

RUDOLF GOPAS (1913 - 1983)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the life and New Zealand works of the Lithuanian born artist, Rudolf Gopas (1913 - 1983).

Gopas has been credited with introducing German Expressionism into New Zealand and with being the father of expressionism in modern New Zealand art. At the same time he has been accused of failing to become a New Zealand artist. These claims are examined, when it becomes apparent that while it is questionable that he introduced German Expressionism into the country he did, for a time, paint in a German Expressionist style and can be viewed as the father of modern New Zealand expressionism. This was a brief interlude however, and to characterise him as a German Expressionist painter is inadequate. While he did accommodate to New Zealand, he is shown to have been conscious of the international character of twentieth century art.

In the thesis the nature of German Expressionism is considered and related to the early experience of the artist. His biographical details are presented for a better understanding of his later New Zealand painting. This is followed by a detailed consideration of the New Zealand works, which are studied in relation to his reception for the light this sheds on his art. When this is done it becomes apparent that his works fall into three periods; an early period of adjustment and re-establishment as an artist, when the works were largely naturalistic; a middle one when German Expressionist influences predominated; and a late one when the cosmological works were produced, which is shown to have been his most creative and significant.

Throughout his professional career Gopas was subjected to a variety of changing influences and these are shown to have been assimilated and integrated with his wide ranging interests into a new form of expression.

In the preparation of this thesis, 169 works and three individual volumes of Nature Speaks were examined, nineteen interviews were conducted with collectors, associates and relations, as well as extensive correspondence entered into with various people.

PREFACE

The artist Rudolph Gopas (1913 - 1983) emigrated to New Zealand in 1949. He continued to paint from the time of his arrival until shortly before his death and left a substantial body of work. In this thesis an attempt will be made to present relevant biographical information and to analyse his New Zealand works in order to establish the progress of his development from the earliest portraits and landscapes to the last two major series, Paintings for the Sun and Nature Speaks. Various issues which arise in relation to this will be considered and the many sources and influences of his work will be identified and discussed. His contribution to New Zealand art will be evaluated.

In doing this the traditional view of his place and importance in New Zealand art history as a German Expressionist painter will be questioned and an alternative interpretation will be advanced.

Some writers, particularly Jim and Mary Barr, have claimed that Gopas worked in two distinct manners, one of which was a 'more commercial' mode of little relevance. Other art historians, such as Hamish Keith and Jonathan Mané have suggested that Gopas despised New Zealand society. They have claimed that as an eastern European immigrant he remained an outsider and cannot be fully assimilated into the main-stream of New Zealand art. They maintain that he brought German Expressionism with him from Europe and that he remained thoroughly European in both outlook and in the style of his art.

His principal contribution to New Zealand art history has been seen to be the introduction of German Expressionism to New Zealand painting and through his activities as a teacher at the University of Canterbury, School of Fine Arts. Emphasis has been placed on his influence as a teacher on a subsequent generation of painters, especially Philip Clairmont and Philip Truettum. While he was undoubtedly important in that way, this study is concerned with his original contribution to New Zealand painting through the medium of his own art.

Much of what has been written may have been affected by close association with the artist. It may also, to some extent, have been conditioned by the way the artist, in later years, preferred to see himself and to have others view his work.

But careful consideration of the surviving evidence suggests that this assessment is questionable. Gopas was a complex character, a man of strong obsessions and deep contradictions, whose work defies easy explanation.

Some effort to present an alternative view has already been made, most notably by Michael Dunn, who questioned that Gopas should be credited with the introduction of German Expressionism to New Zealand and further suggested "that the label German Expressionist is not adequate to encompass his art."¹ But much more remains to be done.

An analysis of his works, together with the documented details of his life and the impressions of his family and acquaintances, permits an objective view of Gopas to be formed.

Such an analysis shows that his works fall into several groups. For convenience and clarity but also to reveal a process of adaptation and development, these groups will be studied more or less chronologically. The various groups of works, however, are not completely self-contained. Rather they overlap and merge with one another.

A brief introduction, outlining Gopas's relationship to New Zealand painting and the German Expressionist movement, and setting out matters for consideration, will be followed by the subject's biography. Attention will be drawn to the influence of his life experiences on his artistic development and the nature and extent of his German Expressionist connections will be investigated.

Next, the first group of New Zealand works will be discussed. Little attention has so far been paid to the portraits, landscapes and maritime subjects of the early 1950s, which have, for the most part, been dismissed as 'commercial'. But both that term and Gopas's use of it warrant some consideration since careful examination of these works contributes to an understanding of Gopas and his process of development. Curiously, if he arrived as a fully fledged German Expressionist painter, these early New Zealand works show surprisingly little such influence. However, some of them do reveal new influences which are to be found in his more important later works.

The works which demonstrate the closest affinity to German Expressionism were not painted until some years after his arrival in New Zealand. Most belong to the five years between 1958 and 1963, although some were begun as early as 1955 and others as late as 1972. Representative examples will be selected and their stylistic resemblances to this and other sources will be discussed.

Subsequent chapters will be devoted to a discussion of his later and most significant works which develop cosmic subject matter. It will be contended that Gopas deserves a place in New Zealand art history as the painter of these works, which had their genesis in New Zealand, and not only as a teacher and disseminator of European art styles. In addition the last major series, Paintings for the Sun and Nature Speaks, introduced written words and thereby relate to the work of other contemporary New Zealand painters. His increasingly political commentary foreshadows the work of a younger generation of artists, whose art has become a vehicle for social and political protest.

Gopas may have grown to dislike New Zealand society but there is evidence to suggest that, initially, he made attempts to be accepted by that society. Certainly, he did not, in every sense, remain an outsider. But he is interesting and important as a case study of the effects, of the forced migration of artists resulting from the ideological struggle of the Second World War. As such he can be compared with other European painters who fled abroad.

Exhibition receptions and newspaper reviews help to determine the manner and extent to which Gopas was accepted by contemporary society. The changing reception he received, at various times during his life and more recently, will be discussed. This serves to indicate both his importance for New Zealand art and the need for re-evaluation.

Finally an attempt will be made to draw together the evidence presented in the previous chapters in order to establish an alternative interpretation of the life and work of Rudolf Gopas and his place in New Zealand art history.

There are certain difficulties regarding sources for this study. Works produced before Gopas came to New Zealand are unavailable in any considerable number. Consequently, this thesis will concern itself only with works produced in New Zealand. However, it is these works, of course, which relate most closely to New Zealand painting. The works discussed will be chosen primarily from those in public collections in New Zealand. But a fully documented catalogue of all works consulted in both public and private collections is presented in Volume II.

In tracing his origins and early development there are also difficulties. Since Gopas was Lithuanian, there is a problem of language. Further, growing up during the first half of this century, he lived through a turbulent period of history, which has rendered most of his early records unobtainable. Even the customary official records are unavailable. Nevertheless, it is possible to reconstruct something of his early experiences, which

undoubtedly had a significant bearing on his later development in New Zealand, and this is important for an understanding of Rudolf Gopas and his work.

This thesis does not claim to be a full survey or a catalogue raisonné but rather it brings together a substantial number of known works by Rudolf Gopas which it attempts to interpret in order to assess his contribution to New Zealand painting.

Endnotes to Preface

- 1 M. Dunn, Artis (Auckland), vol. 1, no. 1, June 1971,
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

E. C.	Exhibition Catalogue
K. F.	Katherine Furniss
MS.	Manuscript
N.A.	Not Applicable
n.d.	no date
p	page
TS.	Typescript

References to end notes are in superscript, and references to plates and catalogue numbers are in square brackets, plate number first followed by catalogue number, thus [94,160]. Where only one number is shown in square brackets it is a catalogue number and indicates that no plate is presented.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Prophet, poet, painter, engraver ... [his] unique greatness lies in no single achievement, but in the whole of what he was, which is more than the sum of all that he did.¹

With the addition of astronomer and photographer, what Raine has written of William Blake may also be said of Rudolf Gopas.

He left a substantial body of thoughts and observations, poetry, paintings and prints, while his presence here helped to determine the direction New Zealand painting has taken since the Second World War. Impressionist and post-impressionist elements had been assimilated prior to this time. Subsequently, expressionist, surrealist and abstract influences were introduced and Rudolf Gopas participated in this process.

His work, his personality and his teaching affected both his immediate contemporaries and a subsequent generation of artists. Through regular exhibitions in Otago and Canterbury, he became well known. He participated in many of the Annual Group shows, and also staged several one man shows in other centres. Although his early works were somewhat representational, his painting increasingly became a vehicle for the expression of his own inner thoughts and feelings about life and man's relationship to the universe. He offered an alternative interpretation of the purpose of art.

His personality and outlook, slavic in origin and coloured by his experiences in Central Europe during the war, stood out in sharp contrast to the majority of New Zealanders of British descent. He was cultured and intelligent, often reserved and quiet, yet a man of passionately held beliefs, animated in artistic discussions, vigorous in his enthusiasms, sometimes cutting in his disapproval and possessed of a caustic wit. He was a distinctive, memorable figure in New Zealand society.²

In his teaching he encouraged a lively, experimental approach to painting and emphasised creative intuition in preference to established methods of study; drawing from the cast and academic life classes. He drew from the wealth of art history for examples for his students, introducing them to Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, Paul Cézanne.³

His importance is indicated by his inclusion in major nationwide exhibitions such as the Contemporary New Zealand Art exhibitions organised by the Auckland City Art Gallery and the QEII Arts Council.⁴ He is included by most New Zealand art historians

in their discussions of post-war New Zealand art.⁵ Further recognition has come from a major retrospective exhibition of his work mounted by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in 1982/84.⁶

However, most discussions place Gopas within the context of German Expressionism. His art has been seen as a continuation of this movement, exported to New Zealand. Docking describes him as a German Expressionist-Realist while Keith and Brown refer briefly to Gopas as an artist "with leanings towards German Expressionism."⁷ The retrospective exhibition catalogue also closely associated Gopas with German Expressionism, stating at the outset that he "continued to work from where the Expressionists left off, finding a lifetime of inspiration in this development."⁸

Such labels, in their brevity, seem to miss much of the variety, richness and substance of Gopas's art. Undoubtedly Gopas had much to do with German Expressionism and his contribution to New Zealand art lies, in part, in that direction. But while aspects of his life and work carry many of the hallmarks of German Expressionism, there are obvious and fundamental differences which render the term simplistic and in some ways inappropriate. In order to perceive something of his subtlety and originality, more detailed study is necessary.

This requires an understanding of 'Expressionism' in general, and of the German Expressionist movement in particular. Gopas's absorption of the principal features of German Expressionism must be considered before his relation to the movement can be established.

'Expressionism' is often used in a general way as an adjective for any painting in which representational and formal aspects have been manipulated for the expression of emotion. But recent discussions of German Expressionism define the movement in more restricted geographic and stylistic terms. It is limited to the work of a generation of artists painting in Germany around the time of the First World War. It is seen as developing into a coherent, identifiable style only after 1905 and to have largely dispersed after 1915.⁹

Discussions of the movement centre on the formation of two groups; Die Brücke in Dresden in 1905 and Der Blaue Reiter in Munich in 1911, together with a number of associated artists who worked independently but maintained contact with one or other of these groups. Of the two groups, Die Brücke remained generally "less well known outside Germany than ... Der Blaue Reiter."¹⁰

Members of Die Brücke, Max Pechstein, Erich Heckel, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, made painting excursions north, to Moritzburg, Dangast and Nidden on the Baltic Coast, coming close to the village of Gopas's birth.¹¹ But such trips were made in the first two decades of the twentieth century, before Gopas could have met them. He was not born until 1913, the year in which both groups were dissolved.

