

John Gibb

Scottish / New Zealander, 1831-1909

Worcester Boulevard, PO Box 2626, Christchurch, New Zealand
www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz Phone (03) 941 7300

Lyttelton Harbour, N.Z. Inside the Breakwater

1886, oil on canvas, 75x115 cm

Presented by the Lyttelton Harbour Board 1989



About the work

Lyttelton Harbour, N.Z. Inside the Breakwater is a traditional academic marine painting. John Gibb portrays a realistic view, with an attention to detail which serves to capture the atmosphere of a busy working port. Starting from the end of the breakwater, the painting gives a panoramic view back across the township to the hill barrier - known as the Port Hills - between Lyttelton and Christchurch. Like an airport today, in the 19th century a port played a vital role in servicing the needs of its region, so, in placing the dredge in a central position of the painting, Gibb is giving it pride of place, signifying that the Lyttelton Port Board is making sure the harbour can cope with any sized ship.

Gibb painted this view 36 years after the arrival in 1850 of the first four ships bringing British immigrants to the then new settlement of Canterbury. The painting documents the changes that have taken place to the town and the port. In 1886, when *Lyttelton Harbour, N.Z. Inside the Breakwater* was painted, a breakwater had been constructed to enclose a large inner harbour. This meant the port could accommodate a diversity of shipping, including ocean-going ships, barges and brigs, inter-island steamers and schooners, along with smaller craft. The painting shows a large assembly of vessels in what was, at that time, one of New Zealand's busiest ports.

Gibb worked in the studio from sketches and drawings. His style, shown in the accurate depiction of the harbour and town, is that of a late 19th century Scottish academic realist. Gibb had a keen interest in capturing the atmospheric conditions at different times of the day and his reputation as a marine painter rested on his ability to paint water in all its moods. His technique was to build up paint so parts of the surface are textured. Here his short horizontal brush strokes of colour capture the breeze crossing the water and the sparkle of sunlight and reflection of the boats.

Lyttelton Harbour, N.Z. Inside the Breakwater was produced at a period in Gibb's career when he was enjoying success as a professional artist. It was exhibited at 'The Colonial and Indian Exhibition' held in the Gallery of the Royal Albert Hall, London, in 1886.

John Gibb

Scottish / New Zealander, 1831-1909

Worcester Boulevard, PO Box 2626, Christchurch, New Zealand
www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz Phone (03) 941 7300

About the artist

John Gibb was born in 1831 in Cumbernauld, Scotland. He received tuition from John McKenzie at Greenock in 1848. In 1852 he married Agnes Crichton but she died three years later and, in 1857, he married Marion Menzies. The couple lived at Innellan. In 1861 Gibb began exhibiting at the Royal Scottish Academy but in 1868 he began to exhibit at the more progressive Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts.

In 1876 Gibb emigrated from Scotland to New Zealand, arriving in Christchurch on 28th September. He became a founding member of the Canterbury Society of Arts in 1880 and he exhibited with art societies in New Zealand throughout his career. Gibb travelled widely in New Zealand, painting many different regions. He died Christchurch in 1909.

Gibb specialised in marine painting and became New Zealand's foremost marine artist after his arrival in this country in 1876. Lyttelton Harbour provided a constant source of imagery for him throughout his career in New Zealand. In this work, his intention was to record the efficiency of the Board as evidenced by the prosperity and activity of the port.

Gibb's keen interest in marine subjects probably relates to the years he spent living by the Firth of Clyde. His views of New Zealand harbours and his depictions of a wide range of vessels, including tugs, ballast boats and dredges, proved popular with his patrons of the time. In 1886 he was represented in 'The Colonial and Indian Exhibition', London, by six paintings, including a companion piece to this work titled, *Lyttelton Harbour, N.Z. Outside the Breakwater* and *Flood in Otira Gorge*, which was reproduced in *The Magazine of Art* as an illustration for an article on New Zealand painting in 1887.

Other works by the artist in the Collection

There are 11 works by the artist in the Collection, including:

Low Tide, Innellan

1871, watercolour
Purchased 1990

Shades of Evening, The Estuary

1880, oil on canvas
Presented by the Canterbury Society of Arts 1932

Clearing after Rain, Foot of Otira Gorge

1886, oil on canvas
Purchased 1964

Bottle Lake

1888, oil on canvas
Presented by the Canterbury Society of Arts 1932

Further reading

John Gibb, N. Roberts, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, 2000.

