

Cities within cities: Australian and New Zealand art in the 20th century

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The Christchurch-born painter Raymond McIntyre had been living in England for more than 15 years when in 1925 he reviewed Australian expatriate artist and art critic Edith Fry's second London exhibition of the Australian Artists in London group. Arriving in London in 1909, McIntyre had studied privately with George Lambert and with William Nicholson and Walter Sickert at the Westminster Technical Institute. He had exhibited regularly at the Goupil Gallery from 1911, with the London Group from 1916 to 1918, and eventually at the Royal Academy in 1924. These experiences, occurring before, during and after the War, would undoubtedly have attuned him to the questions of expatriatism and national identity at stake in Fry's show. Writing of Fry's exhibition in *Architectural Review* – an international architecture magazine published in London since 1896, for which he had been a reviewer for more than 10 years – McIntyre began by asking: "When is an Australian not an Australian?" He then continued: "The most interesting works in the show have obviously been done under the influence and stimulus of European art. Certainly the most up-to-date and enterprising of the artists show this influence... We might even say that, in proportion as they cease to be Australians, their work becomes more interesting, viewed from the standpoint of modern artistic developments in Europe". For McIntyre, the Australians who have "stayed away a long time... have, from any artistic meaning of the word, ceased to be Australians", and thus he confessed himself "surprised to discover that Mr Harold Brodzky is an Australian".¹ It is possible even that McIntyre and Brodzky knew each other (without McIntyre knowing Brodzky's nationality), insofar as both had shown at various times with the London Group. Certainly, McIntyre was familiar with Brodzky's work, and shared with him a concern for a clean and uncluttered line in the portraits he made.

Other artists in Fry's shows, some of whom were mentioned by McIntyre in his review, included Rupert Bunny, Charles Conder, Ethel Carrick, Bessie Davidson, Agnes Goodsir, Roy de Maistre, Bessie Gibson and Janet Cumbrae-Stewart – all of whom had indeed spent time abroad, thus prompting McIntyre's question of when does an Australian artist remain an Australian. But the true irony of McIntyre asking this question – a double irony, given that McIntyre was himself a New Zealander – is that some of these "Australians" were in fact New Zealanders: J.F. Scott and Dora Meeson studied in New Zealand, and Elioth Gruner and Septimus Power were born there.

The authors would like to thank the reviewer of this essay for their suggestions.

¹ Raymond McIntyre, *Architectural Review*, Vol. LVII, January/June 1925, 214.

Scott, for example, was born in Dunedin in 1877 and studied at the Dunedin School of Art. He left for Paris in 1898, where he studied with Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant and Jean-Paul Laurens at the Académie Julian. He was at Gallipoli in the First World War with the Australian and New Zealand Army Corp, and was later appointed an official Australian war artist. Meeson was born in Melbourne in 1869, but moved to New Zealand with her family as a girl. She studied at the Canterbury School of Art, and exhibited with the Canterbury Palette Club and the Canterbury Society of Arts between 1889 and 1895. After returning briefly to Australia to study at the National Gallery School in Melbourne, she left for London to enrol at the Slade in 1896. In Paris she trained at the Académie Julian at the same time as Scott in 1898.

We might say that the conditions and traditions of Antipodean expatriatism – even perhaps the forgetting or blurring of that tradition – would also not have been lost on Fry. She, after all, had been the curator of two exhibitions in London: *Australian Artists in Europe*, in 1924 at the Faculty of Arts Gallery; and *Australian Art Exhibition*, the show McIntyre reviewed, at the Springs Garden Gallery in 1925. She was the author of a series of important newspaper articles on the “Australian” expatriates in Europe, published in the London and Sydney press: ‘Australian Artists in Paris’ (1914 and 1922), ‘Australians in Paris’ (1917), ‘Art and Artists: The Paris Salon’ (1919), ‘Exiles: The Australian Artists Abroad’ (1924) and ‘Retrospect: Twelve Years from Home’ (1924). For *The British-Australasian* she wrote ‘Australasian Artists in Europe’ (1921), and for *The British and Australian and New Zealander* she wrote ‘Some New Arrivals in Art’ (1925).² She helped found the Pantom Arts Club (whose aim was the “encouragement of great art and of co-operation between the arts”) in 1924, the same year she founded the group Australian Artists in Europe. Fry moved equally between expatriate artistic and literary circles, painting in 1927 for example *C.R. Allen, Novelist and Playwright*, and penning in 1939 an appreciation of the blind New Zealand writer for the *British Annual of Literature*.

This question of just who was an Australian or, more precisely, which New Zealanders were Australian was also the question asked in the lead article of the inaugural issue of *Art New Zealand* in 1976. More than 50 years after McIntyre, the same matters of national identity were still being debated in a magazine notable for having abandoned its original title of *Art in New Zealand*. (The same logic would apply in Australia, where the once-titled *Art in Australia* would become *Art and Australia*, in what would appear to be a move against the limiting of Australian art to that made here.) In the then-Director of the Auckland City Gallery Ernest Smith’s ‘Memories of Three New Zealand Expatriate Painters’, he returned Godfrey Miller, James Cook and Roland Wakelin to New Zealand art history, all of them artists who

² These articles were part of a series written by Edith Fry between 1914 and 1927. They included ‘Australian Artists in Paris’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 July 1914, 5 and ‘Australian Artists in Paris’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 March 1922, 7; ‘Australians in Paris’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 May 1917, 5; ‘Art and Artists: The Paris Salon’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 July 1919; ‘Australian Art Exhibition in London’, *Daily Telegraph*, 17 June 1920; ‘Exiles; The Australian Artists Abroad’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 February 1924, 20; ‘Retrospect: Twelve Years from Home’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 July 1924, 11; ‘Australasian Artists in Europe’, *The British-Australasian*, September 1921, p 46-48; and ‘Some New Arrivals in Art’, *The British Australian and New Zealander*, July 1925, 32-34.

