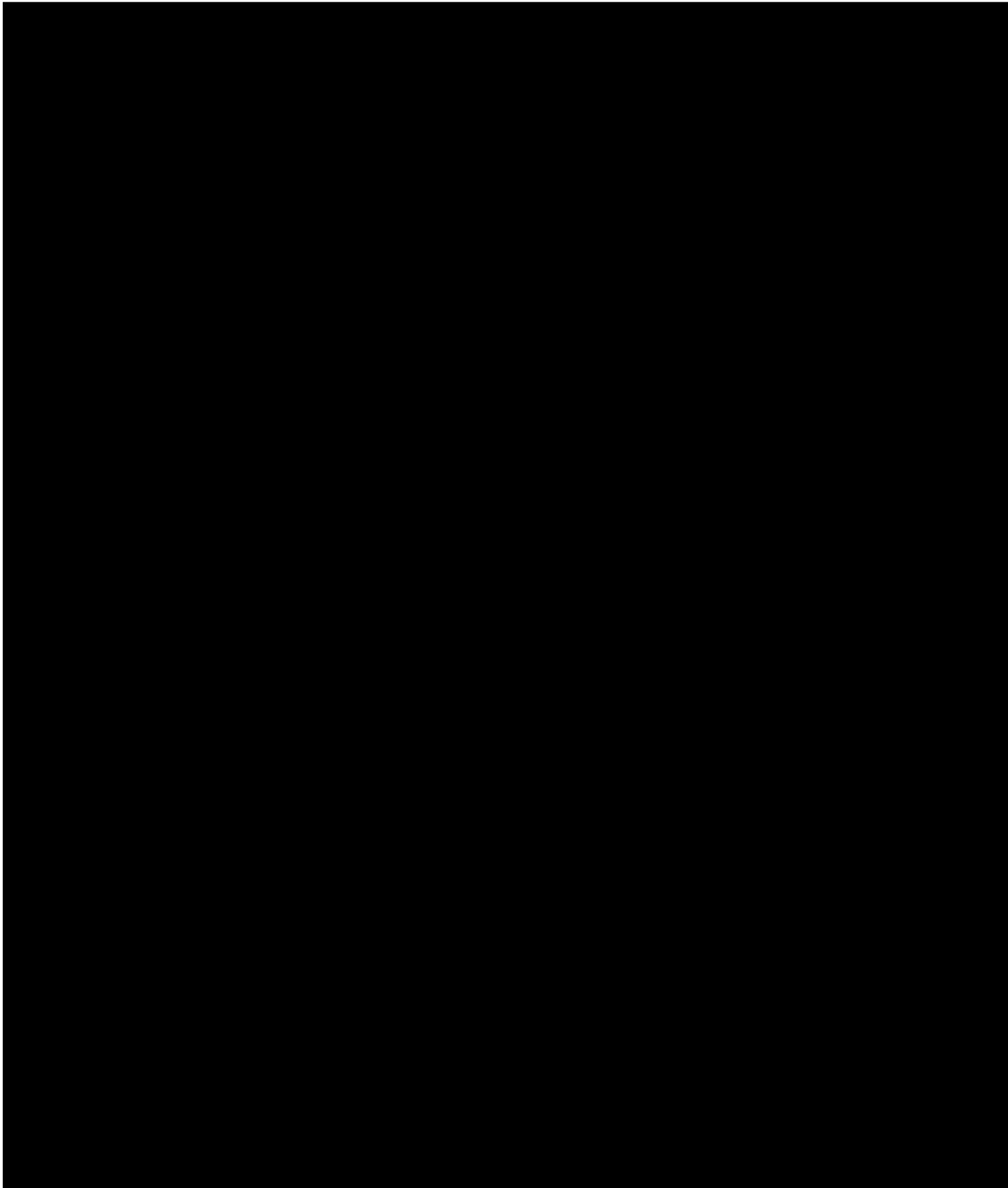


Figure 21: Joanna Margaret Paul, *Unwrapping the Body*, artist's book, 1977
detail: cardboard sleeve cover

(Te Papa Tongarewa)

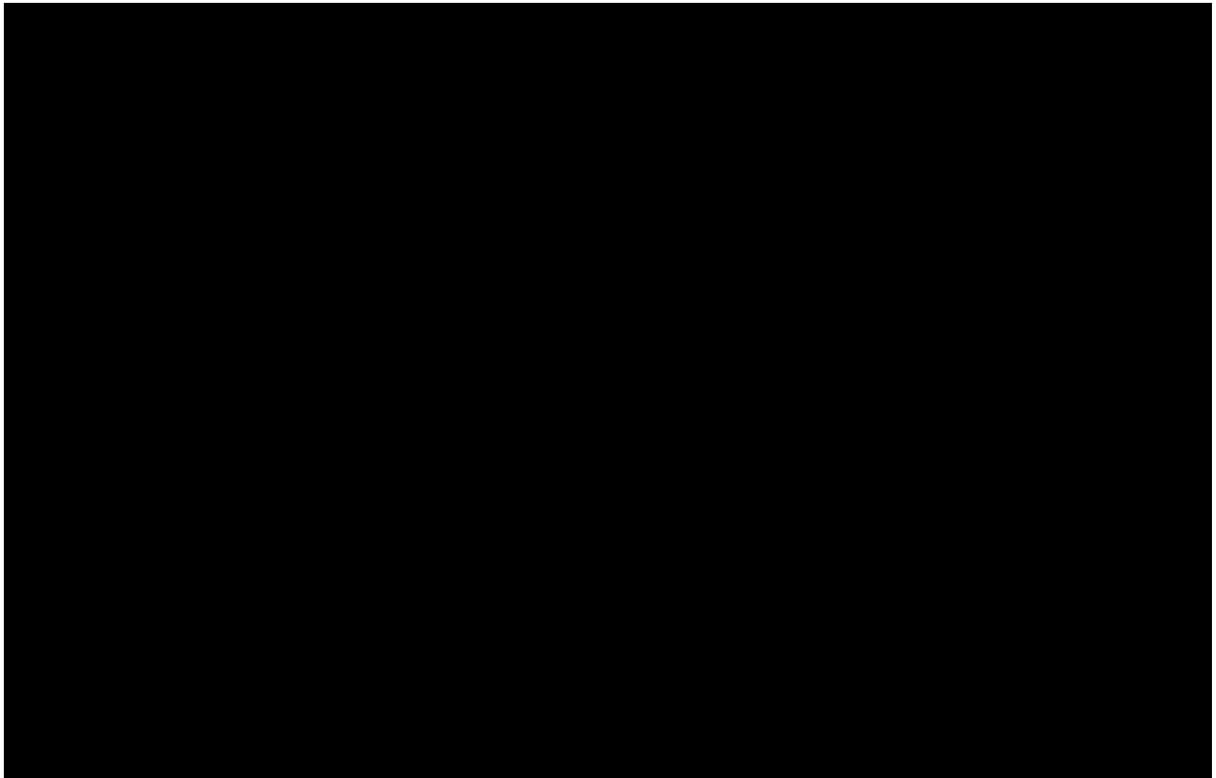


Figure 22: Joanna Margaret Paul, *Unwrapping the Body*, artist's book, 1977
detail: page layout

(Te Papa Tongarewa)

