

John Gibb

Scottish / New Zealander, 1831-1909

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

Shades of Evening, the Estuary

1880, oil on canvas, 54.3x100.0 cm

Presented by the Canterbury Society of Arts 1932



About the work

Painted in the precise, Academic Realist manner John Gibb learned in Scotland, this is a view of Christchurch's Avon / Heathcote Estuary, known to Māori as the Opawaho / Otakaro Estuary, looking west towards the foothills of the Southern Alps. A much more settled landscape today, in 1880 Gibb has shown only a small limp red flag and a derelict rowboat pulled up on the shore as the signs of human activity.

Shades of Evening, the Estuary has been painted with meticulous attention to detail, particularly the lighting in the sky and the faultless reflection. Gibb was very fond of painting sunsets or the subtle light of dusk or dawn. Marion Gibb, his grand daughter, said her grandfather never missed a sunset. "Whatever he was doing - even if he was in the middle of tea - he would get up and gaze at the sunset and afterwards you would see it in one of his paintings." (*John Gibb*, Neil Roberts, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, 2000.) This fondness for painting the atmospheric effects of the setting or rising sun give a romantic aspect to his works.

The pursuit of visual truth was always important to Gibb. While it captures the sense of a real scene, the major elements in *Shades of Evening, the Estuary* have been skilfully arranged into a unified and well-balanced composition. The luminous sunset and the vivid reflection make the quality of the evening light the main statement of the work. The

surrounding landscapes and scruffy estuarine vegetation are all subdued into a unifying sombre brown, creating a zone of dark to contrast most effectively with the luminous colours of the water and sky.

The stillness of the flag and the smooth surface of the water reflecting the moon and stars proclaim the calm quiet atmosphere of this deserted scene. The dull red used for the small flag demonstrates how eye-catching the colour red can be in a composition.

This is the work of a mature and professionally trained artist skilled in the depiction of water surfaces. While it undoubtedly reflects the elements Gibb has observed and sketched in the field, the successive, meticulously applied layers of oil paint are the result of painstaking work in his studio.

Shades of Evening, the Estuary certainly found favour with the *Lyttelton Times* critic: "Night's mantle is falling quickly, and moon and stars are already gleaming in the half-darkness. The picture is harmonious throughout, and forms a fine example of subdued colouring." (*Lyttelton Times*, 18.1.1881.)

This was the first painting purchased (in 1881) by the Canterbury Society of Arts for its collection and was effectively the beginning of the city's art collection.

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About the artist

Gibb was born in Cumbernauld, Scotland, in 1831. He received tuition from John McKenzie, the Scottish marine painter, at Greenock in 1848. In 1852 Gibb 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 on the *Merope*, arriving in Christchurch on 28th September. He became a founding member of the Canterbury Society of Arts in 1880 and was an active member on that committee from 1881 to 1892. Gibb exhibited widely with art societies throughout New Zealand and frequently in Melbourne and Sydney. In 1886 he exhibited six paintings at 'The Colonial and Indian Exhibition', London. He travelled widely in New Zealand, painting many different regions. Gibb died in Christchurch in 1909, aged 78.

Other works by the artist in the Collection

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

Low Tide, Innellan

1871, watercolour
Purchased 1990

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

Clearing up, Otira Gorge

1891, oil on canvas
Presented by H.G. & A.H. Anthony 1964

Further reading

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