up until then had largely been regarded as Australian.³ (Miller, who served with the New Zealand Army at Gallipoli, had come to Australia in 1919; Cook in 1935; and Wakelin in 1912). In his article, Smith was consciously seeking to provide a pre-history to the experiences of a then-contemporary generation of New Zealand artists, such as Billy Apple, John Panting and Eric Macky (the husband, in fact, of the Melbourne painter Constance Jenkins, both of whom would go on to contribute to the story of Australasian art in America). And, of course, Smith in 1976 was writing in a period when art history was concerned to recover and recuperate hitherto lost or repressed traditions, as seen for instance in the feminist art histories of the 1970s. Smith's anecdotal article is written in testimony to his own personal memories of the three artists and to remind readers of the new journal that these artists were in fact New Zealanders and not Australians, after their disappearance from the New Zealand art histories that were then beginning to be produced.

But Smith was only scratching the surface of the phenomenon he identified. From our point of view, there is a whole as yet unrecognised history of New Zealand art in Australia. We have been concerned for some time to write a non-national or what we have called an "UnAustralian" history of Australian art.⁴ It is a history that begins by raising the very same question as McIntyre as to what defines an Australian artist. And our answer, as with Smith, is that we should not confine ourselves merely to artists working in this country. This has been to date the default position of all Australian art histories, from Bernard Smith's canonical *Australian Painting* (1961) on. We have argued, however, that we cannot understand Australian art without taking into account those Australians who did not make art here, and who thereby risked, like Miller, Cook and Wakelin, being excluded from the history of art of the country in which they were born and trained. And in this alternative history we find Australian art taking place not just in the usual London and Paris, ultimately cities of Australian's colonisation and cultural marginality. We find it as well taking place in the great metropolis of New York, at Etaples on the coast of France, in Seattle in the north-west of America and in Papunya in the Central Australian Desert, all cities that instead speak of Australia's belonging to the rest of the world.

In this paper, as the necessary complement to the *expatriate* story, we want to write a brief history of New Zealand art taking place in Australia, the *immigrant* story. This would be part of our more general argument – but one that is always specific, always rooted in historical circumstances, that in a way cannot be generalised – that art is always translocal, metropolitan, caught up in a movement between places. Art is never ultimately a matter of countries but always of cities, whether that city be Paris or Yuendumu; and, more than that, it is always a matter of cities within cities. In Latin, we might say that it is always a matter of *partes extra partes* rather than of *genius loci*. And in our UnAustralian history we reverse the perspective of the usual national histories, which are always written from the inside

³ Ernest Smith, 'Memories of Three New Zealand Expatriate Painters', *Art New Zealand*, No. 1, August/September 1976, 11-15.

⁴ See also Rex Butler and A.D.S. Donaldson, 'A Short History of UnAustralian Art', in Ian North (ed.), *Visual Animals: Crossovers, Evolution and the New Aesthetics*, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide, 2007, p 107-22; and Rex Butler and A.D.S. Donaldson, 'Stay, Go or Come: A History of UnAustralian Art 1920-1940', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 9(1/2), 2009, 119-43.

out, and write instead from the outside in. We ask not how other places seem from here but how we might appear from other places.⁵ And thus to write a history of New Zealand art from the point of view of Australia is also to write an UnNew Zealand history of art from the point of view of New Zealand. For if from the perspective of Australian art history New Zealand immigrants to Australia are excluded, so from conventional New Zealand art history are those New Zealand emigrants to Australia also rendered invisible. We only have to recall the concluding words to the most recent attempt to write a synoptic history of New Zealand art – Hamish Keith’s *The Big Picture: A History of New Zealand Art from 1642* (2007) – to realise that nationalist New Zealand art history is constructed in exactly the same way as the Australian. Keith writes in the chapter ‘The Braided River’: “There is no escaping the one simple fact that runs through all of this story. The art made here or influenced by this place is the only art that speaks to us directly about our experience”.⁶

In the space that remains, then, we wish to outline briefly some of the interconnections between Australian and New Zealand art in the 20th century. Of course, in the 19th century the art of the two countries was largely the same thing. It is only in the 20th century with the rise of national histories that the art in the two countries was divided. We have in common a pre-history, with artists moving between the two countries before their respective art histories were written. Every artist was in effect a “travel” artist, having come from somewhere and most often moving on again soon after.⁷ It is a condition best described by Bernard Smith, who shows the two countries’ common roots in his *European Vision and the South Pacific* (1960). As Smith commentator Peter Beilharz, writes: “Australian and New Zealand – Australasia – were one circuit earlier, even if they now pride themselves as culturally distinct”. And, against this contemporary sense of cultural distinctiveness, Beilharz goes on to call for “a renewed sense of the significance of lateral comparison”.⁸ Ironically, of course, it would be as much against Smith’s own Australianist histories that Beilharz’s appeal would have to be made. Almost as though it were a mythical time before separation, the classic national histories frequently begin with the same artists. But this commonality then needs to be repressed; the fact that the same artist worked in both countries is rarely, if ever, mentioned. We might just point here to four such cases of early artistic cross-over, listing one work painted in Australia and the other in New Zealand: the English-born Augustus Earle paints both *Wentworth Falls* (1830) and *Distant View of Bay of Island* (1827); the English-born Conrad Martens

⁵ Perhaps the great example of this history so far is Frenchman Jean-Claude Lesage’s *Peintres Australiens à Etaples*, A.M.M.E. Éditions, Etaples-sur-mer, 2000, a history of Australian and New Zealand artists at the artist colony of Etaples on the northern coast of France. It is in this book that we have another history of Australasian art as seen through the eyes of another. We draw on this book throughout what follows.