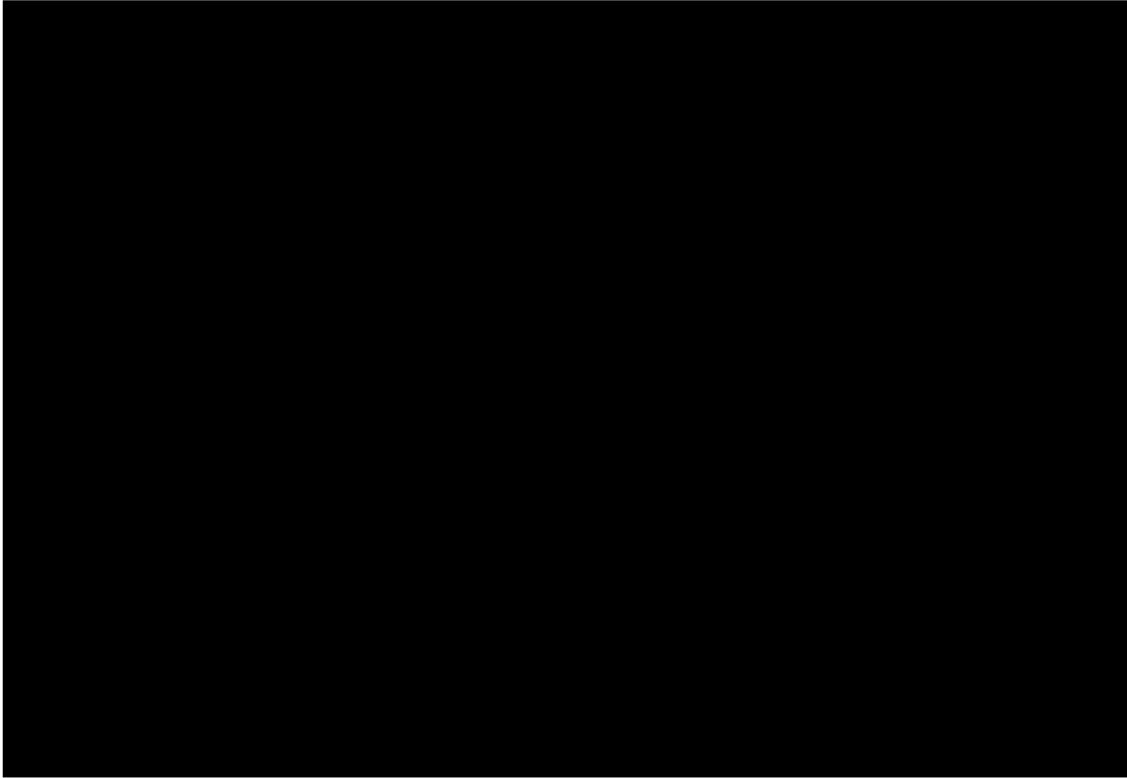


Figure 23: Photograph of Women's Art Environment installation at CSA gallery,
Christchurch, 1977

(Christchurch City Libraries Ngā Kete Wānanga-o-Ōtautahi)

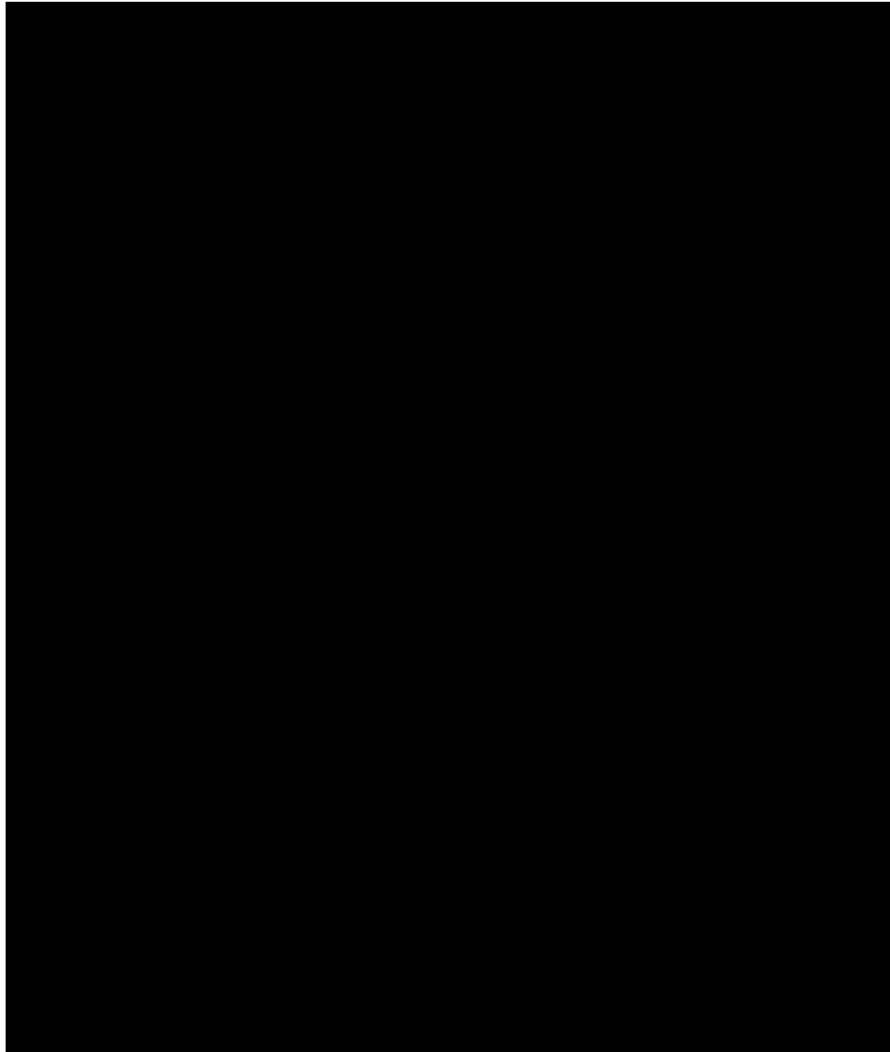


Figure 24: Fiona Clark, *Dance, Auckland*, photograph and text, 1974

(Location unknown)

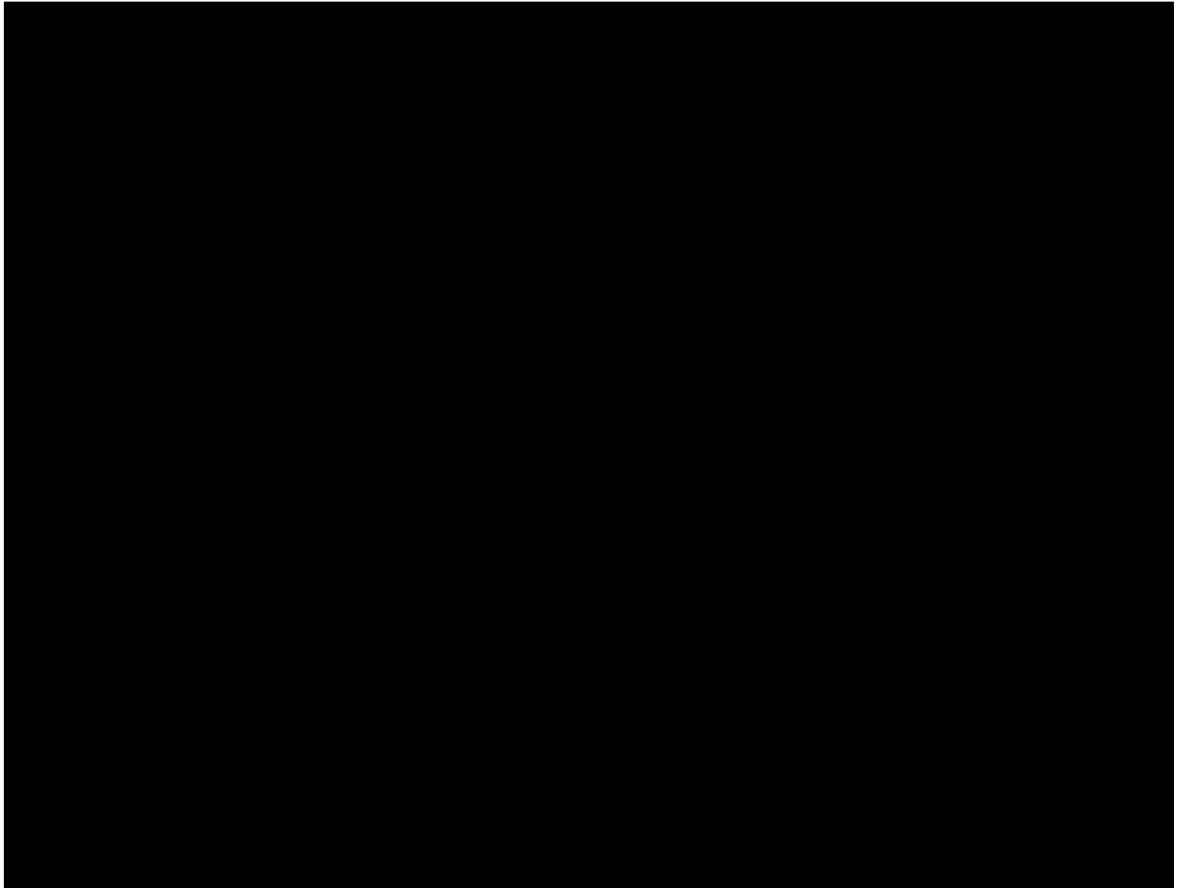


Figure 25: Still from Merata Mita, Leon Narbey and Gerd Pohlmann, *Bastion Point Day 507*, 1980

(Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision)

