

# Doris Lusk

New Zealander, 1916-1990

## Landscape, Overlooking Kaitawa, Waikaremoana

1948, oil on board, 57.1x68.6 cm  
Purchased 1955



### About the work

The Lake Waikaremoana hydro development scheme is situated inland from Wairoa, in the North Island. It consists of three power stations: Tuai (1929), Piripaua (1942) and Kaitawa, which was commissioned in 1947. In 1948 Doris Lusk visited Kaitawa where she stayed with her friends Adelaide and Ian McCubbin. Ian was a construction engineer at the power station.

Painted from studies made on that trip, in *Landscape, Overlooking Kaitawa, Waikaremoana* Lusk has emphasised the dual elements of the landscape and the hydro constructions. The penstock (large pipe which carries water from intake to power house), anchored by concrete holding rings, in the foreground, the jumble of tiny huts behind and the abrupt rectangle of the powerhouse building are deliberately surrounded by and contrasted with the almost impenetrable barrier of the surrounding mountain ranges.

There are similarities in style to the paintings of British artist Paul Nash (1889 -1946) in which he contrasted landforms and man-made structures in the landscape. Lusk's painting forms a commentary on the nature of the relationship between the human presence and the land. She has painted the hills with a dominating repetition of shape, which gives the impression of a vast continuum into the infinite distance. By comparison the human activity is huddled into a small central zone. Using the accurate geomorphologic shapes of the New Zealand hill country, it is possible Lusk was influenced by the diagrams in Sir Charles Cotton's *Geomorphology of New Zealand*, which was also an important influence on the works of Colin McCahon (1919 - 1987). Lusk was a close friend of McCahon and was interested in some of the new ideas he was introducing to his works in the 1940s and 1950s.

The horizontal treatment of the sky in *Landscape, Overlooking Kaitawa, Waikaremoana* augments the sense of never-ending natural forms. There is a cycle of creation, construction and destruction as river valleys are blocked for dams by man and the land surface is cut and modified by nature.

Shown from a high viewpoint the scene is bathed in a clear all-over light, which throws the surrounding hills into sharp relief. The New Zealand poet James K. Baxter saw our mountains in a similar light when he expressed it as "the cold light of inhuman dawn", or:

"In this scarred country,

This cold threshold land.

The mountains crouch like tigers."

(*'The Mountains'*, *Selected Poems*, J.K. Baxter, 1982.)

Through her studies with R.N. Field in Dunedin, Lusk gained an understanding of the modern theories of Roger Fry (1866 - 1934) and Clive Bell (1881-1969), the English critic who wrote the book, *Art* (1914), as well as those of Henri Matisse (1869 -1954), Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), and Paul Cézanne (1839 -1906). Referring to Cézanne's remark that he was not trying to reproduce nature but to represent it, Lusk said, "These theories had marvellous freshness and vitality.... that at that stage in time was a great lift away from the stodgy realism which had been going on." (L. Beaven, *Masters thesis*, University of Canterbury, 1988)

*Landscape, Overlooking Kaitawa, Waikaremoana* is one of three works Lusk painted in 1948 concerned with the Lake Waikaremoana Hydro development scheme.

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## About the artist

Lusk was born in 1916 in Dunedin where her father was an architect. However, she spent from 1918 to 1920 in Scotland, before returning to New Zealand where the family settled in Hamilton (1920 -1928). They returned to Dunedin in 1928.

From 1934 to 1939 Lusk studied art as a full-time student at the King Edward Technical College in Dunedin. In 1936 she held her first exhibition in Dunedin and in 1937 she began exhibiting at the Otago Art Society.

In 1942 Lusk married Dermot Holland in Dunedin. She also began exhibiting at the Canterbury Society of Arts. The couple moved to Christchurch the following year and Lusk also began exhibiting with The Group. A potter as well as a painter, she began tutoring pottery at Risingholme in Christchurch and became a foundation member of the Canterbury Potters Association in 1965, becoming President in 1970.

Lusk was appointed as a tutor at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts in 1966 and was given a permanent position within the following 18 months. She remained at the University until 1981. In 1970 Lusk won the Guthrie Travel Award and used it to travel to Sydney. In 1974 she travelled to Europe on study leave, visiting Britain, Holland, Italy, Spain, France, Canada and the United States. In 1982 Lusk was elected President of the Canterbury Society of Arts. In 1985 she travelled to Lisbon, Florence, Venice, Madrid, London and Canada. She died in Christchurch.

## Other works by the artist in the Collection

There are 26 works by the artist in the Collection, including:

### *Canterbury Plains from Cashmere Hills*

1952, oil on board  
Purchased 1974

### *New World*

1965, oil on board  
Donated by the Canterbury Public Library Collection 2001

### *Bettina*

1970, watercolour  
Purchased 1971

### *Imagined Projects II*

1983, acrylic on canvas  
Purchased 1984

## Further reading

*Landmarks, The Landscape Paintings of Doris Lusk*, Lisa Beaven & Grant Banbury, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, 1996.