⁶ Hamish Keith, *The Big Picture: A History of New Zealand Art from 1642*, Godwit, Auckland, 2007, 269.

⁷ We take the expression “travel artist” from the exhibition and catalogue *Augustus Earle: Travel Artist*, National Library of Australia, 1980.

⁸ Peter Beilharz, ‘Two New Britannias: Modernism and Modernity across the Antipodes’, *Antipodean Modern ACH*, No. 25, 2006, 146 and 155. In this, Beilharz would be echoing the words of the Australian literary critic Nettie Palmer, who once wrote: “At the beginning of this century, and before that, Australia and New Zealand knew a good deal more about each other than in the decades that followed”, *Meanjin*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1944, 165.

paints both *View of the Crags above Neutral Bay* (1857-59) and *Kororarereka in the Bay of Islands* (1841); the English-born William Strutt paints *Bushrangers on the St Kilda Road* (1887) and *On the Beach, Onehunga* (1856); and the Viennese-born Eugene von Guérard paints both *Kosciusko seen from the Victoria Border* (1866) and *Milford Sound, New Zealand* (1877-79).

New Zealand art history proper begins (almost like Australia's) with the so-called "generation of 1890". We see this generation understood almost as a kind of "genesis", to use Bernard Smith's phrase from *Australian Painting*,⁹ in Michael Dunn's *A Concise History of New Zealand Painting* (1991); in the survey show, *Aspects of New Zealand Art 1890-1940* at the National Art Gallery in Wellington 1984; and in – arguably the first history to use this date – Gordon Brown and Hamish Keith's *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1967* (1969). The argument can take the form either of Brown and Keith's straightforward declaration that the 1890s marked "the beginning of an era in New Zealand painting",¹⁰ or Dunn speaking of Von Guérard's *Milford Sound* as the first "major masterpiece from the New Zealand landscape";¹¹ but then, because it was completed in Melbourne from initial studies, reserving this accolade for Petrus van der Velden's *A Waterfall in Otira Gorge* (1891), which was painted entirely *en plein air* on site.

Petrus van der Velden. Edward Friström. James Nairn. Girolamo Nerli. What is it ultimately that distinguishes this generation of 1890 – one Dutch, one Swedish, one Scottish and one Italian – from previous New Zealand artists? It is the fact that they *stay* in New Zealand. They teach and exhibit in the then-emerging arts societies. In short, they introduce the figure of the professional artist. They are *expatriates* not travel artists (an expatriatism that is possible only when there is the national). They do not simply make art for consumption back in Europe or, like von Guérard, complete a picture of New Zealand back in Australia. They work on the basis that they are creating a tradition in the country of their residence, and indeed their work will significantly inflect that of subsequent generations of artists in New Zealand.

But what is notable about each of these artists, with the exception of Nairn, is that they also work in Australia. The case of Nerli in Melbourne is well known, at least in Australian art history; but in fact van der Velden works in Sydney and Friström in Brisbane. And here begins the problem of Australia's and New Zealand's

⁹ Bernard Smith, 'Genesis 1885-1914', in *Australian Painting 1788-1960*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1962, 71-124.

¹⁰ Gordon H. Brown and Hamish Keith, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1967*, Collins, Auckland, 1969, 49.

¹¹ Michael Dunn, *A Concise History of New Zealand Painting*, David Bateman Ltd, Auckland, 1991, 40. Dunn is another fascinating example of Australia-New Zealand interrelations, and indeed the tension between the national and the international in the art historiography of the region. Graduating from the Canterbury School of Art with a degree in painting, Dunn then studied at the University of Melbourne in the late 1960s under European émigré Franz Philipp, eventually completing an MA on the topic of New Zealand sculpture with the title 'Dependent Taste'. Although in *A Concise History* we see the connection made between the landscape and national identity, in Dunn's later *Nerli – An Italian Painter in the South Pacific* (Auckland University Press, 2005) we have the attempt to think Nerli – undoubtedly aided by Dunn's trans-Tasman perspective – as belonging exclusively neither to Australian nor New Zealand art history. It is in the Acknowledgements to this book that Dunn thanks Philipp for suggesting the topic to him. Is it too much to see the influence of the cosmopolitan Italianist Philipp on Dunn's work on Nerli and that of Bernard Smith's *Australian Painting* – for Dunn must have encountered the work of Smith in Melbourne in the late '60s – on Dunn's own national histories?

invisibility to each other. Friström, who lived for some 17 years in Brisbane (even marrying an Australian woman), is entirely absent from Australian art history. Van der Velden too is absent from Smith's *Australian Painting*, despite his earlier South Pacific insight. Of course, van der Velden cannot be absent from Brown and Keith; but certainly his Australian years more or less are – and this despite the fact that he returned to Wellington in 1900 after some 5 and a half years in Sydney, bringing with him, like Friström, his Australian wife-to-be, called indeed Australia. (The van der Veldens would even call their daughter Melba, after the famous light-operatic diva, who once bought his *Self-Portrait* of 1909.) Nerli, who arrived in Melbourne with his fellow Italian Ugo Catani in 1885, is in Smith; but, “after a 4 year sojourn in Australia, he moved on to Dunedin and became one of the first teachers of Frances Hodgkins”.¹² At this point he sails out of our narrative, no longer apparently being an Australian artist – this after having been a major influence on Charles Conder, and through him on the entire Heidelberg School, said by Smith to be the first authentically Australian art movement.