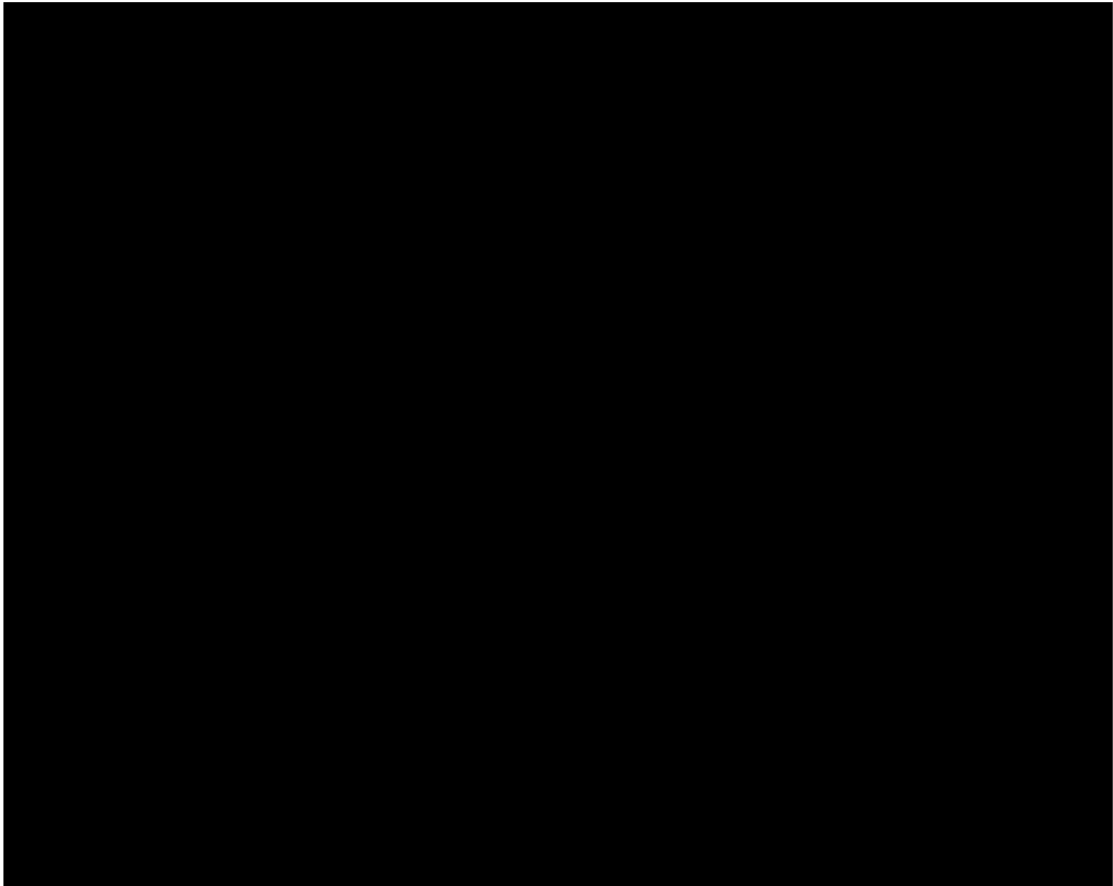


Figure 26: Marti Friedlander, *White Women's Convention*, black and white photograph, 1979
(E. H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, on loan from The
Gerrard and Marti Friedlander Charitable Trust)

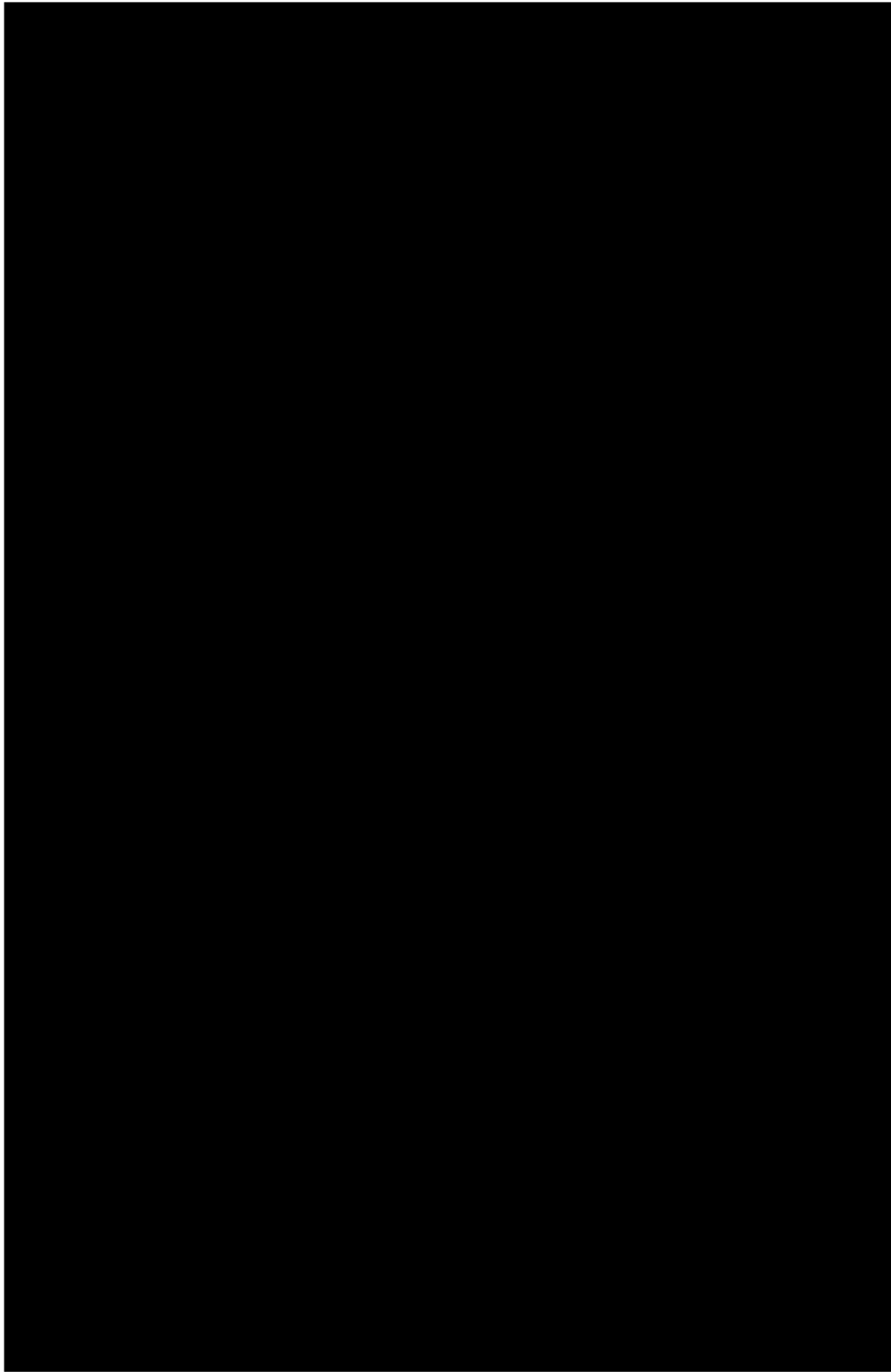


Figure 27: Fiona Clark, Photograph of women outside the Women's Gallery, 1980

Taken outside 26 Harris Street, Wellington, January 1980

l-r: Marian Evans, Allie Eagle, Nancy Peterson, Juliet Batten, Anna Keir, Heather McPherson,
Bridie Lonie, Keri Hulme. In front: Brigid Eyley, Claudia Pond Eyley
Absent: Joanna Margaret Paul, Carole Stewart and Tiffany Thornley

