

news

No Thirty Four November - December 1970

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Gallery Assistant: Tony Formison.
Receptionist: Jill Parsonson.
News Editor: A. J. Bisley.

The Journal of the Canterbury Society of Arts
66 Gloucester Street
Telephone 67-261
P.O. Box 772 Christchurch

President's Comment

THE CHANGING ART SCENE

There have been many changes in the New Zealand Art scene over the last ten years, and this has brought about change in our Art Society too.

Older members will recall the time when the Annual Autumn exhibition was one of the social events of the year, for in those days the society rarely held more than one exhibition annually.

There was little opportunity for artists to display their work then, but things are very different now, and artists are in a much happier position.

With our splendid new galleries everyone has an opportunity to exhibit, with a minimum of expense, for not only do we have three annual painting exhibitions—the "Autumn", the "Open" and the "Summer"—but the success of the recent "Graphic and Crafts" exhibition means that this may also become an annual fixture.

Artist members also have other opportunities to exhibit if they wish. The Society's hire charges for one-man shows are very much in the artist's favour so that should an artist not sell well he is faced with no large bill. Furthermore artists may hire wall space in a group exhibition with other artists, and the society does everything else. This is possibly the most economical way for a painter to start exhibiting in other than the "Summer" and "Autumn" exhibitions.

The "Open" exhibition is a splendid innovation for it allows any member of the society to exhibit work whether he is a working member or not.

The increasing number of painters wishing to become working members raises difficult problems for the Council, and at the same time it is disappointing for a painter to be constantly turned down for working membership. The Council have been trying out various ideas and until further notice the following procedure holds:

Working members are elected as follows:

(1) The Selection Committee appraise the work in the "Open" exhibition and give a written invitation to selected exhibitors to make application for Working Membership. Four suitably mounted paintings and a folio of drawings should then be submitted one month before a C.S.A. Exhibition (Should the applicant then be turned down he at least has the satisfaction that he was invited to submit his work.)

(2) Members of affiliated Art Societies may submit work for a C.S.A. exhibition—as our working members do—and if work is hung the applicant automatically becomes a Working Member of the Society, BUT, in this case the following information should be typed on the bottom of the exhibition entry form:

NEW APPLICANT FOR WORKING MEMBERSHIP.
FORMERLY WORKING MEMBER OF SOCIETY.
I trust this will meet with members approval.

John Oakley.

Gallery Calendar Subject to Adjustment

To Nov. 8:	C.S.A. Summer Show.
Oct. 25 - Nov. 8:	Peter Noonan.
Nov. 10 - 18:	Michael Eaton.
Nov. 14 - 29:	The Group.
Nov. 16 - 30:	Prints by Michael Reed and photographs by G. Bennett.
Nov. 21 - Dec. 2:	Water Colourists Society.
Dec. 1 - 13:	Tony Geddes.
Dec. 5 - 19:	Bashir Baraki.
Dec. 12 - 31:	C.S.A. Saturday Classes Junior Art.

Exhibitions 1971

February:	Annual Autumn. Cora Wilding.
March:	Tony Formison. Allan Pearson.
April:	Gopas John Scott.
May:	National Parks Board Michael Eaton Embroidery Guild. Pamela Barnes.
June:	L. Summers. Web, Edgar, Dawson, Marwick.
July:	C.S.A. Open.
August:	Star Schools. W. Cumming. Wool Weavers.
September:	N.Z. Potters. Louise Lewis.
October:	Kelliher. Sister Lawence.
November:	Colin Wheeler. Group. G. Kane.
December:	Summer Junior Class.

Annual General Meeting

Will members please note that the Annual General Meeting will be held in the gallery on the evening of 18 November at 7.45 p.m.

After the meeting is over—it is usually a short one—Mrs Doris Holland (Doris Lusk), who was this year's winner of the C.S.A. Guthrey Travel Award, will give an illustrated talk on her recent visit to Australia.

We hope that as many members as possible will attend.

CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR GREETINGS

The Office and Gallery staff send Greetings to all members, and express their thanks to all those who have so willingly helped in the running of the Society's activities during the year.

Christmas Fair And Working Bee

Friday, 18th December, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

All artist members—painters, sculptors, print-makers, potters, weavers, and other craftsmen—are invited to participate in THIS CHRISTMAS FAIR.

The general idea is that members will reserve a small area of space and sell their wares at reduced rates. We want to generate as far as possible a market atmosphere, and hope this innovation will be well supported. The more the merrier.

WORKING BEE

Would any members be willing to help clean the Gallery's Permanent Collection?

For both events please contact as soon as possible the Secretary Manager R. Laidlaw.

Council

At the last council meeting Mr J. Nuttall was elected, taking the place of the late Mr George Scandrett.

Wool Weavers' Exhibition

C.S.A. GALLERY, 21st Sept. - 4th Oct.

The first Wool Weavers exhibition in Christchurch has been a great success with well over half the items being sold. Attendances exceeded all expectations.

A wide variety of articles were exhibited, including wall and floor rugs, scarves, cushions, bookmarks, belts, tablemats, ponchos, shawls, bedspreads, fabrics and a tapestry.

Techniques, colours and textures varied from finely handspun and woven materials in natural fleece colours to shaggy rya rugs in bright strong colours and heavy bedspreads.