The presence of Nerli's student, Frances Hodgkins, in Australian art is also largely unacknowledged. Beside the reference to her above with regard to Nerli, Smith remembers her only one other time, in relation to apparently her only one-person exhibitions in this country, in Melbourne in 1912 and Sydney in 1913.¹³ In fact, Hodgkins showed also in Adelaide around the same time, and contributed to the Society of Women Painters in Sydney. Brown and Keith conversely do not mention her years in Australia. The two nationalist blindnesses are reciprocal: if Smith is not interested in Hodgkins insofar as she makes *New Zealand* art in Australia, Brown and Keith are not interested in her insofar as she makes New Zealand art *in Australia*.

In short, here are the facts (most of these barely represented even in Brown and Keith): in 1910, Hodgkins becomes the first woman teacher of any nationality at the famed Parisian atelier school Colarossi's. In 1911, she works and teaches at the French seaside town of Concarneau. That same year, she opens the 'Frances Hodgkins School of Watercolour Painting' at 21 Avenue du Maine in Paris. In 1914, she moves to St Ives on the south-west coast of England. From 1915 to 1920, she holds summer classes there. From 1921 to 1927, she teaches in both France and England. And whom does she teach during this time? Amongst many others, the Australians Ambrose Hallen and Bessie Gibson around 1910 at Colarossi's, Vida Lahey in 1919 at St Ives, and the New Zealanders Kate O'Connor in 1907 at Concarneau and Maud Sherwood in 1911 at Colarossi's.

Thus Frances Hodgkins is a minor but significant figure in Australian art history because of whom she teaches; and because of her Australian exhibitions, which embodied, as their advertising suggested, “Modern French Art”.¹⁴ And it is interesting that when Hodgkins fell on hard times in the mid-1920s, she thought of emigrating from England to Australia, “doubtless remembering”, in the words of her biographer Eric McCormick, “her 1913 tour”.¹⁵ Indeed, in 1925 she even went so far

¹² Smith, op. cit., 74.

¹³ Smith, op. cit., 191. At footnote 21 Smith makes clear his reliance on Eric McCormick, Hodgkins' future biographer, for his understanding of Hodgkins.

¹⁴ The advertisement for Hodgkin's exhibition in Sydney is reproduced in E.H. McCormick, *Portrait of Frances Hodgkins*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1981, 76.

¹⁵ Ibid, 101.

as to book her ticket. She is important to New Zealand art history also because of whom she teaches (Sherwood, O'Connor); but, even more importantly, both New Zealand and Australian artists come to her in France and England because she is a New Zealander (as New Zealanders like McIntyre and Mina Arndt studied with the Australian George Lambert in London, or as New Zealander Edith Collier studied with Australian Margaret Preston in Ireland and England). That is, Australian and New Zealand artists abroad – as opposed to art historians in Australia or New Zealand – do not think of themselves as essentially different.

In fact, none of the Australians Hodgkins taught is mentioned in McCormick's book on her. This is to leave out one extremely significant aspect of Hodgkins' life and work, which is the knowledge of her shared by artists living in Australia and New Zealand, and more precisely her status as Australasian expatriate, the practical example of living and working overseas in another country that she represented for artists living both here and there.

We could never do more than gesture here towards the rich history of overlap and interaction between Australian and New Zealand artists throughout the 20th century. But as some way of suggesting the work to be done, we list here ten exemplary instances. Most of them involve New Zealand artists coming to Australia as the larger country, but not all of them. There are important instances of Australian artists and curators going to live and work in New Zealand. And more revealingly still, there are a number of instances of Australian and New Zealand artists meeting and working together overseas. Again, this is telling us that the artists thought of themselves as similar, even if the histories that were being written about them did not. Certainly, very few of the stories below have made it into the art histories of either Australia or New Zealand. They seem to have fallen "between the cracks", to involve an irrelevant New Zealand aspect in an otherwise Australian story or an irrelevant Australian aspect in an otherwise New Zealand story. But, in truth, it is these kind of cross-over incidents, involving artists from the two countries, that constitute the real art histories of both, as McIntyre and Ernest Smith saw so long ago. This new UnAustralian or UnNew Zealand art history would have to consider:

- the New Zealander Grace Joel, who was born in Dunedin in 1865, and likely trained with Nerli there. Certainly, she knew him in her hometown, but "possibly also in Melbourne where she went to study in 1888-89 and also later in London, where both painters lived for a time after 1906".¹⁶ Joel studied at the National Gallery School in Melbourne until 1894, before returning home and eventually leaving for Europe around 1899. She studied in Paris at the Académie Julian with Marcel Baschet and François Schommer, then moved to Etaples, where she worked beside Hodgkins and Constance Jenkins. As previously mentioned, the French sea-side towns of Etaples and Concarneau were a work and meeting place for both Australians and New Zealanders from the late 19th century on and will become an important military base for the ANZACs in World War I. Following Joel's death in London in 1924, she will endow her old school in Melbourne with a scholarship for painting from the nude.

¹⁶ Dunn, *op. cit.*, 44.