Clearly Rudolf Gopas was not a member of either of these two groups which gave the term 'German Expressionism' its meaning.

Nor does it seem likely that he could have been closely associated with any of the members of these two groups in later years. The circumstances that had brought the painters together changed almost as soon as they arose and those involved were soon scattered.

Kirchner retired to Switzerland in 1917 to receive psychiatric treatment and committed suicide in 1938. Emile Nolde travelled abroad before settling in the small town of Seebull, North Germany, in 1926, to lead a secluded life. Those of Die Brücke who remained in Berlin after 1913 tended to develop in different directions. Pechstein's work became more decorative, while after 1920 Otto Mueller turned to painting gipsy subjects.¹² Even if Gopas had met these painters at this stage, their work had already departed from pure German Expressionism.

Members of Der Blaue Reiter were similarly dispersed. August Macke and Franz Marc were killed at the front, Wassily Kandinsky left for Russia at the outbreak of the First World War and in 1921 he and Paul Klee joined the Bauhaus in Weimar.¹³

It is possible that Gopas may have seen some German Expressionist painting before the Second World War. Die Brücke works were exhibited in dealer galleries such as the Arnold Gallery and the Gurlitt Gallery and promoted by such art dealers as Ludwig Schames. Heckel and Kirchner had received a commission to decorate a chapel at Cologne in 1912.¹⁴ The medium of wood block printing was popular with the German Expressionists, particularly with members of Die Brücke. Such works, with their more numerous productions and consequently wider circulation, may still have been available in the 1930s and 1940s when Gopas was travelling through Europe.

Nevertheless it seems unlikely that Gopas would have been truly familiar with their work. Their paintings were generally rejected by the established academies and even the new secession.¹⁵ Although Der Blaue Reiter were supported by such institutions as the Folkwang Museum, they tended not to be patronised by the bourgeoisie.¹⁶ The German Expressionists gained exposure primarily by way of their participation in collective exhibitions and the last of these, the Berlin Salon d'Automne,

closed in 1913.¹⁷

A more probable means by which Gopas may have known of the German Expressionists prior to 1950 is by way of publications and writings, both their own and those of their protagonists and critics.

The Brucke manifesto, cut in wood and printed by Kirchner in 1905, proclaimed the group's ideals and aims. Der Blaue Reiter almanac, a more substantial production which included articles by Kandinsky, Marc, Macke and Arnold Schonberg, had a first edition of 12,000 and a second edition was planned in 1913.¹⁸ There were also individual statements. Kandinsky published his personal but associated theory of aesthetics in 1912 under the title of Concerning the Spiritual in Art, and Kirchner his controversial Chronik K G Brucke 1913 in 1916.

In addition, several periodicals of the day included German Expressionist material, possibly the most important being Der Sturm. There were various monographs on most of the movement's major painters written before the war and a surprising number of thematic studies such as Bahr's Expressionismus of 1918, Fechter's Der Expressionismus of 1920 and Edschmid's Uber den Expressionismus in der Literatur und die neue Malerei of 1921.¹⁹

The German Expressionists formed "Germany's first modern movement".²⁰ Their two groups encompassed, either directly or by association, many of Central Europe's most important painters. In Germany they extended over the three principal cities; Dresden, Munich and then Berlin. They were well publicised both within and outside Germany by way of several substantial exhibitions and numerous publications. Yet it cannot be assumed with certainty that Gopas was familiar with the movement prior to his arrival in New Zealand.

The rise of Nazism after 1930 greatly affected the availability of German Expressionist art. Proscription restricted every avant-garde painter in Germany. The Nazis recognised that concepts of experimentation and self-expression fostered freedom of thought and action and they took systematic steps for their extermination.

Artists were dismissed from teaching posts and other official positions, the introduction of the Ausstellungsverbot forbade certain artists from exhibiting, while the Malverbot could be enforced to prevent them painting at all.²¹

During the 1930s over 16,500 works were expropriated from public Museums and Galleries. Works by Klee and Lyonel Feininger, for example, were removed from

exhibition. Other artists such as Kandinsky and Kurt Schwitters were forced to leave Germany. Many departed for France or the United States.²² Not only the painters and their works came under attack, associated writings and publications were similarly banned and destroyed. Myer points out that, of the twenty-one more important Expressionist periodicals, none survived in print after 1937.²³

It does not, therefore, seem possible to determine with certainty whether or not Gopas learned much of the movement during his war years in Europe or prior to that time. Rather than attempting to associate Gopas with the German Expressionists directly, it seems more profitable to identify the characteristics of the movement, both stylistic and sociological, which may have influenced him.

Perhaps the most striking features of German Expressionist painting are the use of colour, form and subject-matter. Their use was affected by the painter's primary concern to communicate the inner truth of the feelings and emotions he experienced in the contemporary world. Hamilton identifies a deepening of psychic stress caused by the anxiety of city living in which the individual is suppressed in favour of the mass, the pace of life is agitated and accelerated, sexuality, though open, is tormented and atheism and nihilism leave the world empty and meaningless. He comments "the artistic response to these spiritual events is the often frantic search for self-expression."²⁴

Painting was an outpouring of personal experience, both ecstatic and painful, in an almost trance-like, intuitive state in which the subject "becomes the pretext for the psychological rather than descriptive statement of particular experience".²⁵ The German Expressionists were concerned, not with representation, in which the painting becomes a reproduction of the subject, but rather, with creating, in paint, the perceived emotions which the subject aroused.

These characteristics will be sought for in Gopas's post-war New Zealand paintings. They will help to establish the extent to which Gopas was influenced by the German Expressionists and which of his works are in the German Expressionist manner.

There are, however, certain difficulties in doing this.

Some of the stylistic features of German Expressionism were also evident in previous movements such as Jugendstil and Romanticism. The painters of both Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter drew from other artists especially Van Gogh and Gauguin, Cézanne and Matisse. They assimilated impulses from the primitive cultures and art forms of Africa and the Pacific and they admired peasant and naive art.²⁶ When possible, they visited touring exhibitions but also consulted illustrated magazines such as The

Studio to keep in touch with contemporary developments.²⁷ Almost all of them were affected by contemporary developments in psychology and philosophy. They understood Freudian theories and read Nietzsche.²⁸

Many of the elements evident in the German Expressionist movement can be seen in works by Rudolf Gopas but they are combined with influences from a variety of other sources and it is not always easy to differentiate between them. Further, many of his works reveal little or no German Expressionism and to describe his art as such is to place too great a restriction on it.

He was familiar with his European cultural heritage and drew from it as he chose. He studied widely from European art and literature and was au fait with Leonardo da Vinci, William Shakespeare and William Blake.²⁹ He was attracted to exotic cultures including Indian art.³⁰ He was also interested in local artists, Frances Hodgkins and Colin McCahon.³¹

He was influenced by contemporary developments in several fields, not only in the fine arts but also in philosophy, psychology and science and enjoyed theological discussion.³² Gopas seems to have been aware of surrealist theories of automatism and the subconscious and probably knew something of the writings of Freud and Jung.³³

The destruction of the idea of absolute truth, which undermines traditional metaphysical, religious and moral explanations about the purpose and meaning of life, anticipated by Nietzsche, led to the increasingly nihilistic theories of the twentieth century. Gopas read Nietzsche and was deeply affected by such concepts, which brought about the realization that " 'God is dead', and with him the whole metaphysical meaning of man, world and life itself".³⁴

The acceptance that 'God is dead' and the search for an alternative explanation resulted in the emergence of existentialism.³⁵ Sartre defined existentialism as existence preceding essence, or the existence of man first who then defines his purpose rather than being created with a predetermined purpose.³⁶ As a self-confessed agnostic, Gopas would have been forced to consider such matters.³⁷

He was disturbed by scientific and technological advances, particularly in relation to U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. space programmes and nuclear armament, and overt expressions of concern began to appear in his work.³⁸ Similar expressions are to be found in the work of young New Zealand painters today.

Art in the twentieth century reflects all of these concerns and is characterised by

diversification, fragmentation and interaction. There is a breakdown of traditional artistic barriers. Concepts and assumptions about art, held since the Renaissance, are challenged and altered. Numerous stylistic variations occur and many movements and groups emerge. These cross national frontiers and intermingle with different cultures throughout the world. One art form becomes interfused with another, German Expressionism takes something from Futurism, Max Ernst works with Kandinsky in Germany and also with Marcel Duchamp in America. Colour and dance and music become one. Artists in several countries search for a national identity so that even this becomes an international trend.

New Zealand, although geographically isolated and culturally immature, has not remained immune from these developments.³⁹ The characteristics of modern art have become increasingly evident in New Zealand painting, especially since the Second World War. Gopas played a significant role in their introduction. His relationship to and absorption of international trends invites close study.

Rudolf Gopas was a complex personality and a fascinating and compelling artist, who produced a widely varied oeuvre. He assimilated a variety of influences but also made an original contribution through the medium of his art. He had an ability to respond to and reflect the nature of the society in which he found himself. His position within the development of New Zealand art merits greater consideration than it has so far received.

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- 4 Works by Gopas were included in the following national exhibitions: Contemporary New Zealand Painting, 1960, 1961, 1963, 1965 Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Sculpture, 1962. Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Ceramics to Japan, India and Malaysia, 1964-65. Contemporary Painting in New Zealand, 1965. New Zealand Art of the 1960s, 1970.
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CHAPTER TWO

ADVERSITY

The Life of Rudolf Gopas

An artist's work is inevitably affected by his origins and background, and by his subsequent experiences. This is especially true of Rudolf Gopas, who was born and grew up at a time and place of great political turmoil and was eventually forced to emigrate to a distant country. Consequently, while the details of his early life have been rendered obscure, it is important to piece together the fragments that remain to determine something of his early influences and so form a better understanding of his mature works.

Rudolph Gopas was born in Lithuania on 13 December, 1913, the elder of two children of Pranas Gopas and Marte Plauschin.¹ His father was a machinery merchant in the small town of Silute.² In 1913 Silute was little more than a rural village, with a small population, most of whom eked out a modest living from farming or by fishing off the Baltic coast. In this community it is probable that the Gopas family belonged to the middle class and were of comfortable financial means.³

The middle class in Lithuania had become increasingly influential after the abolition of serfdom in 1861. It continued to prosper during the years that Gopas lived there, despite frequent disorders. Following the German occupation of 1915 - 1918 bourgeoisie governments maintained a precarious independence, as Russia and Poland continued to struggle for control of the region, until the Second World War and renewed German occupation. Subsequently the state became firmly a part of the U.S.S.R..⁴ Until the Second World War, although politically unstable as a country due to foreign interference, the business sector was advantaged by what was the beginning of growth in industrial and agricultural production.⁵ It seems probable, therefore, that the Gopas family had the means to support their son in his endeavour to become an artist, although such a career would inevitably have been seen as a precarious one.