The weavers exhibiting were Jenny Hunt, Doreen Fraser, Pauline Pease, Philippa Vine, Nora Machin, Suzanne Turner, Ida Lough, Mary Bartlett and Marianne van der Lingen.

Items from the exhibition will be going to many different places including Australia, England, Canada, America and Alaska.

The exhibition proved to be an extremely stimulating experience for all the weavers concerned and they are now back at their looms working towards the next exhibition with renewed enthusiasm and inspiration.

Jenny Hunt



SHADES OF EVENING. JOHN GIBB.

This was the first picture that the Society purchased. John Gibb was born in 1831 in Cumbernauld, Scotland.

Later he was to reside at 56 Worcester Street, Christchurch, and by the turn of the century was to be described as "One of the oldest and most prominent artists in New Zealand".

He studied art under Mr John Mackenzie of Greenock, and afterwards exhibited for several years at the West of Scotland Institute and the Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts. He arrived in New Zealand in 1876 where he practiced as an artist. His special talent was in his treatment of marine subjects. He exhibited in almost every exhibition in this country. Mr Gibb also helped to promote the Canterbury Society of Arts and became Vice-President, and never missed sending pictures to all the societies exhibitions.

PAGE TWO

One of his paintings, "Golden Sunset", Lyttelton Harbour, was purchased by the late Mr George Gould, and then presented to this city. Mr Gibb painted scenery of Mt. Cook, for Sir Thomas McIllraith, a Premier of Queensland, and for Lord Glasgow a picture of Otira Gorge.

He trained a large number of students, and on Lord Onslow's stay in Christchurch Lady Onslow took private lessons from him.

One of his sons followed in his father's footsteps as an artist.

Art and Industry

An exhibition of work of members of the Society was put on at Lane Walker Rudkin from whom we have received a substantial gift and a letter saying how greatly it was appreciated.

Canterbury Guild of Spinners and Weavers

The Canterbury Guild of Spinners and Weavers was formed in April, 1969. Up till this time, weavers in particular were struggling along as best they could on their own. Many spinners had formed groups which enabled them to meet together and discuss their work and problems connected with it.

The main purpose of the guild is to pool ideas and skills with the aim of improving the standard of weaving in Christchurch. The guild is a member of the World Crafts Council and the N.Z. Spinning and Weaving and Woolcrafts Council. In this way, members are kept informed of coming exhibitions and events and are able to participate in them.

Monthly meetings of the guild are always well attended and interesting and informative programmes are provided. Some of these have been:

Open day at Risingholme Community Centre where spinning wheels of different shapes and sizes were seen in action. A variety of looms and techniques including card weaving, inkle and back strap looms were shown in operation and the dyeing of wool with onion skins, lichens, etc. was demonstrated. An illustrated talk on wool and wool classing, a history of tapestry weaving, Maori flax weaving, back strap weaving and at the end of the year a display of members' work is held.

Guild members with special achievements for 1969-70 are Nora Machin, Ida Lough, Nancy Mason and Jenny Hunt who had work selected for display at Expo '70. Mary Bartlett who won a national hand-woven rug competition. Ida Lough, Nora Machin, Muriel Wallace and Doreen Fraser had work exhibited with the World Craft Council exhibition.

The newly constituted Canterbury Regional Arts Federation Inc. has two weavers on the executive committee, Mrs Ida Lough and Mrs Jenny Hunt.

For any further information concerning the guild phone Mrs D. Fraser, secretary, 843-232.

Jenny Hunt

New Director for Aigantighe

The appointment of Mr A. G. Manson as director of South Canterbury's Aigantighe Art Gallery from December 22 was recently decided by the Timaru City Council.

Mr Manson is to be honorary director until he takes up his appointment.

A working member of both Canterbury and South Canterbury Societies, Mr Manson received his art training at University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts. He has contributed to exhibitions throughout the country.

He succeeds the late Mr C. E. Brunsden as director.

Letters

It is hoped that members who wish to comment on past or future events of the society will write to the editor. It is my intention to publish these letters, so if you have anything to say, speak up.—Ed.

LAST RECEIVING DAY

The South Canterbury Arts Society—Last Receiving day 20th November, 1970.

ART SCHOOLS IN OTHER CENTRES

University of Otago Department of University Extension.

Eighteenth Art School—Friday 15th January-Saturday 23rd January, 1971.

Sculptors' Group

The formation of the Group followed the recognition of three primary needs. The protection of sculptors in situations of commission and contract is obvious when the history of all too many unhappy issues is reviewed. This protection extends to include responsible advisement of clients and education of the interested section of the community. It follows that sculptors may expect identity in the community and communication among themselves, for exchange in techniques, professional dialogue, as well as assurance of effective representation in cultural organisations.

The third need proceeds out of the other two. That is, for the collation of relevant information to do with sculpture and sculptors, for a focus of reference and for the organisation of exhibitions—all to serve sculptors and the public in an efficient manner.

These factors drew a number of sculptors together and, among several worthwhile initiatives, the Group is setting up a reference facility, organises exhibitions, is pressing for greater media reportage and improvement of the standards of media criticism, has representation on the Regional Arts Federation and is setting up lines of communication with galleries and foundations in New Zealand.