– the New Zealander Kate O'Connor, who will leave her new home town of Perth in 1906 to go first to London and then to Paris, where she would work with Hodgkins at her School of Water Colour Painting in 1911. She also studied with Rupert Bunny at the Atelier Blanche in 1909, and spent considerable time at Concarneau. In other words, Australian and New Zealand artists were entirely aware of an ongoing expatriate tradition, to which they could attach themselves while overseas. But, equally, for all of their knowledge of their fellow expatriates, they could also on occasions deny them. There is always a complementary nationalist conception of themselves, according to which their meetings and friendships with fellow colonials were seen as trivial or insignificant. And this is the case with O'Connor. As Janda Gooding writes of the relationship between Hodgkins, O'Connor and the Canadian Emily Carr at Concarneau: "What is fascinating is that each woman either erased their recollections of the other two artists or deliberately belittled their involvement. Carr identified Hodgkins as 'an Australian woman whose name I forget'; Hodgkins deliberately omitted from her letters any reference to O'Connor; and O'Connor dismissed Hodgkins as 'an opportunist with astigmatism'".¹⁷

– the New Zealander Roland Wakelin, who, having already exhibited with the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, came to Sydney in 1912 and studied with "the Signor", the Italian-born art teacher Antonio Dattilo Rubbo. In a milieu that included Grace Cossington Smith and Norah Simpson, Wakelin later teamed with fellow Dattilo-Rubbo student Roy de Maistre, and together they put on *Colour in Art* at Gayfield Shaw's Art Salon in 1919. The stories of this exhibition and of Simpson's return from Europe with a suitcase of reproductions of the work of French modernism are foundational in the construction of Australian art. That a New Zealander was so central has been forgotten, and in many ways Wakelin's esteem rose as his nationality receded, thus reproducing the fate of many New Zealand artists in Australia.

– the New Zealander Rex Nan Kivell and his well-known Redfern Gallery in Cork Street, London, where Australian curator Alleyne Zander was encouraged to recover the lost Australian modernist Derwent Lees – a clear case of both Kivell and Zander (like Edith Fry before them) recognising a shared expatriate tradition, and the importance of returning that tradition to its source. Kivell will later employ the Australian Harry Tatlock Miller as his assistant after the War, and would show the Australians Sidney Nolan and Louis James. Knighted by the Australian government, he would leave his important collection of Australian and New Zealand colonial art to the Australian National Library upon his death in 1977.

- the New Zealander Helen Stewart, who came to Sydney in 1928, having studied at Wellington Technical College, the London School of Art, and at Colarossi's and la Grand Chaumière in Paris. In 1931 she returned to London, and like so many Australian women worked with Iain McNab at the Grosvenor School. Again, as so many Australian women did, she went on to study with André Lhote in Paris, thus joining a line that included Grace Crowley, Anne Dangar, Eveline Syme and Dorrit

¹⁷ Janda Gooding, 'Putting Distance Between Us: Kathleen O'Connor and the Luxembourg Gardens Paintings', in *Painted Women*, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, Perth, 1998, 27.

Black, as well as her compatriot John Weeks. Stewart moved amongst these artists in Sydney, following her return from Europe in 1933. She exhibited with the Macquarie Galleries (where Wakelin had held the inaugural exhibition in 1925), was a withering critic of art criticism in Australia and was at the centre of the so-called colony of New Zealand women painters in Sydney, a loose group that also included Violet Bowring, Maud Sherwood and Adele Younghusband.¹⁸ She returned finally to Wellington in 1946, and from there regularly sent work to Sydney for exhibition throughout the 1950s. She subsequently co-founded 'The Thursday Group' and exhibited with the 'Group of Nine' in Wellington, where she died in 1983.

– the New Zealander Sydney Thompson, who was a student of van der Velden before leaving Christchurch in 1900, thereafter to spend much of rest of his life in Concarneau. Indeed, we must ask: was it van der Velden who opened Thompson's eyes to the expatriate possibility? In 1925, however, Thompson showed at the Macquarie Galleries in Sydney and the New Gallery in Melbourne, and had his work acquired by both the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the National Gallery of Victoria. The following year, he held one-person exhibitions in both cities again; and would return to Australia, as also did Frances Hodgkins, as a British artist in *The Murray Fuller Exhibition of Contemporary Art*, which toured Australia and then New Zealand. (This mistaken designation was repeated regularly throughout the 1930s. Derwent Lees, for instance, appeared as a British artist in Alleyne Zander's *Exhibition of British Contemporary Art* in 1933, and J.W. Power was likewise identified as British in Basil Burdett's *Exhibition of French and British Modern Art* in 1939.) Thompson was able to work and reside between New Zealand and France for decades, exhibiting regularly in both countries as well as in Australia. He was the very model of a contemporary artist today.

– the New Zealander Owen Merton, who after studying at the Christchurch School of Art left for London in 1909, before joining Hodgkins at her summer school at Concarneau in 1910. Later he studied at Colarossi's and was a student of Percyval Tudor-Hart at the same time as the Dunedin-born painter Maud Sherwood. Merton had met the Adelaide painter Richard Hayley Lever while painting at St. Ives in 1910 and, like Hayley Lever, he moved in 1916 with his family to America, where he remained until 1923. From then until his death in 1931, Merton moved between America, France, England, North Africa and Bermuda. Like his friend from Adelaide, he found the road to America that went through Paris.