Gopas was brought up in a cultured household and it seems likely that his parents would have encouraged his artistic interests from an early age. Pranas Gopas had been interested in poetry as a youth and his second wife enjoyed music and poetry. Gopas's own mother died before he reached his teens and little is known about her.⁶

The countryside in which he spent his childhood was sympathetic to an artistic temperament. Silute is situated on the Sysa, a right tributary of the Nemunas River, which runs to the eastern coast of the Baltic sea. The lands around Silute are mostly lowlying plains of swamp or meadow and gently sloping hills.⁷ The maritime climate is cool and mild.⁸

As a boy Gopas must have found many things of interest in the pastoral landscape of river and meadow-land. He would have grown accustomed to the activities of the merchants and fishermen at work on the river and, only a few kilometres away, on the Baltic coast. Many years later, in New Zealand, he was to recall "I was born among fishing boats. The fishing harbours, the fishermen have always been a favourite scene."⁹ Unlike the sons of peasant farmers or fishermen, Gopas was largely free from daily chores and able to spend his time improving his skills sketching and drawing his surroundings. In a biographical statement made for the Auckland City Art Gallery, Gopas wrote that his early work was done mainly around "Lithuania, particularly the Baltic Coast".¹⁰ The need to spend time roaming the countryside in search of subjects remained with him and, in later years, he was to make many such excursions in New Zealand.

Gopas spent much time painting and drawing, especially from his fourteenth year onwards. His paintings of the locality earned him a modest reputation at an early age and he recalled a "first exhibition - portraits and landscapes at 16."¹¹

While Silute did not attract foreign artists, several Die Brücke painters had travelled to the Baltic coast as far northeast as Nidden, some eighty kilometres distant, on summer sketching trips.¹² Gopas later talked of these painters, who, he said, had shown their works in the hotel lounges.¹³ However, such trips occurred during the first and second decades of the twentieth century while Gopas was very young and unlikely to have met the artists. A group, including Lithuanian painters, continued painting there in the German Expressionist spirit during the 1920s but it remains only a possibility that Gopas visited them. Nidden was isolated and inaccessible to modern transport and Gopas was only in his early teens at this time.¹⁴

In these years he also developed a passion for astronomy, which for a time may have rivalled his commitment to art and which was eventually integrated into it.¹⁵

But by the time he turned twenty, Gopas had left Silute for Kaunas, over one hundred and fifty kilometres away. There he joined the Kaunas School of Art where, J. and M. Barr record, he entered the third year of a five year course in 1933. However they also state that he graduated with honours in 1938, which implies a five or six year

period of study.¹⁶ Unfortunately, little is known about Gopas's years at the school. The Kaunas School of Art became the Kaunas Institute of Applied and Decorative Arts and was amalgamated, in 1951, with the Vilnius Art Institute, which has since become the State Art Institute of the Lithuanian S.S.R. in Vilnius. Those records which may survive are unobtainable.¹⁷

It seems that the syllabus of the school was generally academic in approach, emphasising draughtsmanship and representational subject-matter. A photograph of the life class, with Jonas Sileika, the drawing instructor, and a group of students taken in 1933, shows descriptive studies of anatomical detail made from an Apollonian nude male model in a classical pose.¹⁸

But more modern impulses were introduced by several individual teachers and students. Gopas may have been taught by such artists as Justinas Vienozinskis, Petras Kalpokas, Jonas Sileika, Antanas Zmuidzinavicius, Jonas Mackevicius, Mstislavas Dobuzinskis and Adomas Galdikas, all of whom taught at the school during the years that Gopas was in attendance.¹⁹

Zmuidzinavicius painted landscapes in an impressionist manner while Vienozinskis's works were more post-impressionistic, having been strongly influenced by the work of Paul Cézanne. Mackevicius's work exemplified Realism, and Dobujinsky's graphic works and theatre sets combined folk art with fantasy in an illustrative style. German Expressionist impulses were visible in the turbulent, expressive works of Galdikas.²⁰ In The Mill, (N.D.), the strokes of the brush have been left raw and bold, giving the landscape and sky a sense of power fraught with tension and movement. Woman with Pestle, (N.D.), is also rendered with strong, rapid brushstrokes in dark sombre moody hues. The dark outlining of form, which can be identified in Gopas's works of the late 1950s and 1960s, can be seen in Galdikas's Woman from the Coastal Region of Lithuania, (N.D.).

Galdikas also worked in graphic media. In the 1930s and 1940s Lithuania experienced a resurgence in popularity of printed imagery, in part as a result of economic and cultural requirements.²¹ Both Galdikas and Dobuzinskis, together with a host of other print makers, produced work ranging from commercial posters advertising exhibitions through cubist lithographic prints, such as Steponavicius's Street Musicians of Paris, 1931, to expressionist woodcuts, such as Petravicius's Self-Portrait, 1938, which recalls Ernst Kirchner's Head of Henry van de Velde, 1917. Such imagery may well have been an early influence in Gopas's later use and adaptation of printing techniques.

In Russia under the Communists, Social Realism became the dominant aesthetic.²² In their anxiety to preserve their independence, it was natural for Lithuanian artists to look to German and French styles which asserted the freedom of the human spirit and the exercise of imagination unrestricted by dogmas and ideologies.

Lithuania, under the Republic of the 1920s and 1930s, underwent an artistic resurgence, with the promotion of education and the development of a national intelligentsia. In this environment "The Kaunas Art School, founded in 1922, had a formative influence on art and served as a pedagogical centre".²³ Many of Lithuania's future artists, such as Marija Rackauskaite-Cvirkiene and Algirdas Petrusis, were students there in the 1930s.²⁴

Undoubtedly Gopas would have come in contact with contemporary artistic trends through the works of his teachers and fellow students. The presence of avant-garde artists working in Kaunas and other nearby cities provided a further opportunity for learning of modern developments. Kaunas was host to a number of young Lithuanian artists whose work showed progressive tendencies. Gopas was living and working among the artists who were to become some of Lithuania's greatest painters of the twentieth century.²⁵

XXa. Lietuviu Dailes Istorija notes the influx of expressionistic tendencies "with colour and expressiveness of brushstroke becoming more predominant in painting".²⁶ The expressive tendencies evident in Gopas's New Zealand paintings may well have come from this source rather than directly from the German Expressionists themselves. Expressionistic painting, in which the emotional, subjective responses of the artist become the content of the work, takes many forms and Gopas was susceptible to several of them in addition to the German-based movement.

A further significant presence in Lithuania was the work of Mikalojus Konstantinas Ciurlionis. Most importantly, works by Ciurlionis had been available for study in a temporary building since 1925, when the M. K. Ciurlionis Gallery was first founded.²⁷ Ciurlionis was both a composer and a painter, who studied music at Leipzig and Warsaw before turning to painting "to give full expression to his transcendental mysticism".²⁸ In his work, which he saw as mystical abstractions expressing cosmic forces, he sought to combine painting and music. "Musical tempi were represented by flowing curves or shorter zigzags, pitch by nuances of colour and melody by line."²⁹ His work anticipated that of other major early twentieth century painters, such as Kandinsky, who also sought to combine the different forms of expression of music and art, in the belief that all art has an underlying unity.

His "daring transformations of nature and ... cosmic visions" were a formative influence on the young Gopas.³⁰ Many years later he was to smile in appreciation at the mention of that artist's name.³¹ The influence of Ciurlionis remained with Gopas long after his arrival in New Zealand, and he is a source, at least in part, for the cosmic works of Gopas's last and most significant period.

The Union of Independent Artists, the Lithuanian Art Society and the Ars group were established during the early 1930s and their exhibitions provided opportunities for Gopas to study works by many masters.³² Major art exhibitions in Kaunas at this time included the First and the Second Ars Exhibitions of 1932 and 1934. These showed works with a variety of western European influences by such painters as A. Samuolis, and A. Gudaitis.³³ Examples of their works include the Gauguinesque Woman in Yellow 1933 and Self Portrait, 1926, in the manner of Die Brucke, by Samuolis, and Fishermen's Boats, 1937, and The New Settlers, 1933, by Gudaitis, which recall the work of Der Blaue Reiter.

In addition, the Great Museum of Culture was instrumental in "widening international art contacts: the art of Belgium, Latvia, Estonia, Italy, Hungary, France, the USSR was exhibited."³⁴ There were also works in other collections, providing opportunity for Gopas to become familiar with some of the developments in modern art made by such artists as Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Piet Mondrian and Henri Matisse. While he may not have seen original works by all of these masters, there were works in post impressionist, cubist, constructivist and fauvist styles.³⁵ In addition, works by such painters as Picasso, were made available through visiting exhibitions. An International Paris Exposition was held in 1937, while in 1939 Kaunas was host to the 'Exhibition of French Modern Art'.³⁶

During his time in Kaunas, Gopas made "working and study-journeys to various Middle European countries".³⁷ He was "able to travel and visit Germany, Austria and Greece."³⁸ This may have afforded an opportunity to see works by modern masters of the later nineteenth century, which were, by that time, beginning to enter public collections. While, in Germany after 1930, proscription by the Nazis resulted in the removal of much modern art so that most avant-garde art would probably have been unavailable, Gopas may still have been able to see a variety of modern styles in other countries.

Gopas may have come into contact with German Expressionism at this time, but he would also have been aware of many other movements. It would seem that, rather than being subjected to the influence of only a single, localized art movement, as J. and M. Barr imply, Gopas was exposed to many different styles and that he brought

something of them, together with something of German Expressionism, with him when he migrated to New Zealand.

His painting then should not simply be related to a single artistic movement but be examined for a variety of styles and influences which he absorbed, assimilated and modified to his own personal ends.

Gopas has much in common with German Expressionism, particularly in terms of the attitudes and assumptions about art that those painters demonstrated, but in some ways these attitudes and assumptions are common to a whole aspect of twentieth century painting.

The years spent at art school during the 1930s were those most conducive to artistic study and development, although at some stage during that time, he served two years compulsory national service.³⁹ The following ten years were a struggle for survival in a harsh environment which restricted the practice of his art. During the war he was forced to find employment as a draughtsman for the Department of Agriculture.⁴⁰ This was followed by displacement as a refugee to Austria until he was admitted to New Zealand in 1949.⁴¹

During August 1942, in Ventspilis, Latvia, Gopas married Natasha Seeberg, a Latvian woman he had met, perhaps, through their mutual interest in the arts.⁴² His daughter, Sylvia, recalls that

My mother...had recognised his talent even before they married and their understanding of art was shared and remained a great bond ... throughout the latter years.⁴³

Natasha was a lively, sociable woman, who enjoyed the arts and entertainment. Sylvia, their only child, was born on 11 May 1944.⁴⁴ It is interesting to speculate whether or not, in later years, Gopas felt this marriage and family had adversely affected his artistic career. Subsequently, he was to advise his students against marriage. John Coley recalled how Gopas had been doubtful that marriage would allow Coley to continue with his painting.⁴⁵

Gopas and his family remained in Lithuania during the war, despite the invading German troops who swept across the country towards Russia. But the end of the war brought Russian occupation and with it the systematic deportation of thousands of Lithuanians. Russian troops raided houses at any time of day or night to take away any persons they suspected of holding anti-Communist views. They took students and parents alike.⁴⁶ Although the thought of leaving their homeland to trek across war-torn

Europe must have been terrifying, it was worse to remain.