To help all these aims the Sculptors Group has instituted a patron category of membership for those who are interested in sculpture and its essential place in the community. The Group hopes to inform that interest and increase the number of patron members by making frequent occasions for debate and discussion. They are indebted to the C.S.A. for its good offices. The Group has already conducted one exhibition in the C.S.A. in July and exhibitions are planned for February '71 in Christchurch and May '71 in Palmerston North.

Stewart Mair Memorial Fund

The Stewart Mair Memorial Fund, a practical expression of Stewart Mair's outstanding service to the Society to be applied by fitting a suitably inscribed wall plaque, furnishing the gallery and completing the public address system—any balance to go towards mortgage repayment—has met with a ready response. The Council is pleased to publish the following list of donors

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Miss P. Hishon
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Mr P. R. Smart
Mrs M. A. Steel
Mr & Mrs D. L. Steven
Mr L. M. Summers
Mrs E. M. Taylor
Mr P. Warren
Mr W. G. Wastell
Mrs J. Whitehead

NEW ZEALAND WATER COLOURISTS SOCIETY

extends an invitation to all CSA members
to the official opening by John Oakley
of this exhibition on 21 November at
8 p.m. Sherry.

Obituary

Henry Harrison Fisher

The death of Harry Fisher last July, after a long
illness, marked the loss of one of the Society's oldest
living members.

He was the grandson of the founder of the art firm
of H. Fisher & Son Ltd, which is at present celebrating
its 100th year of business in this city. His connection
with art in Christchurch goes as far back as 1907. In
1912 he went to Europe to gain experience and re-
turned not long before the first world war. After four
years war service in Gallipoli and France he returned
to the local art world.

Mr Fisher was a valued member of the society for
more than fifty years.

Pottery Notes

Doris Holland

My recent trip to Australia took me to Sydney, Can-
berra, Alice Springs, Adelaide and Melbourne, each
place offering many attractions for the visitor interested
in pottery. For the purpose of this brief article, notes
from my diary will best present my view of the Aus-
tralian scene, which owing to other commitments was
not comprehensive.

Sydney: Visited Ivan McMeekins home situated in
virgin bush at Sutherland, he was about to fire for the
first time a new wood burning kiln with a booster of
rock gas. Old telegraph posts were neatly cut and

stored ready for the job. He told me that he once fired all his ware but admitted that it took a lot of practice to glaze successfully the raw clay pots. Although the National Art School was in recess, I was shown through the large Ceramic Dept. in this fascinating old jail, an enormous stone complex built with convict labour. Under the patronage of Mr Peter Rushforth (who was away) ex pupils of this school have a large and active Ceramic Group. I met some of them at a very pleasant evening at the Turrumurra home of Mrs Janet Mansfield, the secretary of the Group. I found quite accidentally at David Jones, a marvellous exhibition of Pots by Shigo Shigeo (Japanese Australian) next to a display of fine old oriental ware. The two areas made a most compatible total exhibition.

I was most fortunate in being taken to visit Ivan and Patricia England at their attractive studio-shop in Paddington. Ivan and Pat are both artist potters, and this unique little shop displays both paintings and pots. Also visited the Woolloomooloo Pot Shop, home of the Australian Potters' Association, open three days a week, and weekend classes organised in a large studio at the back. A very lively set up. I left a subscription to their magazine, and a copy of our own.

Canberra: Travelled by bus, so could not stop off to see the potters at Mittagong en route. Visited Margaret Frankel, whose rock gas kiln, pleasantly situated in her garden, had just been fitted with new burners and about to be fired. Margaret took me to see several well stocked small galleries, and showed me around this elegant and well planned new city. Only three days here.

Alice Springs: I met here a young potter, about to give up teaching for his pottery. He had a tiny studio and enormous enthusiasm. He and his wife took me on a fantastic picnic to an ochre pit, then on to the famous Ormiston Gorge, 90 miles from Alice, and very beautiful.

Adelaide: Here my time was broken by a visit to relations in the country, 200 miles up the Murray River, but I managed a fleeting visit to both the South Australia School of Art and to the Art Gallery, the latter having a fabulous collection of ancient Mediterranean pottery, also an excellent contemporary Australian collection. The School of Art (beautifully new!) now has Ceramics built into the Sculpture course, under Milton Moon. Unfortunately he was absent at the time of my visit.

Melbourne: I spent almost my entire stay here at the Victorian Art Centre. They have an Ethnic Collection to absorb the interest of potters and collectors for long enough, but there was not much medieval or English pottery on view. The Australian collection was stored, unfortunately, but I was allowed to view it on request.

A retrospective exhibition of Stanislaw Halpern showed both his paintings and earthenware pottery, the latter an exuberant manifestation of a kind of folk art approach to bright glazes and unsophisticated forms. In South Yarra I found a large and well displayed exhibition of Marea Gazzard's large global and slab pots, some beautiful and very expensive, but I considered the one purchased for the Commonwealth Collection somewhat contrived and clumsy. Spent a very happy afternoon browsing at the Craft Centre in the Toorak Road and eventually bought a large Blakeborough lidded pot which caused me some problems of transport, but stepped off the plane at Christchurch Airport bearing this splendid souvenir of pottery in Australia.