– the New Zealander John Weeks, who studied at the Elam School of Arts in Auckland under, amongst others, Edward Friström, then spent two years at the Sydney Technical School between 1913 and 1915. In 1923 he left Christchurch for the Royal Scottish Academy, but in 1925 he left Edinburgh for Paris where he began to work with André Lhote, something he would do periodically between visits to the South of France, North Africa and Italy (Weeks was also an Orientalist) until 1929. In that year he headed back to Auckland where, in 1930, he began a 24-year teaching career at Elam School of Art, and in his work he became increasingly concerned with abstraction. This trajectory is, to Australian eyes, reminiscent of the careers of, for

¹⁸ H. S. (Helen Stewart), 'Art Criticism in Australia', *Bulletin*, 4 April 1934. From the Art Gallery of NSW press clippings folder, Art Gallery of NSW Research Library, Sydney. See also Margaret Pearson, 'Colony of New Zealand Women Painters in Sydney', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 December 1937, 26.

example, Grace Crowley, Anne Dangar and Dorrit Black, each of whom as teachers was concerned to pass on their understandings of art gained in Europe once back in Australia. Weeks became, as did these women in Australia, a decisive figure in New Zealand art, even if, as Peter Shand has pointed out, “the observation in his obituary that he was ‘particularly interested in interpreting the New Zealand landscape’ sums up the popular perception of John Weeks’ place in New Zealand art history, but emphasises the wrong reason for his importance”.¹⁹

– the New Zealander Colin McCahon, who during a trip to Melbourne in 1951 met the Australian expatriate painter Mary Cockburn-Mercer, known for once being in the inner circle of Cubists and for having attended the famous dinner put on by Picasso and friends for Henri Rousseau in Paris in 1908. McCahon hired the now “small, elderly woman with a walking stick and crutch” to give him painting lessons and, more importantly, to talk to him about art. It is upon his return to New Zealand that McCahon embarked on a new Cubist phase in his work, which can be seen as leading to his artistic maturity. Unlike many examples of Australian-New Zealand relations, McCahon biographer Gordon Brown fully acknowledges the influence of Cockburn-Mercer upon McCahon: “Although unimportant as a painter, McCahon felt something of the spirit of Cubism flowed through Cockburn-Mercer into his own understanding of what Cubism was about”.²⁰

– Finally, we would have to consider amongst many others the careers of the New Zealand avant-garde sculptor and film-maker Len Lye, who, drawn by the film industry, lived in Sydney from 1921 to 1926, where his shift to hand-painted animated films featuring “primitive” imagery from the region was inspired in part by seeing the archive of Aboriginal and South Pacific art at the Mitchell Library in Sydney; and the prematurely deceased New Zealand artist Frank Weitzel, who was a key contributor to the de Maistre-driven Burdekin House exhibition in Sydney in 1929, which stood at the intersection of modern art and design in Australia. Weitzel, whose family was politically engaged, anti-conscription (his father was interred as an enemy-alien) and subject to local hostility, originally headed to America, where he studied at the California School of Fine Arts. On scholarship, Weitzel studied next at the New York Art Students’ League in 1926, and at the Kunstakademie in Munich in 1927. It was only in 1928 that he joined his sister in Sydney, and having established himself there he set off again, this time for London where he exhibited with, and knew, Jacob Epstein, Duncan Grant and Paul and John Nash.²¹ While preparing for his first one-person exhibition, Weitzel contracted tetanus digging for clay for his sculpture and died in 1932. In 1933 his work was the subject of a retrospective

¹⁹ Peter Shand, ‘John Weeks (1886-1965)’, *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007. URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>

²⁰ Gordon H. Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist*, Reed, Wellington, 1984, 79.

²¹ Coincidentally, Weitzel’s sister Hedwig (Hettie) Ross, having been found guilty in 1921 of spreading seditious literature in Wellington – the Australian newspaper the *Communist* – had moved to Sydney, where she rose through the central committee of the Communist Party of Australia to become the leader of the Militant Women’s Group, while at the same time she completed her training to become a teacher. Working all over New South Wales from the late 1920s, she eventually rose to spend more than 10 years on the executive of the Teachers Federation. From her time at Victoria University College in Wellington around 1920, the future New Zealand Prime Minister Peter Fraser remembered her as “a wonderfully brilliant student”.

exhibition organised by Dorrit Black at the Modern Art Centre in Sydney. Indeed, it was through Black that Weitzel had come to work with Claude Flight at the Grosvenor School, which led to his embrace of the linocut. Weitzel, so briefly in Australia, had a considerable impact here amongst our most advanced artists, but he is completely absent from New Zealand art histories.

All of this would be to leave out such telling New Zealand figures in Australian art as James R. Jackson, Maud Sherwood, Dora Meeson, Harold Cazneaux, Frank Lynch, Dorothy Richmond, Edwin and Mary Murray Fuller, Dorothy Thornhill, Frances D. Ellis, Helen Crabbe (also known as 'Barc'), Gordon McAuslan, Eileen Mayo and even Sydney's so-called Witch of Kings Cross, Rosaleen Norton, who was born in New Zealand. It would also be to leave out those fewer – and for us this is significant – Australian figures who feature in New Zealand art. This brief list would include the natural history painter and Pacific adventurer Ellis Rowan, the Slade-trained watercolourist and painter Eana Blyth Jeans, the East Sydney Technical College-trained painter, printmaker and teacher Kate Coolahan and the gallery director and author of *Two Hundred Years of New Zealand Painting* Gil Docking.