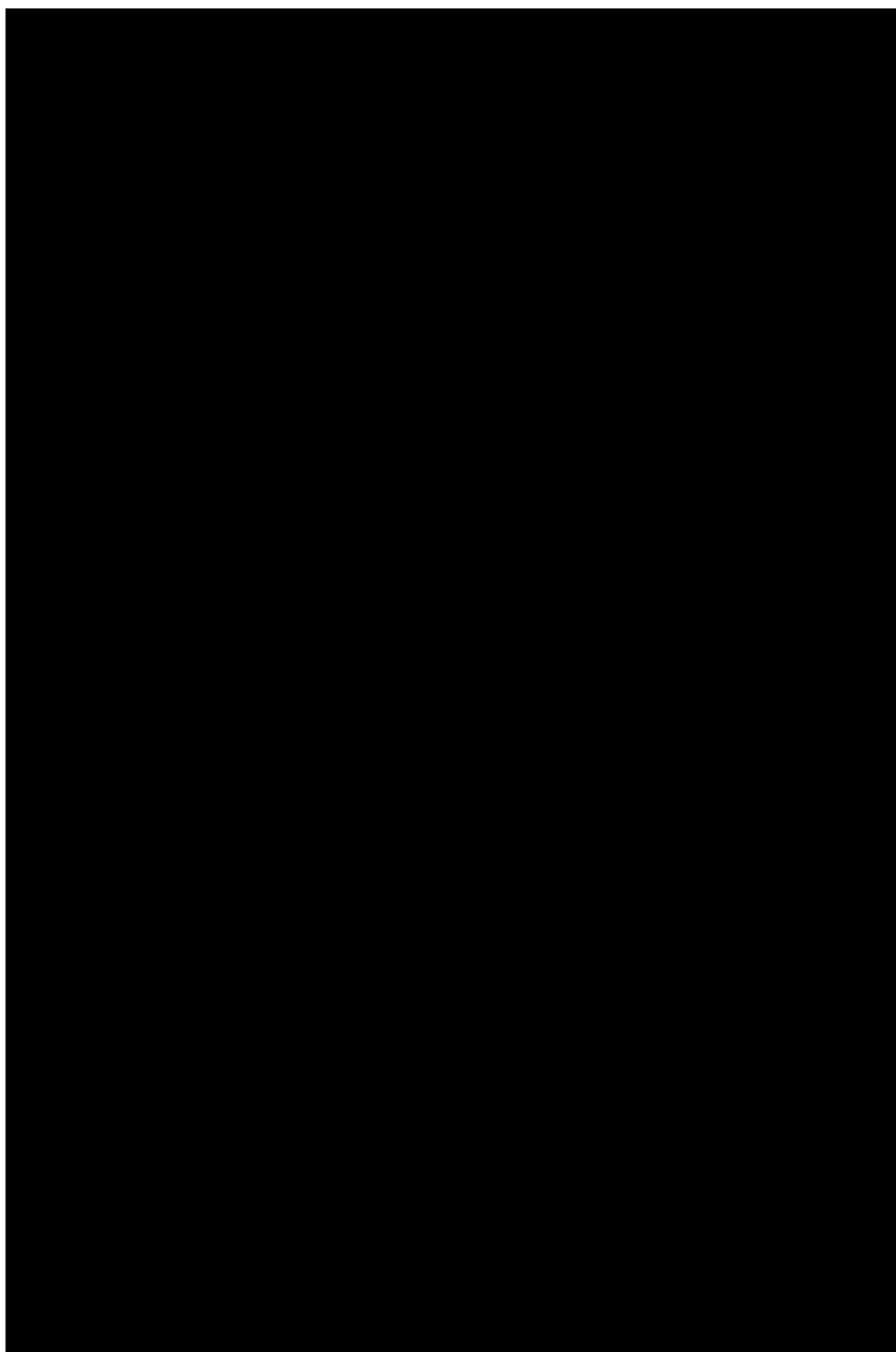


Figure 28: New Zealand Women Artists issue of *Art New Zealand*, autumn 1983

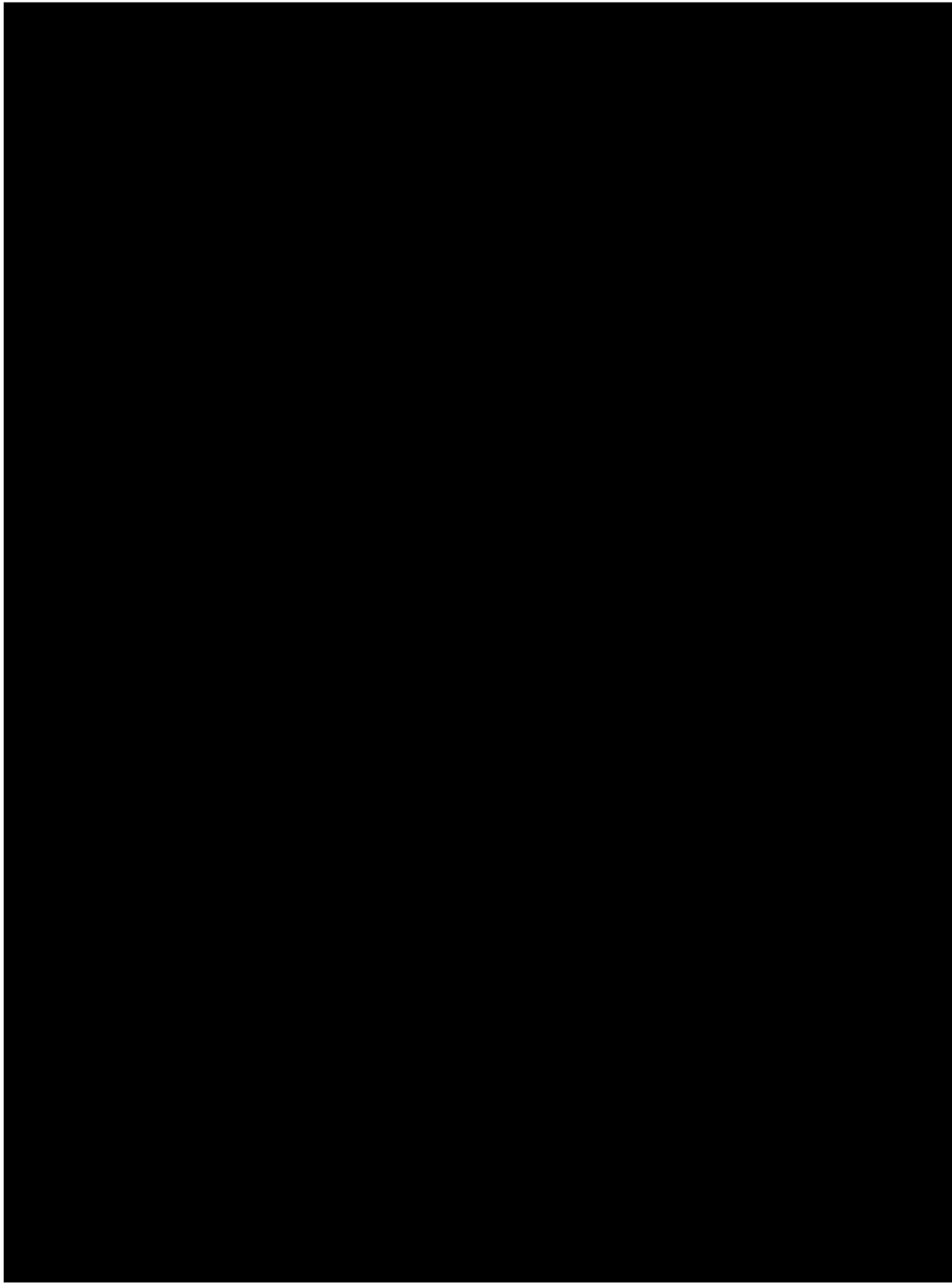


Figure 29: Cover of issue 110 of *Broadsheet*, including a 'Special Feature on Feminist Art'
Autumn 1983