Local Stop Press: Those potters who are attending the Kenneth Clark workshop are requested to turn up armed with several raw clay cylinders, and plates or tiles (also unfired) no less than 12in. square and about 3/4in. thick. This is a unique opportunity for earthenware potters and teachers to learn techniques from this well known potter, and early applications are necessary.

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Centennial of H. Fisher & Son

Late in 1870 the founder commenced business in a small way, with the Stock and Tools of Trade he brought with him from England. Not long after he bought out the firm of "Steel & Wates" and opened as "H. FISHER".

For a short time the premises were on the corner of Hereford Street and Colombo Streets, opposite the Bank of New Zealand, and then they were moved into Hereford Street alongside of "The Golden Age", now "United Service Hotel", on the site of the present Bottle Store. In 1884 he moved to High Street, and the firm was then called "H. FISHER & SON".

THE FOUNDER . . . Henry Fisher was born at Bath, Somerset, on the 15th of November 1834, and at the age of twelve was apprenticed for six years with

"Maggs", of Bath, as a carver and gilder. In 1852 he joined the leading firm of gilders, J. H. Chance of London, where he became foreman, in charge of 38 gilders, eight joiners and six carvers. He was personally entrusted with gilding work at Windsor Castle where he sometimes lead a team of tradesmen for six weeks at a time. The firm also did framing commissions for royalty and the foremost artists.

In 1865 he purchased a "China Shop" in London and ran a picture framing and gilding shop in conjunction. After five years he was persuaded to sell and go to New Zealand, after hearing glowing reports from his brother-in-law, John Davies Hean, who had been in New Zealand and Australia since 1850.

Henry, with his wife and small son, left the East India Docks on the Sailing Ship "Merope" on July 27th 1870. It was a small ship, but carried 290 immigrants, and arrived in Lyttelton on October 26th 1870, just two days after the big fire at Lyttelton. Their ship left Lyttelton and was never heard of again.

The business he established soon after arrival prospered, and Henry taught his son, and their first apprentice, Malcolm McCormack, the trade. Years later McCormack went into business on his own account with Fishers' second message boy, Charlie Pugh. The founder Henry, retired in 1903, and passed away on February 24th 1923, in his 89th year.

THE SECOND GENERATION . . . John Henry, the original "Son", started work as message boy at the age of 13. Deliveries were made on foot to the Deans Homestead in Riccarton and Major Hornbrook in Opawa, not to mention countless trips to country clients' bullock waggons lined up in Market Square. In later years as he took over control of the firm he was responsible for importing many of the fine overseas paintings that adorn many important collections in New Zealand. He was quite a well known character in the art world, and will be remembered by many with his black "smokers" cap, as he was active in the Gallery until his 89th year, and died in 1948.

THE THIRD GENERATION . . . Henry Harrison (Harry) Fisher, joined the firm in 1907 and took over management in 1924. Since the move to the present Colombo Street property in 1939 the firm has expanded from year to year under the management of H. H. (Harry) Fisher, who, although retiring from active participation in 1955, was a director of the firm until his death on July 9th 1970 in his 79th year.

THE FOURTH GENERATION . . . Ken H. Fisher joined the firm during 1936. His younger brother, David, (the present Managing Director) joined the firm in 1941. After "serving their time" they were taken into partnership with their father, Harry, in 1947 and 1950 respectively. Ken left the partnership in 1952 to take up farming, and the firm became a private company on 4th November 1964.

THE FIFTH GENERATION . . . is represented by David's two sons, Richard and John who joined the firm in 1968.

The Fishers, since 1870, have numbered amongst their friends and clients many now famous artists. One of the earliest of the firm's One-Man-Exhibitions was early in August 1873, as advertised in the *Lyttelton Times*, of water-colours by J. C. Hoyte Esq. The firm still maintains the same high standard of Exhibitions by being very selective.

Noted artists of earlier years who appear in the firm's books as customers are: Barraud, Baxter, Blomfield, Byles, R.B.A., Balfour, Cambridge, Canē, J. Cook, Christmas, R.B.A., J. Gibb, Menzies Gibb, Goldie, Goodall, R.I., Goldsmith, R.B.A., Greene, Gully, Hoyte, Haite, R.I., R.B.A., etc., Howarth, Eleanor Hughes, R.I., Madden, Nairn, Nerli, Nicol, Peale, Ethel Richardson, Margaret Stoddard, Spratt, Thompson, Van der Velden, Walsh, Welch, Wilson, Worsley, R.B.A.

The firm, at its centennial, still remains a private family concern, and proudly numbers among its clients, the same families that the original Henry served in the '70s.

