

# John Hoyte

English/New Zealander, 1835 - 1913

## Punchbowl Falls

1875, watercolour, 86.0x55.5 cm  
Purchased 1967



### About the work

Popular with visitors today, the Devil's Punchbowl waterfall is a short walk through native bush from Arthur's Pass village in the Southern Alps. John Hoyte visited the Canterbury region in 1874 and developed this studio work from field sketches he made as he travelled to the West Coast.

Subjects like this had considerable appeal on the art scene in early New Zealand. The impressive grandeur of the landscape painted in traditional techniques had a ready market in both New Zealand and Australia.

In *Punchbowl Falls* Hoyte emphasises the dramatic fall of the water as it moves through a precipitous gorge and falls in stages to the pool beneath.

In fact Hoyte rarely painted a place accurately. In the romantic realist tradition, he would incorporate elements of realism in his depiction of the landscape forms but, in the choice of subject matter and selected viewpoint, his work conforms to the ideals of romanticism. The romantic movement of the late 18th and early 19th century focused its presentations on an appeal to the senses, rather than to logic or the intellect. Romanticism developed around the ideas the philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1797), expounded in his 'A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful' (1756). Burke believed a degree of fear, or awe, was an important ingredient in our enjoyment of the sublime, "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and anger... or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the

sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling." (*The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, ed. Ian Chilvers, Harold Osborne, Dennis Farr, Oxford University Press, pg. 79) In *Punchbowl Falls* the waterfall is not really terrifying but it does represent the imposing powers of nature. The still water in the foreground, however, is picturesque rather than sublime.

Hoyte uses strong light and dark contrasts to define each stage of the painting. As the forms recede into the distance, he uses the strong blue tones of aerial perspective, suggesting the haze of the distance. Hoyte was particularly fond of using a strong lapis blue for his shadows, especially in the middleground, and signs of this characteristic are in the lower section of the falls.

*Punchbowl Falls* has been painted with a succession of applied layers of colour to build up the strong tones and subtle shades, with an opaque Chinese white applied on top for the splashing white water. Heavy washes of colour are applied over dry under-painting, confining the colours to clearly defined areas and creating clear outlines to the forms. The treatment of the rocks seems to reflect Hoyte's early training in England, rather than being a faithful depiction of observed natural forms.

Hoyte's work as a professional artist has been grouped with that of Nicholas Chevalier (1828-1902) and John Gully (1819-1888). They are collectively described as the 'three romantic realists' of New Zealand's colonial period.

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## About the artist

Hoyte was born in 1835 in Britain where he received his art training. He lived in the West Indies from c.1855 to 1860 but then returned to England and married Rose Heather Elizabeth Parsons in Warwick, in 1860. The following year the couple emigrated to New Zealand, settling in Auckland. Hoyte was employed as Drawing Master at Auckland Grammar School and used his school holidays to travel to North Island regions looking for new landscape subjects to paint.

In 1871 Hoyte helped to organise, and exhibited work in, the first exhibition of the Society of Artists in Auckland. He tended to become involved in art circles wherever he settled. In January 1874 he travelled to the Canterbury region on a sketching tour and also held an exhibition of his work at Warner's Hotel. In 1876 he moved to Dunedin to paint full-time and exhibited in the same year at the first Otago Art Society exhibition. In 1875 Hoyte was awarded a medal from the Melbourne Society of Arts in recognition of his status as "an artist of undoubted merit". This may have encouraged him to shift to Sydney in 1879. There, in 1880, he became the first president of the Art Society of New South Wales. Hoyte died in Sydney in 1913.

In an undated review in the Otago Daily Times, his fellow artist, John Gully, said of Hoyte's watercolours, "They are masterly, truthful views of a beautiful country and are treated in a most artistic manner. The colouring is full and pure and is based upon sound principles of aerial perspective being thoroughly opposed to that pernicious tendency appropriately termed prettiness of colouring."

## Other works by the artist in the Collection

### *The Bay of Islands*

c. 1873, watercolour  
Presented by Mrs A.E. Haynes and Mr G.N.H. Hill 1975

### *Te Tarata, The White Terraces*

1872, watercolour  
Purchased 1962