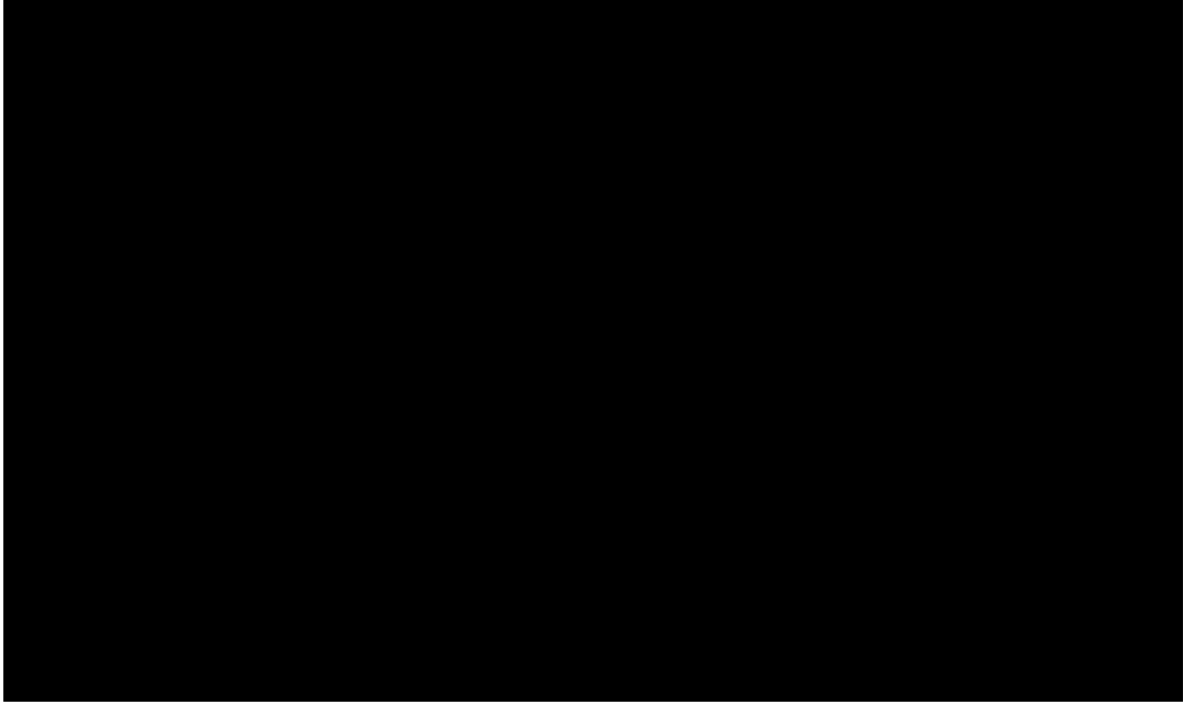


Figure 30: Vivian Lynn, *Rebirth* from the series *G'arden Gates*, human hair, clay, steel, 1982

(Te Papa Tongarewa)



Figure 31: Cover of Anne Kirker, *New Zealand Women Artists* (Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1986)

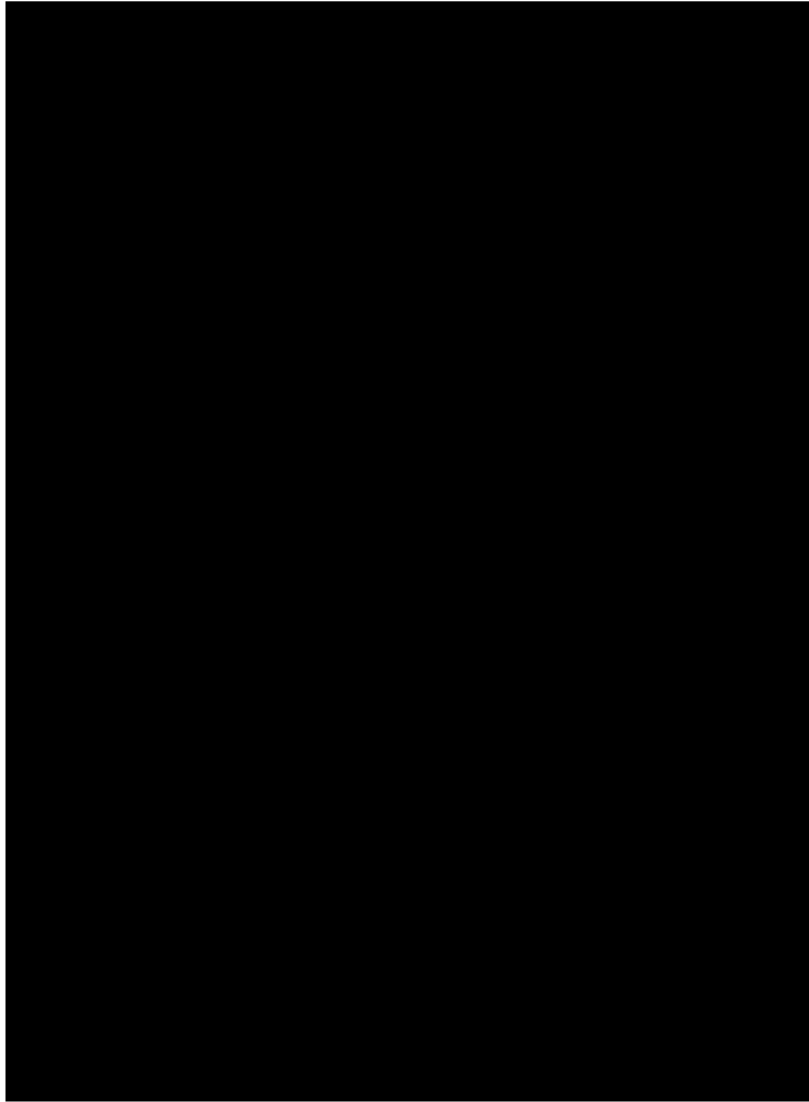


Figure 32: Cover of Elizabeth Eastmond and Merimeri Penfold, *Women and the Arts in New Zealand Forty Works: 1936 – 86* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1986)

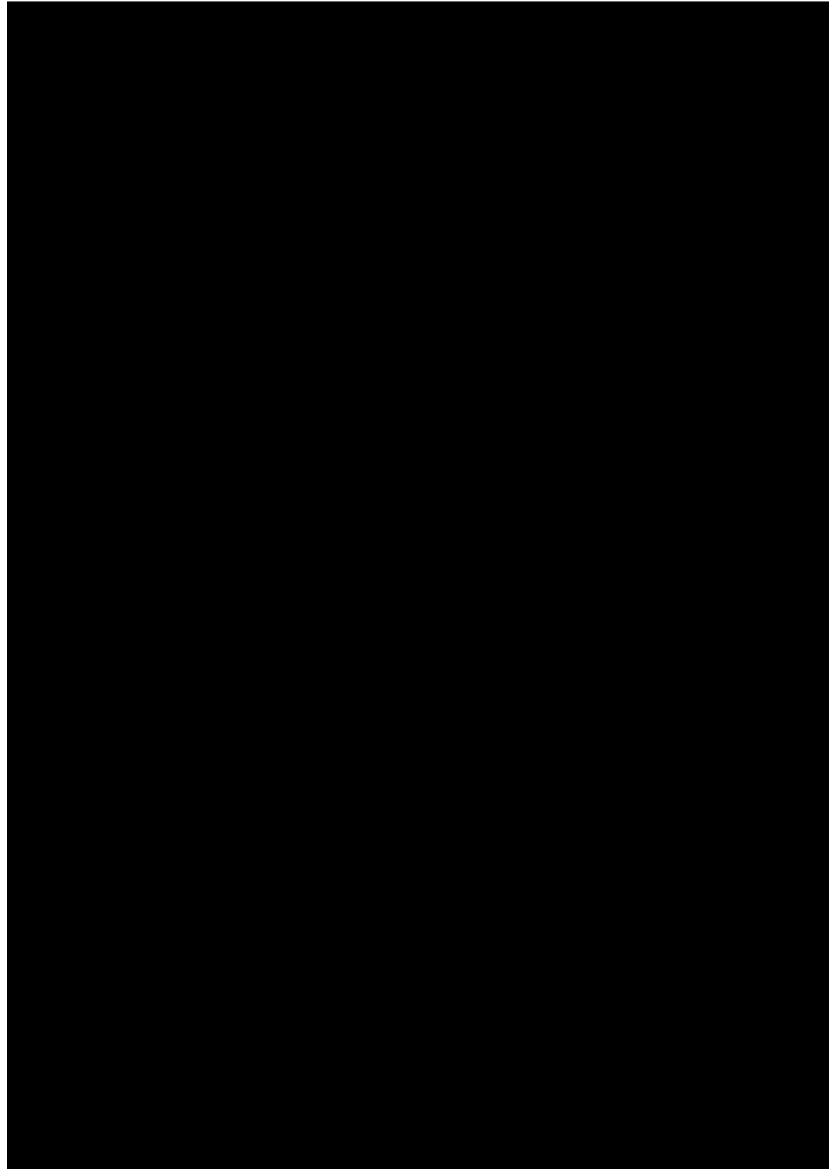


Figure 33: Cover of Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie and Tilly Lloyd, eds. *A Women's Picture Book: 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)* (Wellington: Government Printing Office, 1988)