Late in 1944 Gopas, with his young family and mother-in-law, Marte Seeberg, left Lithuania.⁴⁷ Their journey took them through Germany, where he witnessed apocalyptic destruction. Tom Taylor commented "imagine the effect of a night in Dresden during the atrocity. It is probably the most awful and impressive experience that an artist could suffer. I am sure it changed Rudi."⁴⁸ However, it seems that he was not in Dresden at the time of the horrific British night raid, having "travelled on ahead to Austria".⁴⁹ There he and his family found shelter, during the immediate post-war years, in the small mountain village of Ehrwald in the Austrian Tirol.⁵⁰

They lived there as refugees with an old woman who was prepared to share her home with them. They were very poor.

Food was of course strictly rationed and my grandmother and I would climb the hills and pick mushrooms which would be cooked and disguised as meat - liver or such like and Papa would never notice the difference!⁵¹

Sylvia also recalls how her mother would collect the ends of cigarettes to gather enough tobacco to fill Gopas's pipe.⁵²

Gopas earned what little money he could by selling sketches and paintings of landscapes and an occasional portrait. Although few works from this period are available for study, those that survive suggest that he was working in a technically proficient but rather academic style, producing naturalistic works which were attractive and competent but showed little sign of his experimental potential as a painter.⁵³

It may have been during his sojourn in Austria that Gopas was attracted to Austrian art. Both Tony Geddes and Tom Taylor recall Gopas mentioning an Austrian sculptor, whom he admired.⁵⁴ Jonathan Mané remembers "a drawing by the Austrian sculptor, Anton Hanak I think it was, which Gopas owned", although he can have had no contact with that sculptor, who died in 1934.⁵⁵ He also had an admiration, in later years, for Oskar Kokoschka, whose similarly disrupted life may have struck a sympathetic chord.⁵⁶ Kokoschka's landscapes in "an Expressionist manner" were a possible influence on Gopas's boat and harbour scenes of the later 1950s and early 1960s.⁵⁷

Yet Ehrwald was little more than a group of houses, with few cultural pretensions. There was little there to inspire or strongly influence Gopas. He found a few friends, however, in particular a painter called Wolfgang Schennach, with whom he made painting trips into the countryside, sketching the environment as he had done as a

child.⁵⁸ Sylvia recalled

My earliest recollections [of Gopas]...when he was often away for long periods of time on painting excursions, were of a tall, handsome somewhat remote figure with the inevitable pipe in his mouth. He appeared to be always rather preoccupied.⁵⁹

Gopas felt "My involvement with painting begins in New Zealand".⁶⁰ But the nature of that involvement was deeply affected by his experiences prior to his arrival here.

Gopas and his wife found passage from Trieste to New Zealand on an Irish boat, the 'Dundalk-bay', which brought New Zealand Government-assisted immigrants from various parts of central and eastern Europe.⁶¹ They brought with them their young child Sylvia and his wife's mother, Marte Seeberg. Many families were broken up during the war but Gopas was fortunate to arrive safely in New Zealand with his family intact.

Nevertheless, conditions during the journey were far from salubrious, with men and women segregated and facilities only barely adequate. There was space for only a minimum of luggage and Gopas was unable to bring more than a sketchbook with him. He was able to do some sketching while at sea but years of work in the form of sketches and paintings, which are often of vital importance to the artist for future reference, were left behind in various parts of Europe.⁶²

The few works which remain from the period before his arrival in New Zealand demonstrate that he had developed a professional level of proficiency in representational drawing. A portrait of Natasha asleep, dated 1945,[1,1], shows his competent handling of tonal areas and a sympathetic treatment of the gentle, relaxed face. But there is little to indicate the extent of his abilities as a painter or the range of artistic influences he may have absorbed by this date.

The Gopas family arrived in New Zealand at the Wellington wharf on 27 June, 1949, after a six month sea voyage and were provided with temporary accommodation at the Pahiatua refugee camp. Surviving administrative records demonstrate the attempt made by officials to acclimatise the new immigrants to the strange and very different environment of New Zealand. They show that language ability, skills, age and health of the adult immigrants were assessed and taken into account in placing them in employment and housing. Those with language difficulties received tuition and family groups were kept together.⁶³

Gopas had already demonstrated his adaptability in Lithuania when, during the

war, he had put his art training to use in the draughtsman's office of the Agricultural Department. In New Zealand, he was found employment in Dunedin with the firm of Coull, Somerville and Wilkie, where he was involved in colour separation for printing.⁶⁴

The tedious and repetitive processes in the photo-lithographic section of the printing department of the firm were a long way from the artistic aspirations of the student who had entered art school in Kaunas, but it was there perhaps, that he developed an interest in multiple printing processes. In addition, the relative security of a regular income provided the means for Gopas to return to painting.

Gopas remained in Dunedin for three years. He worked solidly, producing a large number of works, both in a descriptive manner, on commission or for sale, and in a more experimental style.

In post-war New Zealand, public attitudes were extremely antagonistic toward the Germans and ignorance made little distinction between the Nazis and eastern Europeans generally. Gopas's accent was always noticeable and at this time he may easily have been mistaken for a German. A fellow worker recalled thinking, when Gopas joined the printing firm, "A bloody German, whatever next".⁶⁵ It must have been difficult to adjust to living in such a hostile environment.

However, during the months aboard ship and in the transit camp the Gopas family had become acquainted with other displaced persons from eastern Europe, who had had similar experiences. They had arrived in a strange country but they were not completely alone. There was little artistic life in Dunedin at that time but they were with a group of educated immigrants who shared a common cultural background, which helped to ease the transition to a new environment. Natasha had a bright, vivacious personality while Rudolf had a gentle, quiet nature and they made friends easily. Natasha enjoyed socializing and they were a familiar couple at parties.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty for Gopas arose from a gap in artistic understanding between himself and the New Zealand public. A fellow immigrant, Mrs Spencer, believes that in Dunedin Gopas suffered from a lack of the recognition and status that painters received in Europe.⁶⁶ There was also a real cultural gap between the east European art of Gopas and the British tradition current in New Zealand; between expressive and literary approaches to art. Gopas "despised English art and [thought] N.Z.'s contribution was contemptible".⁶⁷ He claimed he "only came here because the next boat out of Trieste was coming here."⁶⁸

In 1950 the majority of New Zealand painters in the art societies were amateurs

rather than professionals; participating in the annual exhibitions as a polite activity rather than as part of their life's work. They were slow to absorb modern artistic developments themselves and to recognise them in others. Little had changed in New Zealand painting since the 1930s. They were primarily concerned with landscape painting which they felt should "express the feeling engendered by a subject that is a monopolistically New Zealand one".⁶⁹

Nevertheless, Gopas had established something of a reputation among his fellow immigrants through his activities as a painter on board the 'Dundalk-bay' and, according to Michael Trumic, Gopas was soon recognised as a "professional artist" in Dunedin.⁷⁰ He produced saleable landscapes and views of Dunedin and the surrounding beaches and hills and soon gained a reputation as "the fashionable portrait painter of the district".⁷¹ But there were few who could appreciate those of his works which moved away from the purely representational.

At this time he lived in a modest house at 41 Scarba Street.⁷² There was little room and he could not afford a studio. However, he was able to journey into the central Otago region, continuing to make those sketching trips which had remained important to him since his youth. Accompanied by Frank Gross, a fellow East-European artist, he would return with many drawings in charcoal, crayon and pencil, and with sketches in gouache and watercolour of the poplar trees and river banks near Lawrence or of the Clutha river and the rugged, barren hills around Alexandra.⁷³

He exhibited a selection of his paintings, some arising from these expeditions, in a one-man show at the Dunedin Public Library in February 1951.⁷⁴ The exhibition is remembered by Dr B. Iggo who recalls "going to Rudi Gopas's first exhibition in Dunedin. I bought a landscape of Central Otago....[from] the exhibition" while A. McIntyre bought

a picture painted by him of fishing boats, I think, a Baltic port. This was bought from an exhibition held in the library in Moray Place.⁷⁵

This was probably Boats at the Baltic Sea. Other works included Rattray Street, Deserted Goldmine, Port Chalmers and Fisherman, which suggest that Gopas was painting both remembered subjects from his homeland and scenes from Otago.⁷⁶ Although this was probably his first exhibition in New Zealand, he was already selling his work.

He also exhibited with the Otago Art Society, of which he became a member in 1950.⁷⁷ He and a number of other dedicated artists formed The Independent Group in the following year, in response to the The Group in Christchurch. They, like their Christchurch counterparts, wished to express a serious commitment to painting and a

Christchurch counterparts, wished to express a serious commitment to painting and a more modern approach to art.⁷⁸

While Gopas seemed affable enough to his acquaintances at this time, already his complex personality proved difficult to live with and prevented him from settling, foreshadowing more serious trouble to come. After only four years in New Zealand he became estranged from his wife and stayed for a time with Michael Trumic before moving to Christchurch in 1953, leaving Natasha and Sylvia in Dunedin.⁷⁹

Again he relied on his artistic skills to find employment, as he had done in Lithuania during the war and in Dunedin during his first years in New Zealand. He found employment in a photographic firm.⁸⁰ He had used a camera in Austria, where Sylvia recalls her father photographing her, and had further developed his photographic skills at Coull, Somerville and Wilkie, where he had been employed to photograph each stage of the reconstruction of the Wax Works after fire had destroyed the original building in 1952. He displayed obvious competency and skill with photographic equipment.⁸¹

Gopas found Christchurch more conducive to artistic activity and, for a number of years, he was able to settle there and to develop his art.

On 25 November, 1958 he married Airini Grennell, a prominent radio announcer of the 1940s and 1950s, whom he had met in Dunedin in 1952 or 1953.⁸² They lived firstly in Cambridge Terrace and later moved to Park Terrace and Gopas was able to establish a studio.⁸³

While he despised Anglo-Saxon culture, Gopas admired Airini's Maori ancestry, for he had a Gauguinesque fascination for indigenous pacific cultures.⁸⁴ Gopas was preoccupied with the work of Paul Gauguin at this time and Michael Trumic recalls that he had reproductions of several of Gauguin's paintings.⁸⁵ This was one of his many enthusiasms and at various times he was attracted to van Gogh, Cézanne and Kandinsky as well as Gauguin. He had an interest in Indian art, owning an illustrated publication on that topic and Tom Taylor remembers seeing "texts on Munch, Rouault, Kandinsky, Braque, Kollwitz in his studio."⁸⁶ Other acquaintances recall his passion for Nolde and Kokoschka, Beckmann and Klee.⁸⁷

On 1 February 1959, he was appointed lecturer in painting at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts and for over fifteen years he experienced what was at times a rich and fruitful relationship with his students.⁸⁸

His intense personality made a strong impression, favourable or otherwise, on students and teachers, and those whom he taught remember him vividly.⁸⁹ Many students found his powerful painting a refreshing alternative to the prevailing classical and realist modes. Philip Clairmont and Philip Truttum but also a host of others including Gavin and Vivian Bishop, Tony Fomison, John Coley and Barry Cleavin, were to form expressionist rather than classical manners of painting. Whether they absorbed similar stylistic features such as Fomison's heavy outlined figures in sombre hues and Truttum's thick impasto surfaces, or whether they came to appreciate alternative influences through his example, such as Clairmont's connections with Bechmann, or whether he helped them to greater freedom of thinking and painting, Gopas's influence was widespread and profound.