FISHERS CENTENNIAL EXHIBITION

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 11-20th

PAINTINGS

By

Alf. Baxter
James Cook
Vera Cummings
Duncan Darroch
Chas. Dixon, R.I.
John Gibb
Menzies Gibb
J. S. Goodall, R.I.
Geo. Haite, R.I., R.B.A.
Eliz. Kelly
John Loxton
J. Madden
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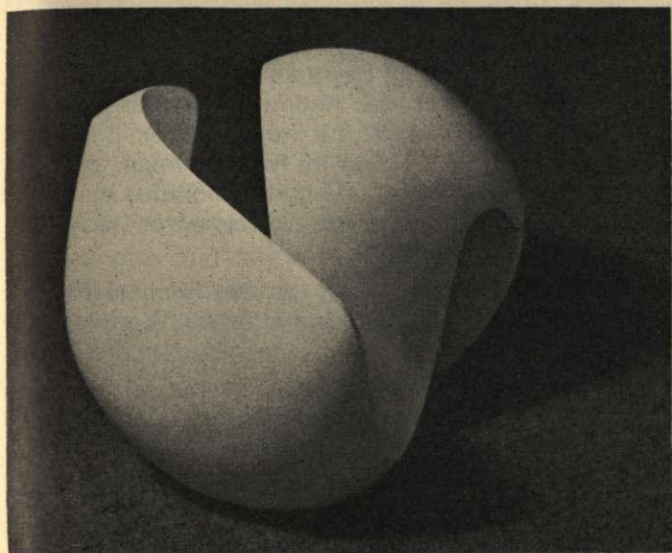
"Beyond Time"

Showing for the first time in this year's "The Group" will be a display of sculptures by Rosemary Johnson. The sculptures are related to landscape forms. In these she has taken natural forms and turned them into smooth folded shapes that show their natural origin.

A graduate of the School of Art at University of Canterbury, Rosemary Johnson gained a Diploma F.A. with honours. On leaving she travelled to Europe visiting England, Germany, Austria, Italy and Greece and all the major Galleries and Museums in these countries.

In Florence she spent some time gaining experience in a foundry, which is well known for its skill in casting works of sculpture.

Upon returning to London she took a two year Post Graduate course at the Central School of Art and Design in metal casting, and on returning to New Zealand she has shown works at the Barry Lett gallery in Auckland. After "the group" Rosemary Johnson has been asked to show work in Sydney at the Macquarrie Galleries.



Plaster part of three piece to be cast in bronze to be shown in the Group.

Reed & Bennett

Work showing 16 November 1970

Michael Reed was born 1950 in Christchurch, and educated at Hillmorton High School, 1963-1966. He attended the Ilam School of Fine Arts from 1967-1969, gaining his D.F.A., majoring in Print-making. This year won Te Awamutu Print Competition and is currently working as a graphic designer for the NZBC.

Graham Bennett was born and lived in Nelson. He attended Nelson College until 1967 when he enrolled at Canterbury University School of Art, where after a year of studies in Painting and Sculpture, proceeded to specialise in Photography and Design. Last year he graduated with a Diploma in Fine Arts and is now completing an Honours year, specialising in photography.

Out of the Cold

Two artist members Austen Deans and Jeannette Bisley sold a painting each to Deep Freeze. The Society is indebted to Kees Groenedaal, Mobilia Ltd., Bedford Row, who made the sale for the society.

Stop Press:

Ida Lough first artist to be asked to exhibit tapestries in the New Zealand Academy, Wellington, next year.

Interesting illustrated travel talk by Tim Round on Wednesday, 4th November at 8 p.m., C.S.A. Gallery. Don't miss this.

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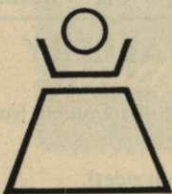
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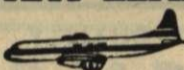
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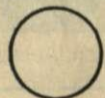
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Report from Sydney

This year's winner of the C.S.A. Guthrey Travel Mrs Doris Holland (Doris Lusk) sent back these impressions of her trip to Australia.

Dear Members,

Here I am, right in the middle of Australia at Alice Springs, and have been to several of the spectacular "scenic attractions", of which there are many, to be reached by rather pricey tours by plane or bus. The landscape varies in colour from cream, pink and orange to red, and is decorated with various species of scrubby growth, as well as the ubiquitous gum trees, some of the white "ghost" species. There are about half a dozen art galleries here, some tending more to souvenir shops, but nearly all featuring native art, either indigenous or à la Namatjira. I have been most interested to find that the biggest gallery, "The Batterbee", is run by Rex Batterbee, who, a painter himself (he must be about 80) was also the famous Albert's mentor and teacher, and I found it difficult to distinguish between the watercolours of master and pupil. Of interest also, is the fact that all Albert's sons and grandsons paint in the same way, so that one can follow, like the Egyptian dynastics, a rigid and prescribed idiom for the Aboriginal painter! And all, not from Albert himself, but from Mr Rex Batterbee! Well, that's the art scene at Alice Springs, plus the native bark paintings, plus a quite ambitious exhibition of Northern Territory artists, a Hays-type show run by Caltex with a \$400 prize.

Have met a very friendly potter, Michael Russell; he is taking me on Thursday into the Wopwops for clay.

To return to the Sydney visit, one of the best galleries was the Central Street Gallery, where I found a really fine contemporary collection, including a comprehensive record of Christos Wrapups shown to us by the director, Mr Coventry, who said the gallery unfortunately soon had to close. He invited us to his very attractive Paddington home, to see his own collection, a quite stunning array of the best of contemporary Australian artists, mainly minimal, hard-edged and color-form, but he also had very good work of earlier painters.

Moved on to Canberra by bus on 26th August, and had only time to leave gear at the motel before being picked up by Lady Margaret Frankel and whisked off to see the big Commonwealth Show at the Albert Hall, and here were all the names one could hope for. A terrific exhibition, which, owing to unforeseen difficulties the next day, I didn't get back to photograph. Saw the famous Leonard French 7 Days of Creation rather dramatically shown in a darkened room, floodlit, looking splendid. In the Menzies Library a delightful exhibition from the R.M.I.T. of the art of paper cutting—design with paper.