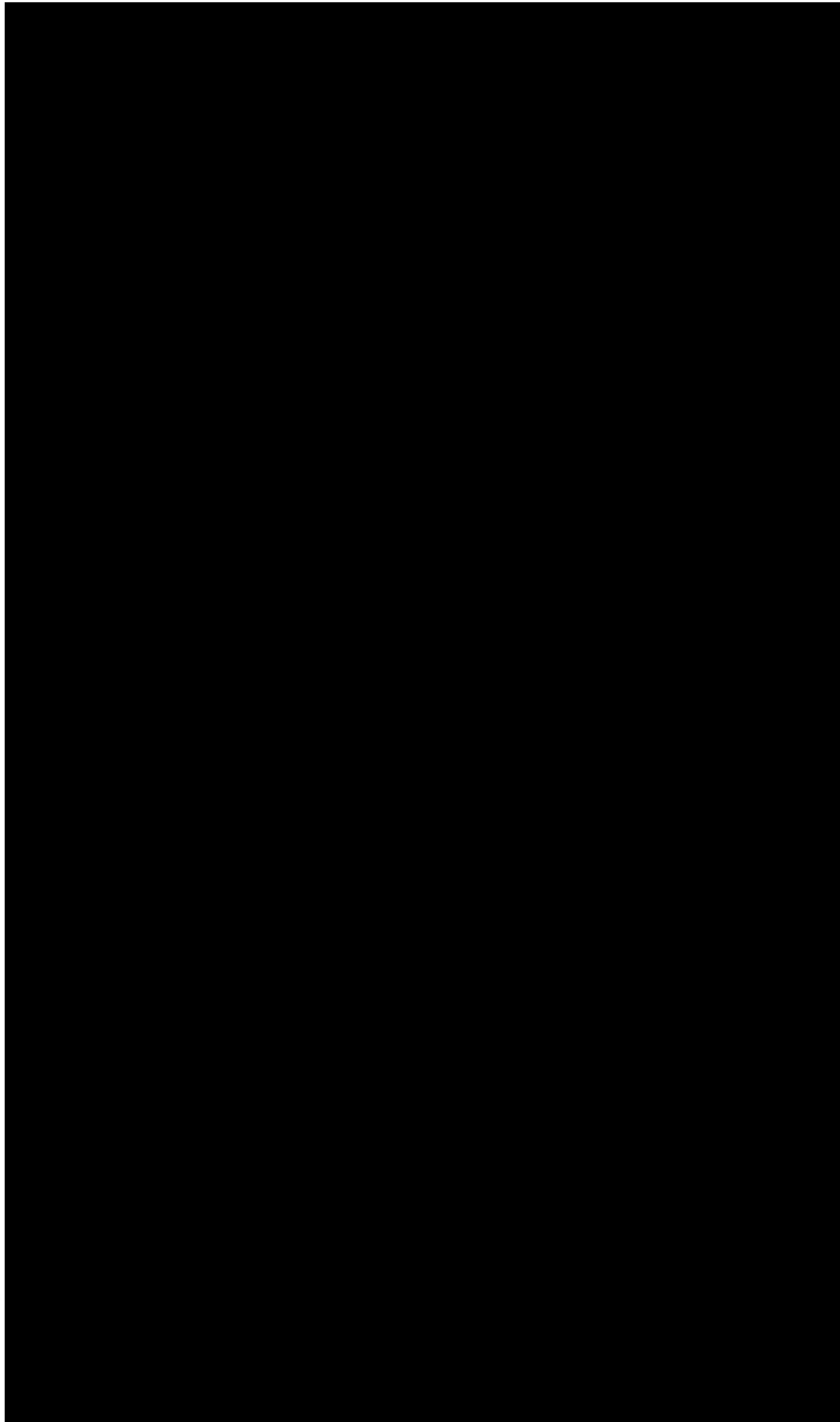


Figure 34: Excerpt from Merylyn Tweedie, 'Dora Re-Constructs a Debate about the Vaginal vs. the Clitoral' in *Antic* 4 (October 1988)

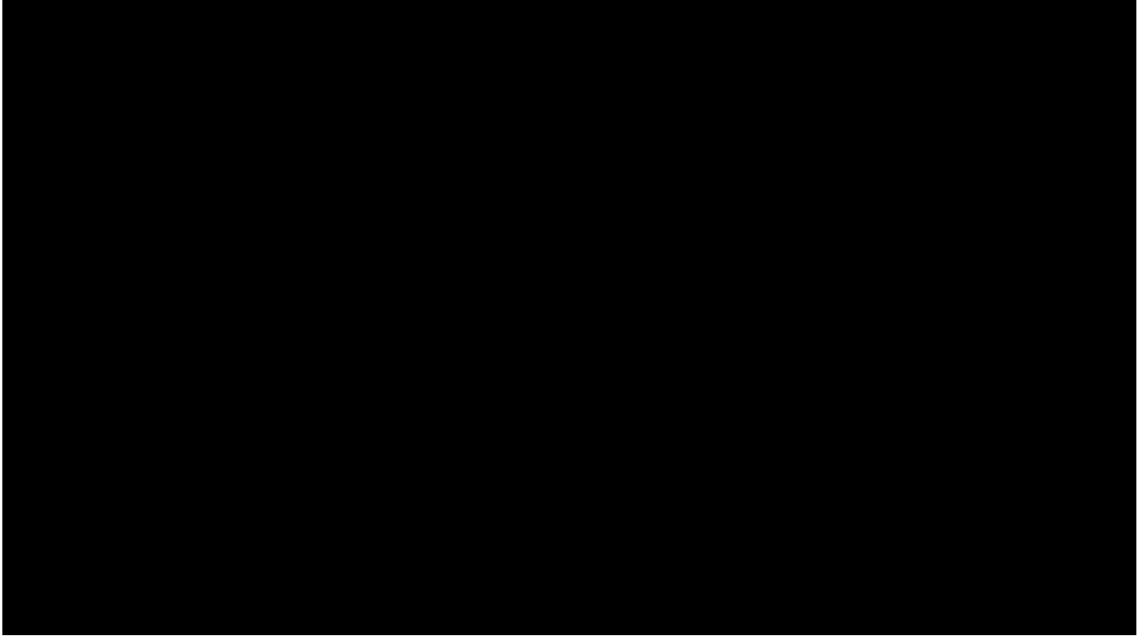


Figure 35: Excerpt from Merylyn Tweedie, 'Dora Re-Constructs a Debate about the Vaginal vs. the Clitoral' in *Antic* 4 (October 1988)

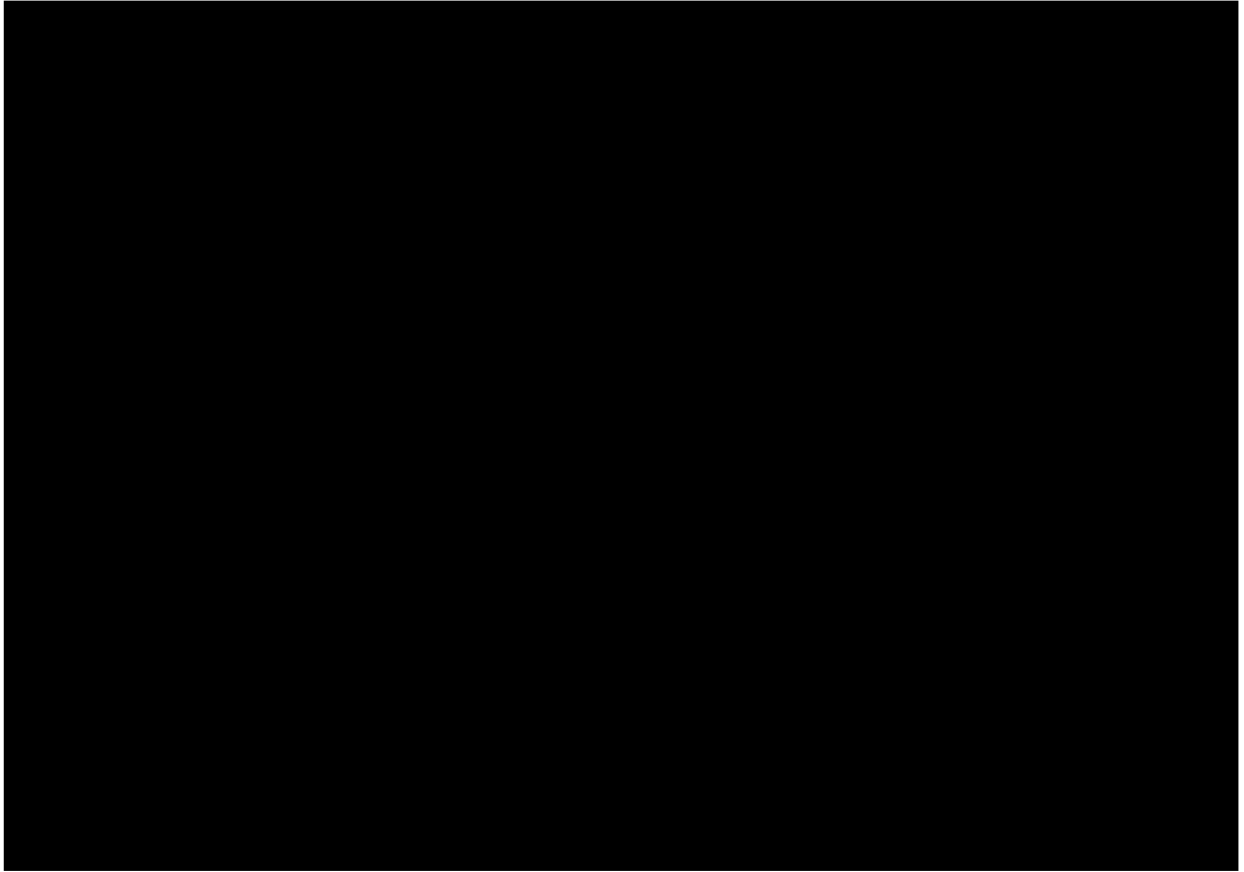


Figure 36: Merylyn Tweedie, *Entering Commercial Distribution 1987*, paper and resin, 1987
as included in Wystan Curnow, 'Sex & Sign'

