

# Raymond McIntyre

New Zealander/British, 1879-1933

## Meditation

1905, oil on canvas, 63.5x48.0 cm

Purchased with assistance from the Olive Stirrat Bequest 1984



### About the work

The sitter for this painting wears no jewellery or other adornments and she shows little emotion. In giving no clear clues to her personality, Raymond McIntyre shows her as a symbolic figure, simply suggesting the mood of meditation.

An early work by McIntyre, *Meditation* was painted before he had travelled to London and seen the contemporary styles of Post-Impressionism. It is painted in the 19th century portrait tradition, showing the influence of portraits by Rembrandt van Rijn (1606 -1669), James Whistler (1834 -1903) and the artists of the Royal Academy in London, such as Frederick Leighton (1830 -1896) who were the arbiters of taste and style for the early New Zealand art schools. It also shows the influence on McIntyre of Petrus van der Velden (1837-1913), with whom he studied as a private pupil.

McIntyre used the dark subdued tones that were popular with students at the Canterbury College School of Art at this time. The warm colours of the flesh are contrasted against the dark background and offset by the cool turquoise green/ blue of the bodice. The smooth brushwork and careful tonal shading have been achieved with the oil paint applied in a succession of thin, carefully smoothed and blended layers.

The model for this work was a young woman who sat for several artists, including McIntyre and Leonard Booth (1879 - 1974). Her tilted head creates a smooth and graceful curve in the composition and her downcast eyes give the impression of a demure, modest maiden. In contrast, her long hair falls freely over her shoulders, which was a style more often used to suggest a seductress or 'femme fatale'.

The oval format McIntyre has used for *Meditation* helps to focus the attention on the sitter's head and shoulders and prevents the distraction of a background space. Oval portraiture like this was traditionally used for allegorical works, following the paintings of the French Rococo artists of the early 18th century, such as François Boucher (1703 -1770).

In April 1906, a review of the Canterbury Society of Arts annual exhibition said: "Mr R.F. McIntyre has scored a brilliant success in *Meditation*, which is far and away the best and greatest picture he has shown. It shows what really fine work he is capable of. The picture is beyond criticism, and the writer takes off his hat - at last - to the artist."

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## About the artist

McIntyre was born in Christchurch in 1879. He began his studies in 1894 at the Canterbury College School of Art under George Elliot and Alfred Walsh and was awarded a bronze medal for a life study. During the mid 1890s, McIntyre also studied as a private pupil under Petrus van der Velden (1837-1913). He left the School of Art in 1900 for a period of five years, during which he continued to paint. He took up study again part-time in 1906. In 1908 McIntyre assisted the staff at the School of Art with still life and figure drawing classes.

McIntyre began exhibiting at the Canterbury Society of Arts in 1899 and continued to exhibit there until 1908. He became a member of the Christchurch Sketch Club, which was established by Sydney Lough Thompson (1877-1973) in 1905 and also included William Menzies Gibb (1859 -1916), Leonard Booth (1879 -1974) and Alfred Walsh (1859 -1916). McIntyre exhibited at the 'New Zealand International Exhibition', Christchurch, 1906/1907, and late in 1908 he held an exhibition of his work at the Canterbury Society of Arts.

McIntyre was primarily a studio painter. Leonard Booth recalled how "McIntyre always regarded the School of Art and later the Sketch Club as places for study. The sketches and drawings he did there were only for practice work. Later, in his studio, he worked out the designs for his paintings from these drawings." ('Raymond McIntyre', unpublished thesis, J. Wells, University of Canterbury, 1972, p.25.)

McIntyre arrived in London in February 1909. There he briefly studied at the London City Council Central School of Arts and Crafts under William Nicholson (1872 -1949), George Lambert (1873 -1930) and Walter Sickert (1860 -1942). He gave an interesting response to his father's advice that he study art under some well-known man. McIntyre replied, "Who are the eminent men anyway? A man who looks big from New Zealand ain't so very big in London. When you come up against a man he doesn't seem so great as when you are a long way off him... One's only chance is to be oneself." (Letter to his father, 3 June, 1910.)

In 1910 McIntyre initially exhibited with the Thames Valley Art Club, which closely followed the Post-Impressionist movement and had an interest in Japanese art. In 1911 McIntyre began to exhibit with the Goupil Gallery, which was the leading international contemporary art gallery in London at the time. He continued to exhibit at the Goupil Gallery Salon annually from 1919 to 1926. He also exhibited with the New English Art Club, the Grosvenor Gallery and with the 'London Group' exhibitions in 1916, 1917 and 1918.

During the First World War McIntyre worked as a lorry driver, as he was physically unfit for active service. He held a large solo show at the Eldar Gallery in 1918 and the Royal Academy in 1924. From 1923 to 1930 McIntyre wrote reviews of art exhibitions for the *Architectural Review*. He died suddenly in London in September 1933, aged 54.

## Other works by the artist in the Collection

There are 10 works by the artist in the Collection, including:

### *Portrait Sketch of James Jamieson*

1906, oil on canvas  
Purchased 1985

### *Self Portrait*

c. 1912, oil on canvas  
Purchased 1996

### *Ruth*

c. 1914, oil on panel  
Presented by the McIntyre Family 1938

### *Suzette*

c. 1914, oil on panel  
Presented by Mrs Mary Good 1975

### *London Street with Shadows*

c. 1919, oil on canvas  
Presented by the McIntyre Family 1951

## Further reading

*Raymond McIntyre, A New Zealand Painter*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1984.