Plenty to see in Canberra. I was lucky in having such a well informed guide. Besides showing me the current art shows, Lady Frankel also toured me around the city and environs, splendid buildings, concourses, fountains and motorways, also shops of Continental sophistication. I wished I had planned more time for Canberra, it's a unique city. Leave Alice Springs on Friday for Adelaide, and several days in the country.

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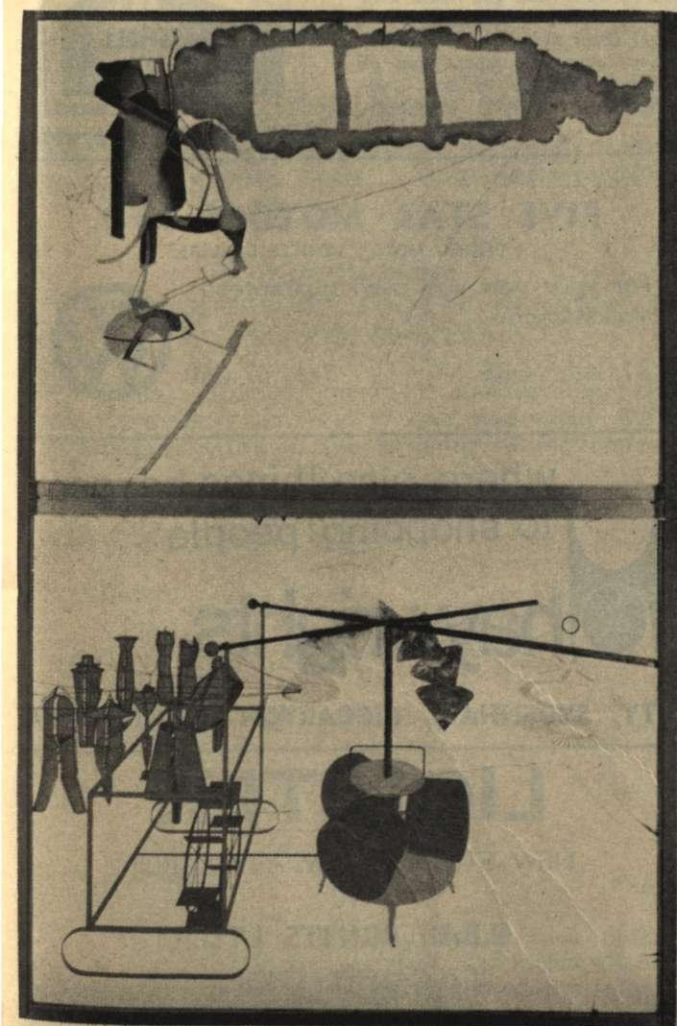
Ted Francis

As long ago as the early '50s the American composer and philosopher John Cage put forward the idea that all periods now, culturally speaking, are periods of transition — that if values are to exist it will not be through their being handed to us piecemeal by a more stabilized era. They will be formed with the transition itself and partake of its character. On the face of it then, previously established formal values might appear to be in danger of extinction, with nothing to fill the vacuum to enable us to evaluate or discriminate.

As Greenburg stated so emphatically, "novelty is a pre-requisite of acceptance in London and New York." And Harold Rosenberg points out that the word "avant garde" has long been a pivotal term in modern art together with words such as "experiment", "transformation" and "pioneer", words which originate not in the vocabularies and formal art criticism, but in the new world of science and exploration.

The changes which occurred in the visual idiom of the West between the 15th and 19th centuries were mainly of syntax rather than language. Renoir came from the same family as Rubens and changes of style took place at intervals of roughly 50 years. But since Post impressionism the built-in death date of any style seems to be 12-18 months.

Of course, the reasons for this are extremely various and complex and reflect the measured temper of developments in society generally. Life in the major countries, and more particularly the densely populated areas where vast sums of money are being expended on science and technology is being continuously transformed. It is apparent that the tempo is accelerating rapidly. Many previously accepted modes of thinking and planning are now fast becoming obsolete. Enormous strides are being made in the behavioural sciences which within a few decades will be seen to be exerting a radical effect on education. It is not



'The Large Glass', Duchamp

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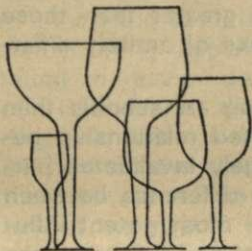
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surprising then that a fluid state prevails in the arts or that Cage propounds the view that we live in a cultural situation of perpetual motion, if we accept that art reflects the condition of society. The question is (and this applies to metaphysical issues as well) whether we are in fact faced with a negative situation and the loss of cherished traditional values.

Confronted with the bewildering conglomeration of styles today we may feel this to be so.

As Bernard Denvir recent pointed out, "the stylistic and iconological differences which divide works of art made in the same form and same year by people of roughly the same age are today greater than those which previously divided the works of entirely different civilizations."