His insistence on the validity of personal expression at the expense of representational likeness became an important element of painting in Christchurch at this time. Hamish Keith goes so far as to suggest that there are two distinguishable 'schools' evident in New Zealand painting; a Northern 'hard-edge' one and a Southern 'expressionial' one. If that is true then Gopas played a major role in bringing it about.⁹⁰

However, his relationships with others were not always happy. His dedication to art made him a hard taskmaster while his own traumas may have caused him to shelter behind a hard shell of seeming indifference to the feelings of others. Although some students thought him challenging, others, especially female students, found him imperious; at once demanding and uncaring.⁹¹ This was an impression probably reinforced by different cultural backgrounds.

Further, the necessity to maintain regular employment in order to support himself financially was a continual drain on the time and energy he could spend on his own work. Nevertheless, in Christchurch, Gopas began exhibiting his works more regularly and in greater numbers. He exhibited with the Canterbury Society of Arts from 1951 becoming an artist member in 1954, and became a member of The Group in 1953.⁹² The works exhibited over the following years reveal his gradual move away from representational and descriptive subject-matter, through a period of close affinity with the work of various German Expressionists, to the later works which seem to form an original contribution to painting and are his principal achievement.

The period of his employment with the Canterbury School of Art was arguably the most significant for his development as an artist. While the years spent in Europe were undoubtedly crucial to the development of his personality and for the range of influences he was able to absorb, it was the Christchurch years which provided the stable environment necessary for him to produce some of his best work. He was able to recover

from the shock of war and the upheavals it had caused in his life. Although hampered by a time-consuming job, he was able to assimilate the influences accumulated before 1949. It was during these years that he developed an original statement of his own artistic and philosophical beliefs.

But this climax of achievement was accompanied by a continuing decline in his personal relationships. In 1976, he and his second wife became separated as Gopas felt he needed time alone.⁹³ The following year, "hurt by his treatment by the University and his 'wrongful dismissal' as he saw it", he resigned from the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts.⁹⁴ He also became increasingly bitter at what he felt was a lack of understanding of his art.

In 1977 he revisited Ehrwald, Austria, where he had been given assistance during the immediate post-war years. He felt that there he would receive a more sympathetic reception and appreciation of his art. He took with him perhaps the most significant series of paintings he had produced and gifted them to the town that had sheltered him and his family after the war, since he felt they had been unappreciated in New Zealand.⁹⁵ He intended to remain there for the rest of his life but was soon further disillusioned and, after only a few months, he returned to New Zealand.⁹⁶

His emotional state was now moving to a crisis and he suffered a mental breakdown. Airini continued to take care of him but eventually he was committed to Sunnyside for periodic treatment.

Often, differing perceptions are held by the participants in such tragic situations. Later Gopas attempted "to set the record straight" asserting his sanity to the Barrs, but Airini maintains that he was paranoid, and was hospitalized after becoming agitated because he was fearful that C.I.A. agents would come for him.⁹⁷ This feeling was presumably connected with his observations relating to U.S.A. moon exploration, which he had attempted to make public.⁹⁸ Whether or not Gopas is considered to have been paranoid, therefore, depends on the credibility that can be given to his observations. While it seems improbable that an amateur astronomer would make observations that professionals failed to make, nevertheless it remains a remote possibility. But certainly Gopas was under great stress at this time and was, no doubt, excitable and open to suggestion. Whatever the case, Airini remained genuinely concerned for him and did not attempt to get rid of him, as he implied.

It seems that he was now suffering from alcoholism and his physical condition began to deteriorate. His wife, Airini, and a close friend, Mr. A. Wicks, were concerned that he was drinking too much.⁹⁹ Michael Trumic, however, thought that Gopas drank

little because of his physical state.¹⁰⁰ Possibly, as happens in some depressive states, Gopas found that alcohol helped to relieve his depression. He may, therefore, have restricted his drinking to the privacy of his home and have rarely drunk socially.

Possibly through alcohol abuse, his circulation became impaired, necessitating the removal of his left leg above the knee in 1982. He made a partial recovery from surgery but then complications arose and he became immobilized.¹⁰¹

His life was drawing to a close just as he was beginning to gain the recognition he had craved. He greeted plans for a retrospective exhibition of his work enthusiastically.¹⁰² This was to be mounted by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in 1982 and signalled public acceptance of his work. But two weeks before the scheduled opening of the first exhibition dedicated to his life's work, on 23 July, 1983, he died of a heart attack caused by arteriosclerosis, at his home in Opawa Road, Christchurch.¹⁰³

Although Gopas died only recently the details of his life are already obscure. This is especially so for the important early, formative years. Yet the present outline demonstrates both the effect of his life experiences on his art and of his art on the progression of his life.

Gopas was born into a bourgeois family and might reasonably have expected to pursue a career in art. In the event, he was always forced to expend considerable effort in making material provision for himself and his family. He grew up in a country that became one of the battlefields for the clash of ideologies that erupted in the Second World War, and joined the streams of displaced persons flowing from that upheaval. Not only was he separated from his early environment, to a large extent it ceased to exist and he must have felt adrift in the world.

Uprooted from a country with established cultural traditions, he found himself in New Zealand, whose fragile artistic life offered little support. Eventually, however, he was able to make a significant contribution to that life.

Having lived the first half of his life in the northern hemisphere, he came to spend the second half in the southern one. He was in a literal sense a man of two worlds. He was also culturally a man of two worlds, coming from an old one of established standards to a young one with nascent aesthetic values. But the difference was not only between old and young but also between eastern and western European origins.

Great art may arise out of hardship, but great hardship may crush even the strongest personality. Not surprisingly, the turmoils and difficulties Gopas endured,

disturbed his emotional stability and he tended to lose control of his life in later years. Nevertheless, he continued to be a productive artist.

Art is born out of the influences of previous artists acting on the painter's sensibility, tempered by life's experiences. More than most painters, Gopas was subjected to repeated disruptions to his life and exposed to a bewildering array of influences. The manner in which these experiences and influences were gradually assimilated into his art may be demonstrated by careful progressive study of his New Zealand works, beginning with those of the 1950s.

Endnotes to Chapter 2:

- 1 Registrar General's Office, Lower Hutt, certified copy of entry of death, 11 September 1986.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Letter: Sylvie Ronayne (Auckland) to K. F., 9 October 1987.
- 4 A. Prokhorov ed., Great Soviet Encyclopedia, vol 14, (Moscow: Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia Publishing House, 1973), pp 573-576.
- 5 Ibid., pp 581-584.
- 6 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, E.C., (New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1982), pp 10-11.
- 7 A. Prokhorov ed., Great Soviet Encyclopedia, vol 29, p 654.
- 8 Ibid., vol 14, p 570. The hottest month is July with an average temperature of 17.2° C.
- 9 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 21.
- 10 Auckland City Art Gallery, "Rudolf Gopas", Archives on Artists.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 W-D. Dube, The Expressionists, (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1972), p 86.
- 13 Letter: William Sutton (Christchurch) to K. F., 5 October 1987.
- 14 W-D. Dube, The Expressionists, p 87.
- 15 R. Gopas, Galactic Landscapes 1965 - '67, E. C., Auckland Festival Exhibition, New Vision Gallery, 8 - 20 May 1967, signed and dated 'R. Gopas April 67'.
- 16 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, pp 12-13.
- 17 Letter: M. Martynaitis (Kaunas) to K. F., 8 March 1987.
- 18 Lietuvos TSR Mokslu Akademija Istorijos Institutas, XXa. Lietuviu Dailes Istorija 1900 - 1940 II, (Vilnius: Vilius Ambrazevicius, 1983), p 7.
- 19 Ibid. XXa. Lietuviu Dailes Istorija has been taken as the authority for the spelling of Lithuanian artists' names.
- 20 Ibid., p 479.
- 21 Ibid., p 479.
- 22 H. Osborne, ed. The Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Art, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p 477.

- 23 Lietuvos TSR Mokslu Akademija Istorijos Institutas, Lietuviu Dailes Istorija, p 478. XXa.
- 24 Ibid., p 486.
- 25 Ibid., p 481.
- 26 Ibid., p 482.
- 27 M.K. Ciurlionis Art Museum, Kaunas. The M.K. Ciurlionis Art Museum and its Branches, (U.S.S.R.: Mintis, 1981), no pagination.
- 28 H. Osborne, ed. Twentieth Century Art, p 114 .
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Lietuvos TSR Mokslu Akademija Istorijos Institutas, XXa.
Lietuviu Dailes Istorija, p 477.
- 31 Interview: Jonathan Mané (Christchurch) with K. F., 29 April 1986.
- 32 Lietuvos TSR Mokslu Akademija Istorijos Institutas, XXa.
Lietuviu Dailes Istorija, pp 478, 481.
- 33 Ibid., pp 13-14,16.
- 34 Ibid., p 481.
- 35 Ibid., p 482.
- 36 Ibid., p 485.
- 37 Auckland City Art Gallery, Shoreline (1962), acquisition form.
- 38 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 13.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Letter: Sylvie Ronayne to K. F., 9 October 1987.
- 42 Ibid. Natasha Seeberg was born in Ventspilis, Latvia on 13 June 1920.
- 43 Letter: Sylvie Ronayne to K. F., 13 September 1986.
- 44 Letter: Sylvie Ronayne to K. F., 9 October 1987.
- 45 J. Coley, "Introduction", Rudolf Gopas,(New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1982), p 8.
- 46 Interview: L. Spencer (Dunedin) with K. F., 21 October 1986.
- 47 Letter: Sylvie Ronayne to K. F., 9 October 1987.

- 48 Letter: Tom Taylor (Christchurch) to K. F., 15 October 1987.
- 49 Letter: Sylvie Ronayne to K. F., 9 October 1987.
- 50 Letter: Sylvie Ronayne to K. F., 13 September 1986.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Refer Volume II for known works painted before 1949.
- 54 Letters: Tony Geddes (Christchurch) to K. F., 14 October 1987, Tom Taylor to K. F., 15 October 1987.
- 55 Letter: Jonathan Mané to K. F., 14 July 1987.
- 56 Letter: William Sutton to K. F., 5 October 1987.
- 57 H. Osborne, ed. Twentieth Century Art, p 299.
- 58 Letter: I. A. Gamtsl, (Burgermeister, Gemeindeamt Ehrwald) to K. F., 9 January 1987.
- 59 Letter: Sylvie Ronayne to K. F., 13 September 1986.
- 60 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, pp 14 - 16.
- 61 Interview: L. Spencer with K.F., 21 October 1986, also National Archives, immigration records.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 National Archives, immigration records.
- 64 Interview: E. Jeavons (Mosgiel) with K. F., 14 December 1986.
- 65 Interview: F. Jackson (Mosgiel), with K.F., 18 October 1986.
- 66 Interview: L. Spencer with K. F., 21 October 1986.
- 67 Letter: Tom Taylor to K. F., 15 October 1987.
- 68 Letter: Tony Geddes to K. F., 14 October 1987.
- 69 Otago Daily Times (Dunedin), 10 Feb 1951, p 3.
- 70 Interview: Michael Trumic (Dunedin) with K. F., 2 June 1987.
- 71 Interview: A. Hogg (Dunedin) with K. F., 16 December 1986.
- 72 Wise's Directory (1951), p 1231.
- 73 Interview: Sylvie Ronayne with K. F., 29 January 1987.
- 74 Otago Daily Times, 10 February 1950, p 3.