(Artspace, 1988)

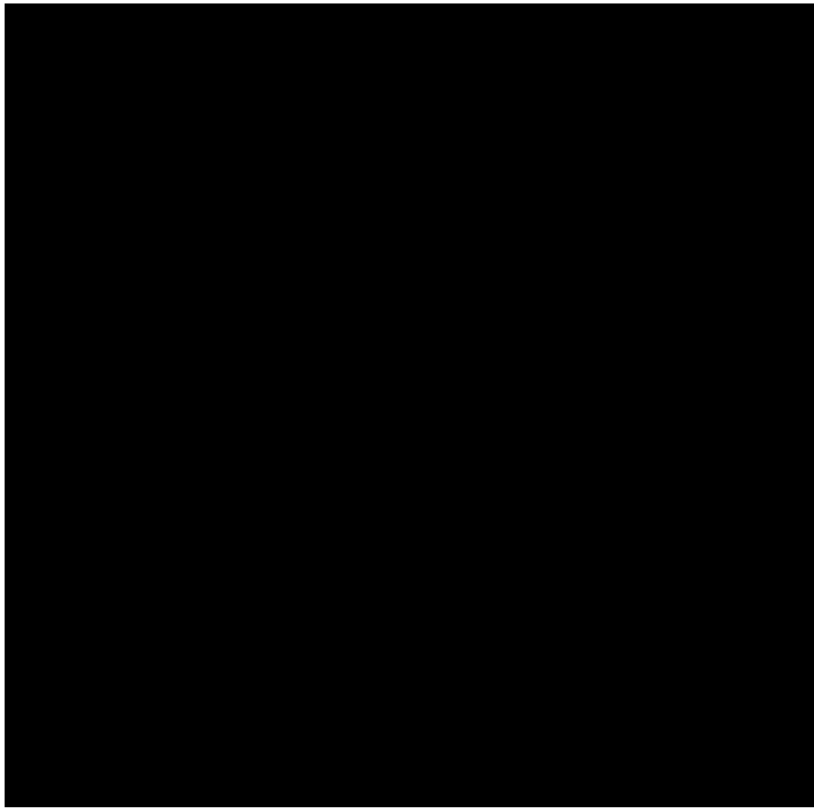


Figure 37: Cover of Robyn Kahukiwa and Patricia Grace, *Wahine Toa: Women of Maori Myth*

(Auckland: Collins, 1984)

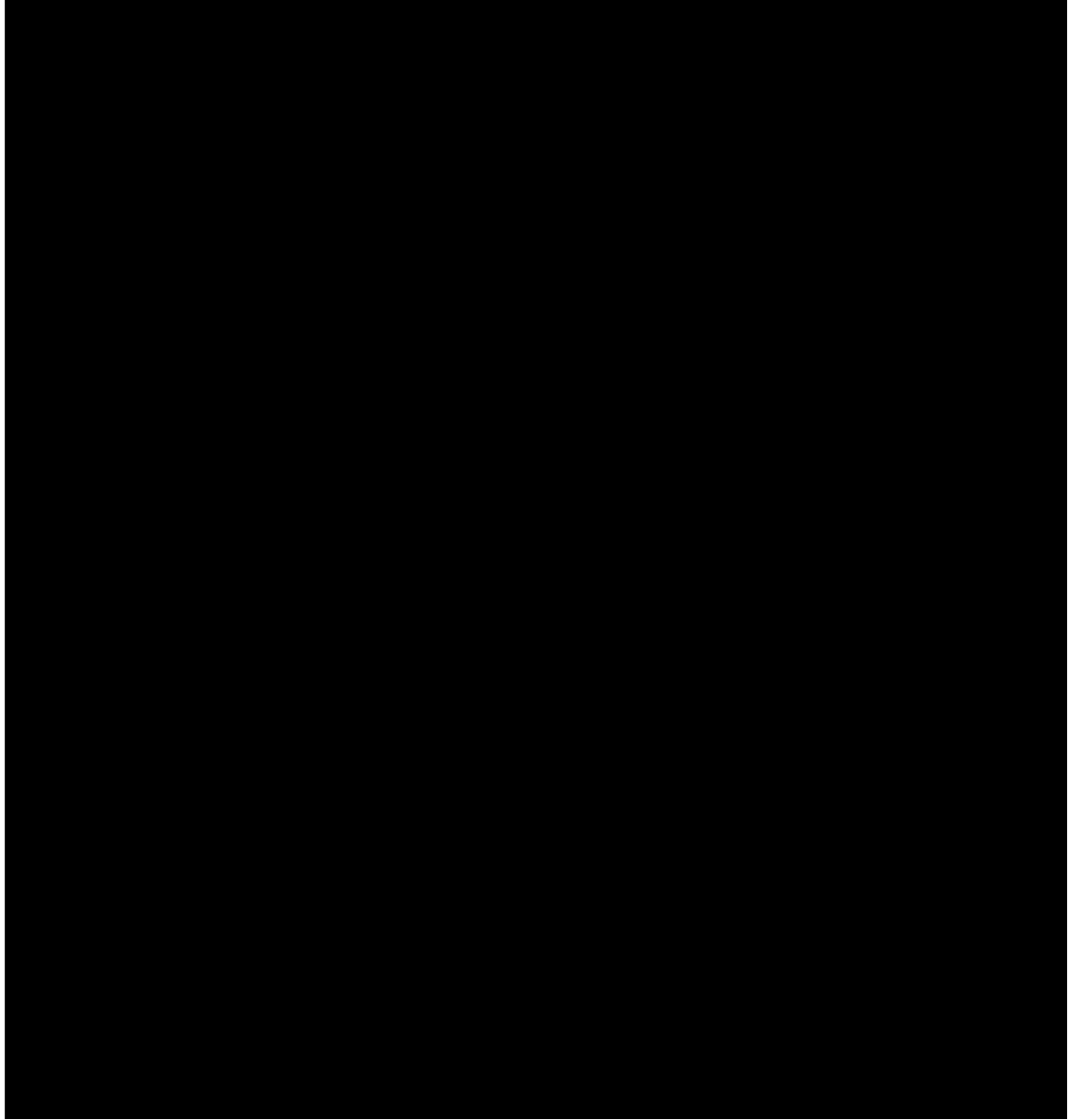


Figure 38: Sharon Alston, *My Bloody Hand*, watercolour, 1979

(Location unknown)