To conclude here, however, let us take up one case study in Australian-New Zealand artistic relationships in a little more detail. The recently published *The Invention of New Zealand Art: Art and National Identity 1930-1970* by Francis Pound is clearly an attempt to reverse previous histories of New Zealand art. The book is an analysis of the nationalist rhetoric that accompanied New Zealand art throughout the 40 years under review, in effect arguing that the distinctiveness of New Zealand art is not real but the creation or invention of a discourse. Moreover, for Pound, this nationalist discourse – as for Ernest Smith some 30 years before – no longer speaks to the situation of such contemporary New Zealand artists as Michael Parakhovai or Jenny Fraser or the gallerist Peter Vuletic (his examples), who make and show work with galleries and artists around the world. Pound's book ends in the year 1970, and his concluding chapter is entitled 'A Post-Nationalist Art'. But what is notable about Pound's book is that, for all of his criticism of the rhetorics of nationalism, he is unable to present a positive alternative; if he ends with a "post-national" situation for New Zealand art, he is precisely unable to write the history of this post-nationalism. Indeed, the reader ultimately gets the sense that the book, which was written over a 20-year period, was originally a nationalist history, and for all of its change of heart along the way cannot get itself beyond a nationalist horizon.

We might get a sense both of the limits of Pound's book and of the possibilities another, UnNew Zealand art history might open up, if we consider the career of one of the artists Pound takes up in his "post-national" chapter, Gordon Walters. Pound – as Michael Dunn in *A Concise History of New Zealand Painting* before him – wants to understand Walters' turn towards abstraction as a consequence of his encounter with the art of Paris in 1950. This contact was no doubt crucial, but it arose within the wider context of his life and work in Sydney and Melbourne during the six years between 1946 and 1953. However, Pound, as Dunn, makes no mention of Walters' Australian years (as Australian art historians do not when writing histories of art in this country), but it was in fact during these years that Walters did his first abstract paintings.

To offer the briefest summary of events: after studying with the Indonesian-born Theo Schoon at the Wellington Technical College, Walters comes to Sydney for the first time in January 1946, and in that month acquired a copy of the catalogue for the Museum of Modern Art's 1941-2 Juan Miró exhibition. He visited Melbourne and then returned to Wellington in April. He spent July and August with Schoon in the South Canterbury caves examining Maori rock art, and over the Christmas period he continued to make drawings and take photographs in the caves with Schoon. In June 1947 Walters held his second exhibition at the coffee shop French Maid in Wellington, and left again for Sydney in December, where he would live until February 1949. During this period he recalled "studying rock engravings in the Sydney area and bark paintings in the museums of Melbourne and Sydney".²² Walters' *Untitled* (1955) "was partly inspired by Australian Aboriginal rock paintings".²³ Of course, Walters' imaginative exploration of the indigenous art of Australia and the Pacific and his use of the Mitchell Library is an almost exact replay of Len Lye's evolution in the same city in the 1920s.

1948, however, was an important year in the history of abstract art in Sydney. In that year Grace Crowley was appointed to teach abstraction at East Sydney Technical College – which had previously been Sydney Technical College and is now the National Art School – but handed over her class to Ralph Balson, who began the first of his 12 years teaching there. Tony Tuckson considered them his most influential teachers, and they in turn remembered him as their most "sincere" student.²⁴ Both Balson and Crowley contributed work that year to *Contemporary Australian Art*, which opened in June at Auckland Art Gallery, and both artists were central figures in the seminal group exhibition *Abstract*, which opened in October at David Jones Art Gallery in Sydney. At this time Walters caught up with, for instance, copies of *Cahiers d'Art* at the State library and came to know "several Australian artists, including Charles Blackman".²⁵ It would be fascinating to learn whom else Walters befriended in Sydney in 1948. Balson? Crowley? Tuckson? In February 1949 Walters headed back to Wellington, where in November he held his fourth exhibition, this time at the Wellington Public Library. This exhibition, consisting of work mostly done during and after his time in Sydney, was his last for 16 years. For Michael Dunn it either gets a "hostile reception"²⁶ or is "received with indifference".²⁷

In March 1950 Walters steams to London, which he uses as a base for his forays onto the continent, in particular to Paris, over the following ten months. Already familiar with the work of August Herbin from the November 1949 issue of *Art d'Aujourd'hui*, he arrives in Paris at a time when geometric painting is in the ascendant.²⁸ In April 1950 Galerie Denise René holds the group exhibition *Espaces Nouveaux*, which includes the work of Victor Vasarely, and in June she shows Arp

²² Gordon Walters, 'Notes', *Gordon Walters*, Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland, 1983, 34.

²³ *Ibid*, 34.

²⁴ Daniel Thomas, *Tony Tuckson 1921-1973*, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, 1976, 9.

²⁵ 'Chronology', *Gordon Walters*, op. cit., 25.

²⁶ Michael Dunn, 'The Enigma of Gordon Walters' Art', *Art in New Zealand*, March-April 1978, 59.

²⁷ 'Chronology', *Gordon Walters*, op. cit., 25.

²⁸ Iain Buchanan, 'Walters and Auguste Herbin', *Gordon Walters: Order and Intuition*, Walters Publications, Auckland, 1989, 33.

and *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*, presumably the show at which Walters “warmed to [the work of] Sophie Taeuber-Arp, on the whole preferring it to the work of her husband, Hans Arp”.²⁹ In the same month, the 5th Salon des Réalités Nouvelles opened at the Palais des Beaux-Arts. This was the exhibition in which the SRN opened up to artists from around the world, in particular to those from Switzerland, Holland and America, besides the usual French, Germans, Scandinavians, Italians, Belgians and Hungarians. In this single exhibition, Walters could have seen the work of Josef Albers, Ilya Bolotowsky, Etienne Beothy, Max Bill, Marcelle Cahn, Jo Delahaut, Piero Dorazio, Felix del Marle, Natalia Dumitresco, Jean Gorin, Paul Gadegaard, Camille Greaser, Janin, Frantisek Kupka, Gyula Kosice, Richard Paul Lohse, George Morris, Eric Olson, Pevsner, Manlio Rho, Hilla Rebay, Mimmo Rotella, Nicholas Schöffer, and Auguste Herbin, and the Australian Mary Webb.³⁰ 1950 was also the year in Paris in which Jean Dewasne and Edgar Pillet founded their Atelier d’art abstrait in the Rue de la Grande-Chaumière.