- 75 Letters: Dr B. Iggo to K. F., 29 November 1986, A. McIntyre to K. F., 11 February 1987.
- 76 Otago Daily Times, 10 February 1950, p 3.
- 77 Otago Art Society (Dunedin), Otago Art Society Annual Exhibition Catalogue, 1950.
- 78 Press, (Christchurch), 16 October 1951, p 3.
- 79 Interviews: Sylvie Ronayne with K. F., 29 January 1987, Michael Trumic with K. F., 2 June 1987.
- 80 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 20.
- 81 Letter: Sylvie Ronayne to K. F., 13 September 1986, also Interview: E. Jeavons with K. F., 14 December 1986. E. Jeavons, as Supervising Engineer, worked closely in conjunction with Gopas on this project.
- 82 Registrar-General's Office, Lower Hutt, certified copy of entry of marriage, 10 September 1986, also Interview: Airini Gopas with K. F., 8 April 1987.
- 83 Stone's Directory (Canterbury, Nelson and Westland), 1960-61, 1966.
- 84 Letter: Tony Geddes to K. F., 14 October, 1987.
- 85 Interview: Michael Trumic with K. F., 2 June 1987.
- 86 A. Mookerjee, The Arts of India from Prehistoric to Modern Times, (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co. Inc., 1966), also Letter: Tom Taylor to K. F., 15 October 1987.
- 87 Letters: Rosemary Greer to K. F., 11 October 1987, Tony Geddes to K. F., 14 October 1987.
- 88 Letter: Mary Barr to Don Peebles, 8 April 1982, includes a note by John Darly stating when Gopas began teaching as part of Don Peeble's reply on the original letter from Mary Barr. However, Gopas is not listed among the lecturing staff in the University Calendar under Fine Arts until 1961, also University of Canterbury, University Calendar, 1958, p 12, 1959, p 12, 1960, p 12, 1961, p 12.
- 89 Letters: Tony Geddes to K. F., 14 October 1987, Rosemary Greer to K. F., 11 October 1987, William Sutton to K. F., 5 October 1987, also Interviews: Jim Barr (Wellington) with K. F., 10 February 1987, Michael Dunn (Auckland) with K. F., 23 May 1986, Jonathan Mané with K. F., 29 April 1986.
- 90 H. Keith, Contemporary New Zealand Painting, E. C., (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, November 1965), no pagination.
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- Interview: Rosemary Entwisle with K. F., 2 September 1986.
- 92 Canterbury Society of Arts (Christchurch), 71st Annual Exhibition of the Canterbury Society of Arts, 4 April 1951, also 74th Annual Exhibition of the Canterbury Society of Arts, 21 April 1954, also J. Catchpole, The Christchurch Group, Christchurch, University of Canterbury, 1984, (Thesis: M.A. Art History).
- 93 Interview: Airini Gopas with K. F., 8 April 1987.
- 94 Letters: Nola Barron to K. F., 14 October 1987, Mary Barr to Don Peebles, 8 April 1982. Note by John Darly stating Gopas resigned from teaching on 4 May 1977, as part of Don Peeble's reply on the original letter from Mary Barr.
- 95 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 41.
- 96 Interview: Michael Trumic with K. F., 2 June 1987.
- 97 Letter: Rudolf Gopas to Jim and Mary Barr, 30 May 1982, also Interview: Airini Gopas with K. F., 8 April 1987.
- 98 R. Gopas, "A warning to Humanity Supressed ?", 28 June 1978, T.S.
- 99 Interviews: Airini Gopas with K. F., 8 April 1987, A. Wicks with K. F., 1 June 1987.
- 100 Interview: Michael Trumic with K. F., 2 June 1987.
- 101 Interview: Airini Gopas with K. F., 6 July 1987.
- 102 Interview: Michael Trumic with K. F., 2 June 1987, Michael Trumic remembers Gopas agreeing that this exhibition was evidence that New Zealanders did appreciate his work.
- 103 Registrar-General's Office, Lower Hutt, certified copy of entry of death, 11 September 1986.

CHAPTER THREE

POT BOILERS OR PREREQUISITES

The Works of the 1950s

The majority of the works Gopas produced during his first years in New Zealand were portraits, landscapes and maritime subjects. Few works survive from his years in Ehrwald, Austria and this is the first substantial body of works available for study.

In general, the portraits sought to capture a likeness in a representational manner while the sea and landscapes were predominantly naturalistic, depicting familiar and attractive scenes from Otago and later Canterbury. Among them, however, are works which exhibit a variety of techniques and styles. These indicate his interest in other artists and demonstrate his practice of working through the styles of painters whom he admired.

There are several reasons why these early works should be studied. They form a significant proportion of his total *oeuvre* and so they are important in assessing the nature of the work he was producing and the stage of his artistic development, on his arrival in New Zealand.

They suggest something of his attitude to painting and his state of mind at that time. Gopas's natural evolution as an artist was disrupted by the war and in New Zealand he worked through several styles in attempting to re-establish himself. All his works are relevant indicators of this process. His daughter wrote:

Obviously New Zealand in 1949 when we arrived here was a cultural shock for my father - however the harsh sunlight and different beauty of the countryside instilled new vigour and life into him - causing the past to be forgotten and a whole new phase of painting to be created in Otago. Those early paintings give the greatest insight into what was really happening to my father, I think.¹

These works reveal the range of people and places that formed his environment in New Zealand. The portraits demonstrate a professional approach both to his client and his work, while the land and sea scapes show a concern to exhibit his works.

He exhibited portraits only occasionally and few were sold at exhibition. Most were painted on commission while many of the uncommissioned portraits were kept for their personal associations.

Land and sea subjects, in contrast, tended to be shown and sold through

exhibition. Although A. Wicks recalls requesting Gopas to paint a specific harbour scene, which he claims resulted in Fishermen, c.1955, [54] this was the exception rather than the rule.² Gopas did not often paint views on commission.

Gopas participated in each Otago Art Society Annual Exhibition held while he was in Dunedin, between 1950 and 1953, and six of The Group exhibitions, held in Christchurch between 1950 and 1960. At these ten exhibitions he showed forty-six works. Landscape and maritime subjects predominated and portraits were only shown in any number in The Group show of 1959.³

He first exhibited at the Annual Otago Art Society Exhibition in 1950, as an established painter, where he showed five works and matched the average asking price of his fellow exhibitors. Excluding F. Shewell, J. Murphy and W. Reed, whose prices were exceptionally high, the average price was thirteen guineas while that of Gopas was nearly fourteen guineas.⁴

But it is doubtful if such exhibitions were profitable. During the first ten years that Gopas participated in the annual Group shows, his asking prices were modest, averaging seventeen guineas each. Yet, his prolific production far outnumbered the sales he was able to make and L. Spencer recalls an exhibition he held in 1953, immediately prior to leaving Dunedin, at which numerous unframed paintings were piled up and the artist sought to sell as many as possible at very modest prices.⁵

Nevertheless, the annual Art Society exhibitions were still popular and provided a ready way to become known as a painter among patrons of art. Gopas quickly established a reputation in this way and many private households contain landscapes and portraits from this period.

His reputation was further expanded by the publication of his works in New Zealand art magazines. The Arts in New Zealand Year Book for 1950 and 1951 included landscapes and portraits while the issues of Landfall for September 1950 and March 1962 included head studies, probably self-portraits.⁶ These works are similar in style to many of the works which might be considered as pot-boilers in the light of his subsequent development but it is interesting that in the 1950s they were considered worthy of inclusion in magazines claiming to represent New Zealand art.⁷

From the beginning he was well received. The works in his first one man show of 1951 were considered to be of "outstanding ability and perception."⁸ But he was expected to conform to an accepted formula in rendering the New Zealand landscape.⁹ "The present exhibition indicates that he is still experimenting, still seeking to capture the

essential atmosphere of a landscape very different from that of Europe."¹⁰ His landscapes were discussed in terms of their ability to "express the feeling engendered by a subject that is a monopolistically New Zealand one."¹¹

His portraits were also commended and he was thought to have "an ability in portraiture that is too seldom encountered in this country".¹² He was equally well received in Christchurch, where his works were "probably the most brilliantly coloured in the display."¹³

But while comment on his works in the "inspiring exhibition of mature artists", held in Christchurch in 1954, was generally favourable, he was not grouped with the leading painters; Doris Lusk, Colin McCahon, Leo Bensemann and Rita Angus, but was listed among the minor artists.¹⁴

Although Gopas did not exhibit with The Group again until 1958 his reputation had, by that time, risen considerably. The reviewer warmly praised Gopas's work.

The outstanding painting is R. Gopas's "The Old Wharf, Kaikoura". This is a big, powerful painting, painted with intensity and assurance and glowing with rich Byzantine colour. The painter has more than fulfilled the promise which he seemed to possess when he came to New Zealand several years ago. His watercolour still life is also very fine.¹⁵

The earlier single-line references to Gopas, among a host of other painters, had been replaced by a full paragraph, equal in length to the discussion of leading New Zealand painters such as McCahon, Olivia Spencer-Bower, Toss Woollaston and Russell Clark, accompanied by promotion to the first painter to receive mention.¹⁶ This change in reception set the tone for the following decade.

Yet this body of works, responsible for establishing his early reputation in New Zealand, has tended, more recently, to be seen as 'commercial' and has received little attention from art historians. Few early landscapes and no commissioned portraits were included in the most extensive exhibition of his work so far, which claimed to be a survey.¹⁷ Barr thought that the only bearing of "these competent but unremarkable paintings" on Gopas was to impede his later development, stating that it was only when he was able "to give up the more commercial works that he was able to reach maturity as an artist."¹⁸

In his later years, Gopas also preferred not to remember them.¹⁹ He distinguished between the commercial works he had produced for sale and his serious painting. This goes beyond a distinction between commercial and non-commercial works to suggest an aesthetic distinction between poor works and works of quality, between "

'bread-and-butter' [works] as opposed to 'serious' or high-minded or searching and ambitious [works]".²⁰

Gopas stated that he indicated this distinction by his signature format, signing his serious works "Gopas (R. Gopas on works of commercial nature)".²¹ This was accepted as consistent and plausible by Barr, who, however, also disregarded many works of the 1950s which were signed 'Gopas'.²²

But, closer examination reveals that the use of different signature formats was not consistent. They cannot be relied upon to indicate whether or not the artist's intention was commercial. Two beach scenes, Brighton Beach, 1953, [26,47] and St Clair Beach, 1949, [6,7] are remarkably similar. They are both beach scenes of the Dunedin coast. They are both painted from the same viewpoint, with rocks in the left foreground, sea in the midground, stretching away to the right, and a headland, painted more faintly, in the far distance. One is perhaps a little more sketchily painted than the other but their colouration is similar, being predominantly in shades of brown and blue. They are both watercolour paintings on paper and are of similar proportions. Both were purchased by Lithuanian immigrants, yet while the former was signed 'R. Gopas', the latter was signed 'Gopas'.

Furthermore the signature formats are not consistent with the artistic quality of Gopas's works. The Portrait of Sylvia, 1965, [60,101] was signed 'Gopas' while the Portrait of Dr Simenaur, 1950, [9,12] was signed 'R. Gopas'. It would probably be agreed, however, that the portrait of Sylvia is a slight work and more 'commercial' than the latter portrait. Therefore, while the signature format may sometimes indicate Gopas's commercial intention or his assessment of a work, it should not result in an aesthetic assumption being made.