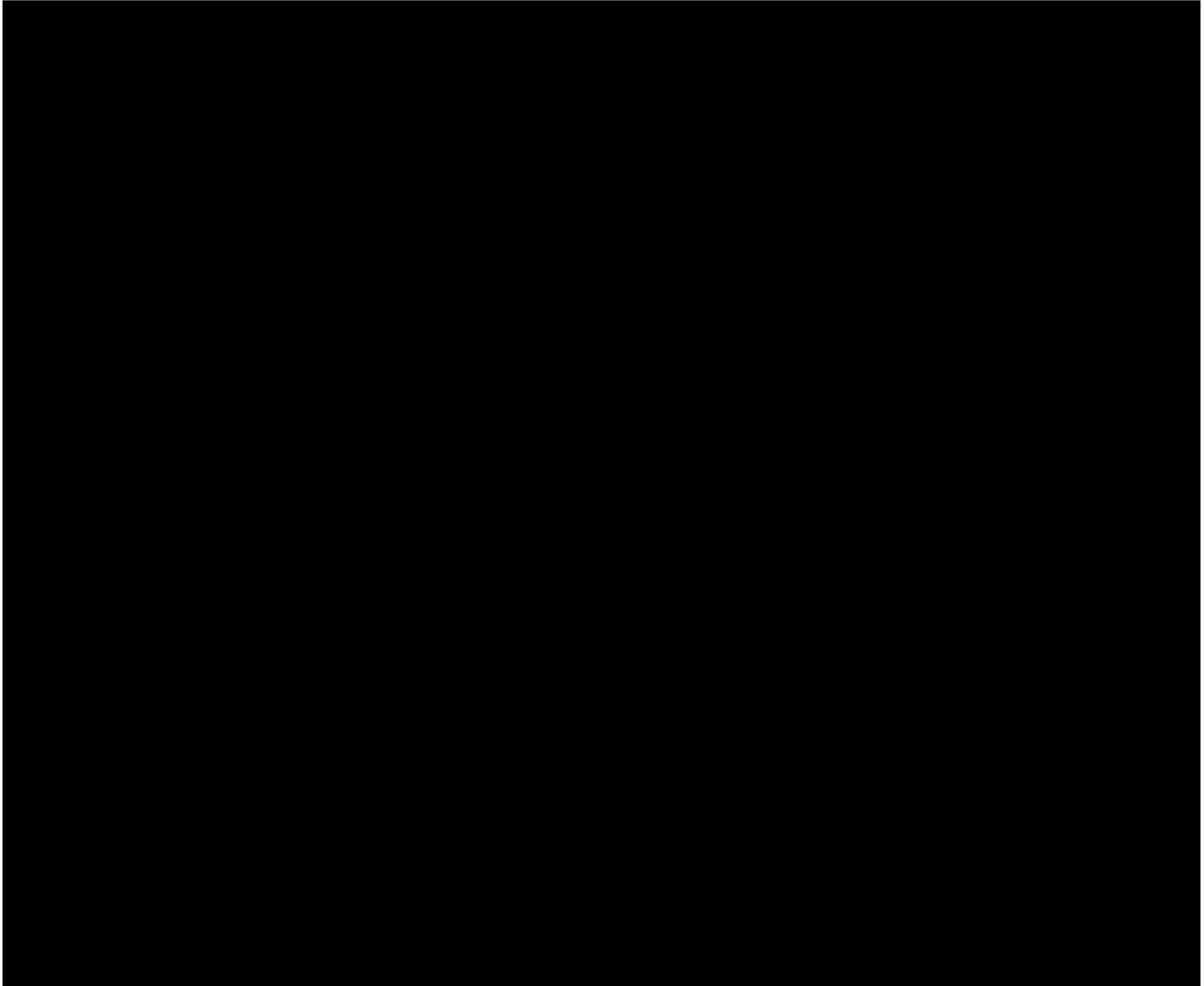


Figure 39: Fiona Clark, detail from *Living with AIDS*, photograph album, 1988

(Te Papa Tongarewa)

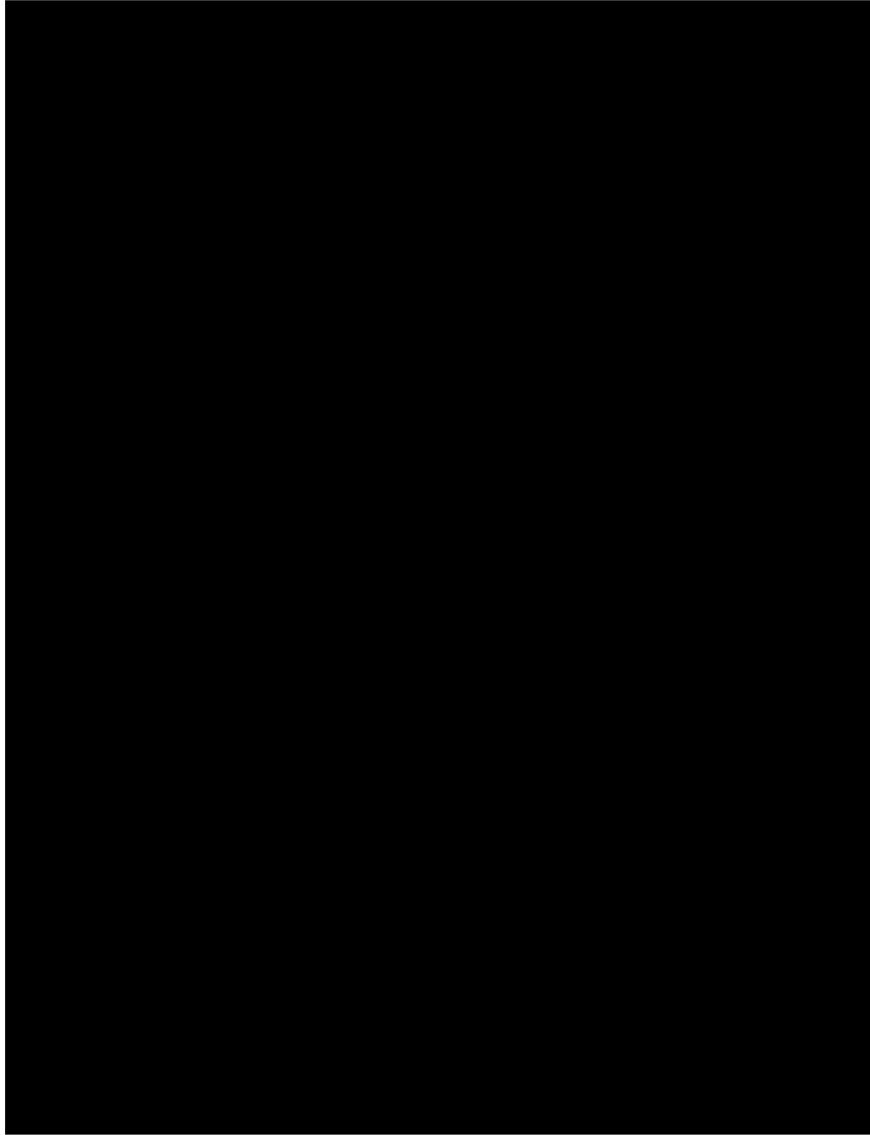


Figure 40: Cover of Sidney M. Mead, *Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections*
(Auckland: Heinemann; New York: American Federation of Arts, 1984)

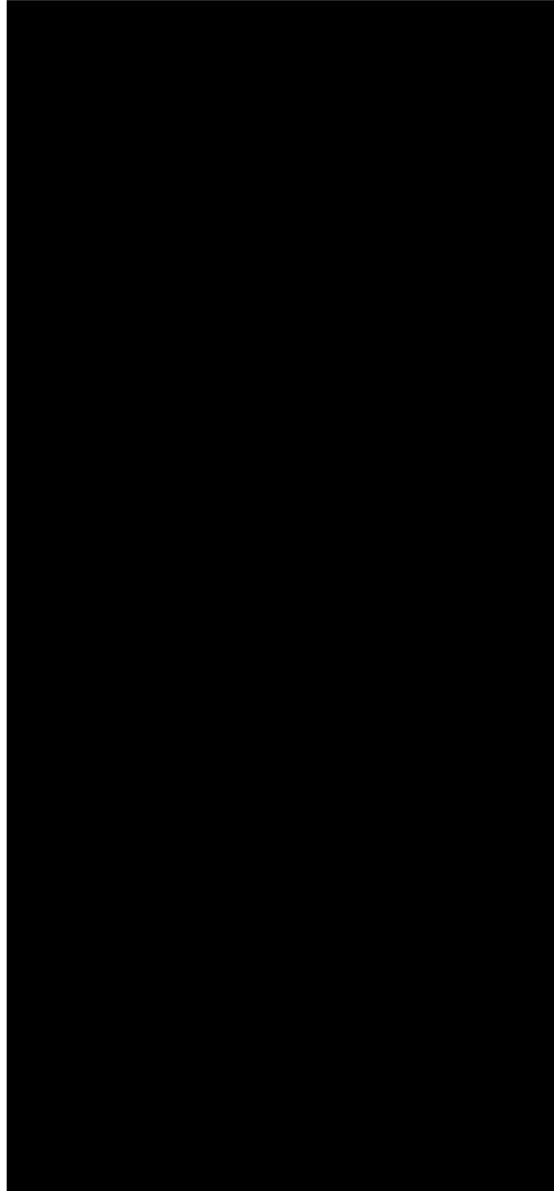


Figure 41: Invitation for the opening of *Karanga Karanga*, Wellington City Gallery, 1986
(Te Papa Tongarewa Library)



Figure 42: Photograph of visitors at the opening of *Karanga Karanga*, City Gallery Wellington, 1986

(City Gallery Wellington Te Whare Toi)

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