Then, in January 1951, Walters returned. Not to Wellington but to Melbourne, and it was there that he completed, for the first time, an abstract painting. In October, he was joined by his friend, the expatriate New Zealander George Johnson, and through most of 1952 the two artists shared a studio in Nicholson Street, Footscray.³¹ Walters spent more than two and a half years in Melbourne, and while little is known of this time it was clearly a productive period for him.³² “The influences I was digesting at the time were those of the artists whose work I had studied in Europe, and who were to have a decisive and lasting effect on work. They were Arp, in his early reliefs and collages, Mondrian, the early Vasarely, Herbin and Capogrossi in particular. On the other hand there was the art of the Pacific, New Zealand, New Guinea (all of it), the Marquesas, the Austral Islands, etc, which I had also studied closely in museums while overseas”.³³ In all Walters was in Australia for more than two and half years before he left in August 1953 for Auckland, where he caught up again with Theo Schoon, the first time the old friends had seen each other in more than 8 years. In Australia he had done his first abstract works and, when “he departed from Melbourne in August 1953, Walters left much of his work behind with the intention of soon returning. Instead, he was to remain in New Zealand from that time onwards, based in Wellington”.³⁴ Walters’ lost Melbourne works remain a tantalising prospect. In 1979 Walters returned to Sydney, where he met Bridget Riley

²⁹ Jenny Harper, ‘Black, White and “Op”’: Links between Gordon Walters, Bridget Riley and Victor Vasarely’, *Gordon Walters: Order and Intuition*, *ibid*, 27.

³⁰ Michael Dunn, ‘The Art of Gordon Walters’, *Gordon Walters*, *op. cit.*, 12. Dunn writes: “In Paris, he saw exhibitions by French non-figurative painters such as Auguste Herbin and Victor Vasarely at the Denise René Gallery”. Neither artist, however, held a one-person exhibition in 1950 in Paris, let alone at Galerie Denise René. Both, however, did have work in the group exhibition *Aspects de l’Art d’aujourd’hui* at René’s gallery in that year, but this was in January before Walters arrived.

³¹ George Johnson, interview with Charles Nodrum, November 2008. Curiously, Johnson remembers Walters coming to Melbourne from Hobart, and that he, Johnson, had preceded Walters in Melbourne. If this is the case, Walters had perhaps spent time in Sydney and then Tasmania before moving to Melbourne.

³² In July Walters made a brief trip to New Zealand to see his parents.

³³ Gordon Walters, ‘Statements’, 15 September 1982, *Gordon Walters*, *op. cit.*, 24.

³⁴ Michael Dunn, ‘The Art of Gordon Walters’, *Gordon Walters*, *op. cit.*, 13.

as she escorted her touring Australian exhibition and made his final trip to that city to view the 1982 Sydney Biennale.

Let us be very clear here: our point in all of this is not merely a matter of asserting that Walters spent time in Australia, as though this is significant in and of itself. Rather, our point is the much stronger one that we cannot properly understand even the *New Zealand* part of Walters' career – his breakthrough into abstraction – without taking account of the time he spent in Australia. And in all kinds of ways, as we have tried to show here, whether it is the experiences of New Zealand artists overseas before they return or, indeed, the influence of New Zealand artists who remain overseas on the art made in New Zealand, we simply cannot restrict New Zealand art to that made there or influenced by the country, as Keith would have it. New Zealand art also takes place *elsewhere*; its cities always contain *other cities*.

Now, Pound is undoubtedly right when he says that New Zealand art today is "post-national". It is to admit that the special relationship Australia and New Zealand once had throughout the 19th and 20th centuries is over. Today, Australia is no longer a privileged destination for New Zealand artists, as the closest larger culture. Whereas once it was the Sydney film industry that drew Len Lye to Sydney, today New Zealand filmmakers work all around the world, and make the world and, indeed, other worlds, in New Zealand. But if we were going to write the history of this situation, of how New Zealand got to be like this, we would start with Australia. It was perhaps in Australia more than any other place that New Zealand art began to move beyond itself. It is only by considering New Zealand's ongoing artistic relationship with a country like Australia in the 20th century that we might understand New Zealand's artistic relationship with the rest of the world in the 21st century.

We might finish our account here by reflecting on the famous story of McCahon in Sydney in 1984. He had not been out of New Zealand for 26 years and, at the height of his artistic fame and doubtless stressed by the events surrounding his inclusion in the Biennale of Sydney, in which his work had pride of place, he fled and went on a drinking spree. He walked the streets alone and disoriented for two days, lost in a place that New Zealand art history does not see and that does not see New Zealand art. By the time of McCahon's alcohol-fuelled wanderings and memory lapses, so incorporated were New Zealand artists in the history of Australian art and so unknown were those New Zealand artists living in Australia by New Zealanders that it had been forgotten that both Walters' and McCahon's old friend Theo Schoon had been in Sydney for years, equally lost. And McCahon himself, walking through the streets of Sydney, was the very embodiment of New Zealand art in Australia: unrecognised, incognito, thought to be just another Australian until he was found and rescued.

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