Not all works, signed 'R. Gopas', are art-historically unimportant. Not all were devoid of artistic merit and irrelevant to his later work. Some of his self-portraits were signed 'Gopas' and others 'R. Gopas', although, when seen as a group, they reveal important aspects of his evolution as an artist. Clearly the signature format cannot be accepted as a reliable indicator of a work's significance.

Much of the relevance of art is due to the relationship the art has to the society in which it was produced. It is in the portraits and landscapes of the 1950s that Gopas was most obviously and consciously adjusting to New Zealand society. The opportunity to study many different sitters, without incurring the cost of a model, and to familiarize himself with his physical surroundings, by way of repeatedly observing it and recording it in descriptive landscapes, may be seen as a necessary part of his adaptation to a new

environment and re-establishment of his technical skills. Gopas himself recognised that he "had to get to know the landscape".²³ The works of the 1950s, regardless of signature, are more important to the development of his art than has been recognised.

Gopas painted the majority of his portrait subjects during the 1950s. Among them there are different kinds of portraits, executed in various styles and ranging from conventional likenesses to generalised studies. While most demonstrate a proficiency in academic portraiture others show experimental and modern elements. They can be seen to fall into four groups.

Many of his figurative works belong within the traditional boundaries of portraiture. To this first group belong the commissioned portraits and those of his friends and family. They were painted with the subject present and relate directly to that subject, describing the physical appearance. Others are penetrating psychological studies. These are mainly self-portraits. Other works do not present a specific, identified person but are anonymous, perhaps faces recalled from the past. They are introduced by their profession, many being fishermen. The fourth group of images includes monumental nudes, which are studies of form rather than of individuals.

The specific portrait commissions were largely received from middle-class parents, who sought likenesses of their children. The children went to Gopas's studio, often travelling some distance to Dunedin or later to Christchurch, to have their portraits painted. During the 1950s, it became "quite the fashion" to have one's children painted by Rudolf Gopas and, for a time, he became almost a society name.²⁴ He received his numerous commissions as a result of this reputation and it was unnecessary to advertise. The cost of such works was hardly a consideration for the wealthy farmers of Canterbury and Southland or the professionals of Invercargill, Dunedin and Christchurch, who formed the majority of his patrons.²⁵

It may seem surprising that so soon after arriving in an alien country Gopas had acquired such a reputation. The wives of prominent society men were frequently involved in social work through local church organisations which assisted with the resettlement of new immigrants. No doubt Gopas was building on a reputation gained at sea among the other assisted immigrants but it also seems possible that he would have received support from such society women.²⁶ Commissioning portraits was one possible way to support the artist.

The portraits Gopas painted for this clientele were usually a standard size, measuring between 45 and 50 centimetres in height and about 35 centimetres in width, showing only the head and shoulders of a single sitter, placed centrally in the

composition in three-quarter pose. The young girls or boys sit looking to the right or left rather than straight at the artist or spectator. The expressions are gentle, perhaps a little bland. Spots of light catch on the nose and sometimes the eyes. The colours are soft and naturalistic; fleshy for the faces, muted for the garments. The unfocused gazes, together with the fall of the light and delicate colouration, give the works a romantic quality. Such features were explored by Sir Thomas Lawrence but here have become formalized academic practice.

This is not to imply that Gopas painted all his commissioned portraits to a rigid formula. The Portrait of Sally and Wendy Wise, 1953, [26,46] is an example of a double portrait, in which two girls are placed side-by-side, and is evidence that Gopas could adapt and alter his standard format as necessary.

He recorded the faces of his subjects swiftly, needing only one or two sittings to complete his commission. The Portrait of Joan Hunt, 1957, [36,63] was formed by pencil lines to structure the face with notes on colour at the first sitting; watercolour being applied during the second sitting. The entire portrait was created in a matter of a few hours. It measures 48.5 centimetres in height and 36.5 centimetres in width.

The subject remembers Gopas being confident and proficient while painting; professional and somewhat businesslike in his manner. He engaged in a modest amount of conversation during the session but required his subject to remain still.²⁷ His manner was somewhat severe, perhaps a little frightening to younger children. One of his patrons, Mrs. A. Hogg, relates how Gopas, with his 'shock of black hair' and piercing, dark eyes, terrified her five year old daughter, who refused to smile.²⁸ But Gopas found a means to persuade most children to sit as he wished by the promise of sweets. He had little difficulty relating to more mature sitters.

The Portrait of Joan Hunt, 1957, [36,63] is attractive, filled with light and fluidly brushed features. Although some thirty years have elapsed, the resemblance between portrait and subject is still evident. The parent, who commissioned the work, was pleased with the result and, to that extent, Gopas was successful in his objectives, swiftly creating an image which satisfied his client.²⁹

However, it does seem that his method for rapidly capturing a physical likeness was perhaps a little too 'slick' and sometimes descended to a dry and repetitious formula. On such occasions, as his subjects were generally young and of no close acquaintance, Gopas would have felt little or no empathy with the sitter and made no attempt to endue the works with any deep meaning.

Some portraits were produced at the request of friends or acquaintances, as were those of Mr Wicks, 1949, [4,4], and Mr Tidsell, 1955, [28,51]. In these works, where Gopas knew something of the sitter's personality, he showed an ability to capture a revealing expression.

The Portrait of Dr Simenaur, 1950, [9,12] is of particular interest, since it is one of the first portraits Gopas painted in New Zealand. Although now in the Rotorua Art Gallery, it was probably painted in Dunedin. Gopas may have known Dr Simenaur well. The name suggests an east European origin and, possibly, he was a fellow immigrant. Perhaps he was Gopas's dentist.³⁰ As in many of his other portraits, the sitter is shown in a three-quarter pose, but here he looks sideways, almost at the viewer. The left side of the face is obscured by shadow while the right is illuminated in a gentle light, which falls across the face. The structure of the head, the brow, nose and chin, is well formed but sensitively rendered in soft charcoal. The frowning brow and firm mouth suggest a severe yet thinking and concerned person. The portrait is signed 'R. Gopas', perhaps indicating its 'commercial' nature, but nevertheless it is a fine study of a head.

Other portraits were more personal; paintings of his family, in which he captured the spontaneous moments of his closest relations. He painted his first wife, Natasha, asleep and his daughter, Sylvia, being taught to write by her grandmother and, in another work, surrounded by her toys. Later he painted Airini, bent over her task, darning socks. In these studies Gopas was less concerned to create a strict likeness than to evoke the mood of the sitter or the situation.

Unrestricted by the expectations of a patron, Gopas was at liberty in these works to explore the properties of his medium; watercolour and gouache. Loose, fluid brushstrokes of black outline the figures and objects while patches of bright blues and reds or soft yellows colour the forms.

The Portrait of Natasha, c.1960, [46,75] an ink, gouache and watercolour work on paper is more experimental in technique and colour than the commissioned works. A mixed watercolour technique has been used. Wet paint has been applied to other wet areas, dry to dry and wet to dry areas. The white paper shows through where paint has been applied drily and has caught on the texture of the paper. The face has been formed by a few cursory black lines in ink and the background has been boldly brushed in. The colour is adventurous, Fauvist rather than descriptive. The left cheek is apricot and orange while the right is yellow and ochre. The nose is green and the eyes purple. The background has been painted in orange and blue. The use of complementary colours enhances their intensity and that of the painting. Blocks of different colours, rather than tonal shading, structure the face. The strong shadows are green under the lips and above

the eyes and created by coarse cross-hatching in black ink on the left cheek. The Portrait of Natasha, c.1960, [46,75] recalls Woman in the Hat, by Henri Matisse.

The attributed date of this work seems late, for Gopas and his first wife had separated by 1953 and in 1956 Natasha moved to Auckland. While they remained on friendly terms and visited each other occasionally, it seems more likely that Gopas would have painted Natasha before he remarried in 1958. If an earlier date is accepted then the work suggests that Gopas was exploring modern styles, when the opportunity arose, soon after his arrival in New Zealand.

While the majority of his portraits were conventional, being descriptive and naturalistic in colour and discrete in technique, there were others which suggest a wider range of more modern influences. This is particularly true of the self-portraits.

Gopas painted a number of self-portraits, though these were produced intermittently over a long period of time. At least five such works are known, in addition to those included in Nature Speaks. Two head studies, which were published in Landfall, are strikingly like Gopas in appearance and may also be self-portraits.

Not all painters concern themselves with self-portraits and Gopas's recurrent preoccupation with them may suggest a degree of egocentricity or self-consciousness of himself as a painter. Barr has suggested that the self-portraits were a means of "periodic self-assessment", a way for Gopas to consolidate his development.³¹ There is another possibility. Gopas made specific reference to Rembrandt in his later work and he was probably aware of that painter's remarkable series of self-portraits.³² Perhaps Gopas was acting in imitation of Rembrandt in producing a record of the gradual process of aging and decay in himself.

Certainly his works have the same penetrating stare as many of Rembrandt's works. Unlike Gopas's other portraits, the self-portraits frequently look straight at the viewer with a piercing intensity, although this may have resulted from the use of a mirror. He invariably portrayed himself with his pipe and this too is such a recognisable feature that it becomes almost a leit-motiv of a Gopas self-portrait.

These portraits were produced in various styles, as if Gopas was experimenting on his own face with the techniques that interested him.

The earliest known self-portrait is an ink drawing dated 1947, [3,3]. Gopas experimented with a loose, scribbly technique to create form; recording his youthful appearance in his thirty-fourth year. It is a free sketch with the shoulders and arms briefly

rendered while closer attention is paid to the face, particularly the eyes, which are perhaps the most significant feature in facial expression. Gopas returned to this mode of portrayal, with increased freedom, in 1962, [54,93] and again in a "scribble extended to a self-portrait" included in Nature Speaks, c.1978, [87,136].³³

In contrast to these is the self-portrait of 1965, [61,102]. Unlike many of the others, which are busts, this is almost a full-length study. Gopas is seated, almost squatting, with his knees bent up. His feet and left hand are cut off abruptly by the picture frame. Facial and body details are suppressed and the whole of the figure is rendered in a uniform, simplified manner. The figure is flattened by the broad, crude brushstrokes in black, which outline the form and the areas of largely unmodulated colour. The background, a flat wall with a single rectangular blank window, enhances this effect. There is little attempt to suggest volume or depth by tonal shading or perspective.

The work suggests a mixture of possible influences. Gopas was interested in Oskar Kokoschka, one such influence, whose 'psychological portraits' he may have seen in Europe. The figure, which has been distorted from the purely representational to express the psyche of the sitter and painter, also recalls German Expressionist figure painting, especially that of Die Brücke. The elongated body and dark, shadowy eyes with their penetrating stare, recalls Erich Heckel's painting, Two Men at Table, 1912. The figures in both are angular and the perspective is flattened. But Gopas may well have been influenced by other expressionist painters such as George Rouault. It has a similar sombre moodiness and the heavy outlining present in Rouault's Head of Clown, 1948.

The spacial flatness, which draws attention to the pictorial aspects of the painting, indicates Gopas's awareness of modern concerns with the method of painting. A work in oil rather than watercolour, it is more obviously 'painterly'. The vertical line of the window extends into the torso of the figure and intersects with the horizontal line of the knee. By thus dividing the canvas into geometric shapes Gopas structured the composition and interlocked the objects as Cézanne did in Man with Pipe, c.1895-1900.