There are more people attending art schools than ever before and the old established relationship between teacher and student is largely invalidated particularly where there is a big age difference between the two. For better or worse the most potent influence (within the English art school and I suspect the same situation exists in the States and elsewhere) is that of the gifted young practitioner employed in a part-time capacity as a teacher to stimulate and convey his immediate findings to the student, perhaps five years his junior. Empirical thought and natural acceptance of the here-and-now situation are part and parcel of the attitudes of the younger generation of art students.

The teaching of Fine Art (it is a pity there is no substitute in English for this dreadful term) is now carried out within the context of an increasing predominance of design education, with its use of new materials.

A non-traditional type of aesthetic valuation is emerging as a result of all these factors.

The myth of the permanence of the art object and the sense of preciousness which has tended to surround it is diminishing. One senses in the atmosphere of the more idealistic younger generation, a feeling of contempt for the hypocrisy of the art-dealer/gallery owner situation where fortunes change hands over works by artists who may never have benefited materially from their own ideas. This had led to a tendency, coupled with the demands of society, for a constant renewal of shapes in terms of cars, packaging, furniture, etc., for the development of a throw-away or impermanent art in keeping with stylistic mobility. For more complex philosophical reasons there has been a resurgence of the nineteenth century notion of Art as idea rather than end product. Hence the proposition that a creative idea may be communicated to a percipient, appealing to his imagination, of a project impossible to realise in concrete terms; or that the greatest value in terms of perceptual experience may be in the **memory** of an event. It is against this background of change and innovation that we need to consider the creative process itself in relation to the individual.

Freud and Jung have contributed to the dissolution of Man's belief in his own ability to make decisions and judgments as acts of pure will or intention. Discoveries about the nature and functions of perception have undermined our belief in objective reality. Despite the young artist's desire to innovate, his thoughts and feelings are very much determined by factors over which he has no conscious control. Gombrich, in his work "Art and Illusion", says that our motives to form are dictated by the compelling force of already existing visual images which, subconsciously or otherwise, we allow to influence us.

We cannot avoid to some extent the impact of style even if our reaction is one of rejection or reaction.

To quote Andre Malraux: "The young painter does not make a choice between his 'personal vision' and his master or masters, but between certain canvases and certain other canvases. If this were not so he would have to invent the art of painting for himself."

Freedom of expression is a fallacy and so too the

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idea of the innocent eye. Does this mean that originality of any substance can only develop out of some kind of precedent? We cannot begin to create without a conscious determination to identify ourselves with certain attitudes which have already been established in very broad terms.

It is on this assumption that we might consider the philosophies and example of two major exponents of 20th century ideas, i.e. Marcel Duchamp and Henri Matisse.

First of all, they are exciting more interest among young artists of today than any other of the founders of the Modern Movement, and secondly, they seem to personify two powerful and vital yet diametrically opposed attitudes.

One attitude (that of Matisse) seems to be the continuation of certain intrinsic and unassailable values inherent in the mainstream tradition of Western art. It results from the externalization of an inner serenity and optimism—a quality which Apollinaire referred to as "an order to which instinct sets the measure".

The other stand typified by Duchamp is that of a man antipathetic to what he called "retinal painting"—a man who has been referred to as a thinker who happened to do some painting. An individual who appeals vastly to many in an age where "We have come to accept an open-ended concept of art of the kind predicted by Wittgenstein in which our provisional definition of art is enlarged by every new manifestation of it." (Bernard Denvir)

Duchamp has done more to change our conception of what art can or cannot be than any other artist of the 20th century; among other things with the notion that art can be a joke—the idea of the absurd as the ultimate in seriousness. Perhaps too he represents a delightful and refreshing attitude which questions the posturing of the so-called professional artist and the validity of those cultural cemeteries known as art galleries.

But to return to Matisse. Like Picasso (and unlike Duchamp who gave up art for chess) he had an enormously long working life extending from his early days in the studio of the Symbolist Gustave Moreau, to his death in 1954. Throughout this period, except for brief flirtations with the Fauves and Cubists, he is a comparatively isolated figure.

His development owed much to his involvement with the values of the past—a characteristic of French painting which must have had a lot to do with the practice of copying in the Louvre. It is significant that Matisse himself worked in the Louvre until he was 30 and as with Delacroix and Cezanne there is a formal harmony in his work, clearly revealed in his figure drawings. But the impressive aspect of Matisse (and I think this is one factor which appeals to the young) is his independence from and suspicion of academic or intellectually-based system painting. While drawing benefit from the past his work is essentially instinctive, feeding upon external stimuli where needed. It is interesting to note that the large exhibition of Persian painting displayed in Paris in 1903 made a profound impression on him and preceded his experience of Cubism. He never became a slave to the rather dogmatic form of the Cubist grid and throughout his life he used the classical motif of the human figure as the basis for all his ideas. The figure meant more to him in humanistic terms than it did to Cezanne, to which his writings testify.

Again we find that he doesn't approach the figure in a systematic way but arrives through a process of simplification at a formal relationship which stems entirely from his immediacy of sensation before the presence of the model and the sheet of white paper or white canvas.

His writings on colour—for it is in terms of colour that he looks forward to the future, clearly indicate why if not how he broke through into an area unique in the history of Western Painting. And it is this breakthrough which makes him a figure of continuing interest and concern to painters and sculptors at this time.

In his notes on the instinctive reaction to his material, he says "I would not repeat this drawing on another sheet of different dimensions, e.g. on a rectangular sheet, if the first one happened to be a square. If I had to repeat it on a sheet of the same shape but ten times larger I would not limit myself to enlarging it; a drawing must have a power of expansion which can bring to life the space which surrounds it."

His "Notes of a Painter" illuminate for us the motives which underlie the distortions and dispositions of form in his canvases quite different from those that promote the distortions of Picasso or the German Expressionists. The motives seem to equate more satisfactorily with the work of the Chromatic Abstractionists and Colour Field painters, particularly Rothko, Noland and Olitsky and sculptors like Anthony Caro. He says: "There is an impelling proportion of tones that can induce me to change the shape of a figure or to transform my composition." Each generation interprets differently the production of the previous generation. The paintings of Impressionists, constructed with pure colours suggested to the next generation that these colours, while they might be used to describe objects or the phenomena of nature, contain within them independently of the objects that they serve to express, the power to affect the feelings of those who look at them. Thus it is that simple colours can act upon the inner feelings with all the more force because they are simple."

These remarks go some way to indicating the reasons for the production of a number of remarkable key works. Starting with the "Red Studio" of 1911 in which the forms appear to float and rotate (non-compositionally, in the traditional sense) and yet are embedded in a dense field of vibrant red, covering some forty square feet. Another work of importance for the future is "The Piano Lesson" of 1916 in which fragments of strongly saturated colour enliven a field of grey.

These works do not lie within the orbit of his more traditionally based canvases such as 'The Odalisques' and the 'Open Windows at Nice' of 1920-1930.

But it was with the commission for the Barnes Foundation Murals that he began to see paintings in

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creasingly in public terms, conceiving colour on walls, and abandoning paint on canvas, leading to designs for ceramics, tapestries and stained glass. The final culmination of all this work was the Vence Chapel of the Rosary of the Dominican Nuns which was consecrated in 1951. The chapel is his conception in every detail and presents a complete unity of expression.

His final phase of work, the "Papiers Decoupees", has been likened to the late quartets of Beethoven representing as they do a leap ahead of their time. Their decorative simplicity conceals an underlying complexity of conception.

Here then in Matisse we have an attitude and principles which have been recognised as open ended and capable of re-evaluation in terms of the present and future. When we turn to Duchamp we are presented with a very different but no less influential philosophy. For Duchamp art is conceptual—a mental act. His life has been dedicated to the annihilation of retinal painting (art which appeals principally or solely to the eye). What he sought among other things was the idea that a painting should not be self-contained but be in itself an idea or evoke an idea. He said in 1945: "I wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting. . . . I was interested in ideas—not merely in visual products. I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind." Gilson's concept of the physical existence and reality of the art object is swept aside and the tidy and comfortable systems constructed in the service of art, philosophy, and aesthetics are disarrayed.

Duchamp has opened up aesthetic possibilities since realised in Surrealism and Pop art and now at work in so-called Impossible Art in which the younger generation rejects again the accepted order of things by forcing comparison through negation, absence or unwieldiness, and assumes a threatening posture to the Art Establishment.

The whole body of material presented by Duchamp is thought-provoking. The issues raised over the presentation of the "ready-mades" such as the urinal, coat rack and snow shovel are well known and were justified if only for the uproar they created in the MacDougall, a situation with which Duchamp would have been hugely delighted.

The seemingly mischievous and destructive attitude of Duchamp which also characterises Dada and Impossible Art I believe does an immense service. Anton Ehrenzweig in his book the "Hidden Order of Art", refers to the necessity of using disruptive techniques in art education in order to avoid what he calls "tired exercises in empty sensibilities" (referring to exercises in Abstraction or Realism) and the well-placed thrusts of anti-establishment art achieve something of the same result.

One of Duchamp's intentions was to make us think and to question our sense of values concerning the "objet d'art", but at the same time he was capable of creating works of intriguing complexity, which leave an indelible impression if one is prepared to make the effort to explore them.

The most monumental structure is the work "The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors Even". It is a compound of literary and graphic forms consisting of two independent objects, "The Green Box" which contains ninety-four items in the form of handwritten notes, sketches and precise perspective drawings, and "The Large Glass", a kind of witty mechanistic analogy for the reproductive functions of human beings, painstakingly constructed over the course of several years. In material terms it is neither painting nor sculpture and is a combination of precisely calculated factors and elements of chance characteristic of Dadaist works. "The Bride" hovers tantalizingly beyond any form of easy categorization and teases us with its unique ingredients.

If we can make the effort to understand the philosophy underlying Duchamp's works, we can perhaps the better come to terms with much that has been created since, from the creations of Robert Raus-

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chenburg, Claes Oldenburg, and Andy Warhol's seditious attempts to undermine accepted aesthetic values, to more recent radical experiments in the Arts.

Duchamp and Matisse in their different ways enlarge our understanding and keep us alive to new possibilities. They help us to enjoy more fully the wide range of attitudes current at the present time. The questions they raise are above nationalism, regionalism, or creed, and have universal validity. They both allow for that open-ended and divergent concept of art which is the only way forward.

To quote Denvir again: "To suggest that this rate of change, this constant empiricism which characterizes art today, is in some way immoral, dishonest, or specious, is naive. Art cannot evolve away from the patterns of society and at no time in history has any original creative movement been ultimately rejected."

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