An oil of 1960, which was published in Landfall in 1962 as Head Study, [45,74] is strikingly similar in appearance. The bare furrowed brow, sunken dark eyes and hollow cheeks compare closely as do the nose, firm mouth and protruding ear. The treatment is less angular and brutal but it may have formed a prototype for the later work.

In a self-portrait of 1975, [73,122], Gopas returned to a representational form of portraiture, using conté and charcoal to render his self-image. The lines and shading, which give form to the face, recall the Portrait of Dr Simenaur, 1950, [9,12] drawn twenty-five years previously. The jaw, eyes and forehead furrows are rendered in

descriptive detail. Although it shows Gopas's ability to grasp the particular expression which conveys much of the sitter's personality and likeness, the work is far from the expressionist self-portrait of 1965. This more conventional, academic portrait, produced at a time when he was developing his most progressive and experimental works in other areas, was perhaps the result of a need to reassure himself of his ability as a painter in a traditional manner. The controlled and well formed image might be seen as evidence of his stability as a painter despite his imminent breakdown.

These self-portraits were produced over a thirty-year period, but all remain recognisable as images of the artist, tracing the gradual progression of age. They show Gopas's continuing concern with subject matter despite abstract developments in other areas of his art. They reveal that Gopas was not solely influenced by German Expressionism. Rather this was one of many sources and influences which extended from Dutch through German to French painting and included old as well as modern masters.

The third group of works lie between portraiture and genre. The identity of the subject is not recorded and does not seem important. Many are of fishermen smoking pipes, with boats and seascapes in the background to identify their profession, such as Untitled (Fisherman), c.1950, [10,14] Untitled (Fisherman with pipe), pre 1953, [22,42] and Untitled (Bearded Fisherman), c.1952, [21,41]. However, their particular facial characteristics, which distinguish them from one another, suggest that they may be unnamed portraits.

They all seem to have been executed shortly after his arrival in New Zealand. At the Otago Art Society Annual Exhibition of 1950 Gopas exhibited Fisherman, n.d. and Une Pecheur, n.d. and in February of the following year, at his one man show at the Dunedin Public Library, he exhibited Fisherman, n.d. while his later exhibitions with The Group included no works with such titles.³⁴ However, the untitled works are not necessarily those exhibited during 1950 and 1951 for titles were sometimes changed or repeated. Their precise dates are unknown because Gopas did not sign and date them. This suggests that they were produced for personal reasons rather than on commission. Gopas may have painted them for their Baltic associations or because they were faces which stayed in his mind from his childhood.

They are executed in a variety of styles. The first, Untitled (Fisherman), [10,14] is created from a myriad of tiny strokes in different colours in the Fauvist style of Derain's Landscape near Collioure, 1905, though less vibrant. Gopas may also have been influenced by works of Frances Hodgkins such as La Premiere Communion, c.1912, which had been included with a selection of her works exhibited in Dunedin in 1950. He

later acknowledged parallels between his works and those of the earlier New Zealand painter.³⁵ The second work, Untitled (Fisherman with Pipe), [22,42] is a watercolour painting of fluid washes, while the third, Untitled (Bearded Fisherman) [21,41] is broken into facets like the orphic cubism of Robert Delaunay. A further work, Four Figures, c.1955, [30,53] recalls the sombre colouring and weary figures of Vincent van Gogh's The Potato Eaters, 1885. But it may also have been influenced by the "overpowering gloom and silence" of Petrus van der Velden's Interior, n.d..³⁶ Gopas, it seems, did not arrive in New Zealand with a fully developed German Expressionist style. Rather, he spent some years experimenting with different styles from which he gradually formed his own art.

His figure studies, which include Figure Study, Immigrant Series, [20,40] Untitled (Crouching Nude) [39,67] and Sleeping Woman, [40,68] painted between 1952 and 1959, are further evidence of this process. They are lessons in form, shape and structure. Gopas stated "I think that may be the hardest task - to take a human being apart and then come back and put it back together again with certain elegance and strength."³⁷ The first of these is similar to the self-portrait of 1965. The figure, reduced to a few simple lines, expresses the desolate emptiness of the immigrant's life and, although not presented as a self-portrait, it was perhaps an expression of Gopas's own feelings in an alien country. The other works compare to the early works of Rouault. Examples of Rouault's etchings were to be seen in Christchurch at the Gallery 91 in 1959.³⁸ The full forms are rendered with swift dark curves in a similar manner to his Nude with Raised Arms, 1907.

Like the portraits, the landscapes of these early New Zealand years were painted in several different mediums, techniques and styles. There are drawings in pastel, charcoal and crayon and paintings in watercolour, gouache and oil. There are abbreviated sketches, loose renderings and finished productions. They vary from city and country to sea and harbour scenes. There are cityscapes made around Dunedin and later Christchurch, and more traditional landscapes, made during sketching trips into Central Otago. Gopas also painted beaches and numerous scenes of boats at the wharves in Port Chalmers and later at Kaikoura and Lyttelton.

His subject matter came largely from his environment but it can be called landscape only in the most general sense. As in his portraits, Gopas extended the 'landscape' in every direction, eventually to encompass the universe. Also like the portraits, his method of portrayal varied so that in some works parts of the scene were modified, accentuated or abstracted until little of the original scene remained recognisable, although most were naturalistic renderings of nature.

Other works were painted from memory, sometimes of his homeland and

childhood environment. Perhaps like the portraits of anonymous fishermen, Lithuanian Forest, [5,6] was a remembered scene, or was made from sketchbook drawings, which were all that he was able to bring with him from Europe. An attractive, idyllic scene, painted shortly after his arrival in 1949, it suggests that the artist was suffering a sense of loss in exile and sought solace in familiar images from his home country. Other immigrant artists, like Petrus van der Velden, who wrote " I am, thank God, a Dutchman, and proud of my country ", had also reacted in this way.³⁹

Like many of the watercolours he sold, this is an academic study in watercolour and is evidence of Gopas's knowledge and proficiency in that medium. The paper has been correctly stretched so that the work has not cockled. The lightest washes of colour, in yellow and beige, have been applied first while the darker and stronger greens, reds and browns have been laid on top. Deeper accents, for the shadows, were then added in drier paint while, finally, highlights were touched on in white gouache.

Many of the cityscapes, vistas of city buildings, streets and harbours, accurately record what was visible from the artist's viewpoint.

In Untitled (St Joseph's Cathedral from Rattray Street, Dunedin), c.1950, [11,18] three historic buildings, the cathedral, the main block of Otago Girls' High School and the spire of First Church, stand in correct relationship to one another. The harbour and peninsula are also visible from the slopes of Rattray Street. Gopas commented that in this work he was "trying to paint like an art society painter."⁴⁰ This and many others are similar to those by New Zealand artists of the day.

Dunedin Harbour, 1950, [14,22] although sketchily painted, is a close rendering of the city's streets. Barr suggests the work is evidence of Gopas's "early experiments with abstraction".⁴¹ This is a somewhat surprising claim considering the details of figures and vehicles in the streets and naturalistic colouring in tones of browns and blues. However, there may be some confusion in the catalogue since the authors discuss elements which clearly are not to be seen in this work.

Such 'experiments with abstraction' are more evident in the small studies of Untitled Composition, 1951 [18,30] and Untitled, 1952, [36] which Gopas painted from his imagination. Gombrich suggested that much abstraction is merely non-objective areas of paint.⁴² Examples of such abstraction can be found in Gopas's work. In an untitled landscape, [24,45] although the objects in the composition are recognisable as trees, hills, rocks and water, segments of the painting, seen separately, are abstract lines and areas of colour. However, Gopas said "I was not interested in merely hacking up objects and then putting in some colour. That is not abstraction."⁴³ It was not until the 1960s that Gopas's

works became abstract in conception.

The light-filled scene of Backyard Gloucester Street, 1957, [36,64] with vigorously painted trees and vegetation in fluid watercolour, recalls Margaret Stoddart's Old Homestead, Diamond Harbour, c.1913, while Buildings in a Landscape, c.1960, [47,76] might be compared with the works of such painters as John Holmwood and Eric Lee-Johnson.

Gopas painted many pastoral landscapes of fields, hills and rivers, like Calm River, 1949, [7,9] and Untitled (landscape), 1952, [19,39]. They are predominantly descriptive scenes, painted from around the city or from his trips into Central Otago, such as Old Diggings, Naseby, 1951, [17,29]. They are recognisable as a particular area but in them Gopas has emphasised certain aspects. In Untitled (Central Otago Landscape), 1950, [13,21] he used the brushstrokes and a limited tonal palette to define the structure and form of the rugged, barren hills of Central Otago.

Lake Hayes Landscape, [23,43] is a drawing, in crayon, of the banks of the lake. The familiar poplar and willow trees of the area descend the hills to the water's edge and are reflected in it. It is a landscape of the Central Otago area and, although undated, it was probably made on a sketching trip to the region, one summer during the early 1950s. However, although of a particular place, it goes beyond the topographical. Gopas had a sense of the shape and structure of nature. The various objects of the scene are locked together. It is boldly rendered. The broad strokes of the trees, hills and sky suggest the full sweep of the artist's arm. Gopas has exploited the potential of his crayon medium, using the point to make firm, heavy lines and the side, which responds to the texture of the paper as it is dragged over the surface, to make soft tonal areas.

These works occasionally reveal something of Gopas's awareness of modern developments. In subsequent years he was to make a practice of working through various styles, assimilating and developing them.

A watercolour and Indian ink sketch of 1950, [12,19] is reminiscent of the watercolour sketches Cézanne made of Mont Sainte Victoire. Gopas has simplified the mountain and foreground settlement of his view into planar shapes, outlined in black. Roads lead into the picture and converge at the base of the mountain, anchoring the composition, which has been reduced to a series of interlocking planes. In Lyttelton Landscape, 1959, [41,70] the objects are again simplified into generalized shapes. Like Cézanne, Gopas laid on oil paint in blocks, emphasising the structure of the images.

A landscape, [24,45] in the possession of the artist's daughter, which conveys a

sense of the way objects in nature relate to each other and to the space that they occupy, recalls Mondrian's tree series, while Still Life, 1954, [27,49] is reminiscent of the colouration and application of paint in works by Paul Klee, such as Remembrance of a Conception, 1918. Landscape Kaikoura, c.1955, [31,57] in which the brushstrokes structure the scene and the foreground trees create a sudden recessional depth, recalls works by Camille Pissarro.

Other paintings from this period were sea and beach scenes. Many represent the South Island's eastern coastline, such as the beaches of Brighton and St Clair. While in many of the landscapes the images were formed by dark outlining, giving emphasis to structure, in the seascapes the images were formed by the patches of watercolour in which the colour changes distinguish the shapes, a technique perhaps more appropriate to the watery subject matter.

The scenes of boats are so numerous that they almost form a genre of their own. Sometimes these were painted from memory, as in Fishing Boats, Baltic Sea, c.1950, [15,23] but Gopas also visited the wharves and jettys repeatedly to paint the boats at their moorings. During the 1950s these tend, like the landscapes, to be realistic. In Old Steamer, Papaki Beach, Governor's Bay, c.1955, [34,61] the pictorial composition is given sufficient recessional space to convincingly contain the boats and boat shed. Others, such as Boats, c.1955, [32,59] in which Gopas has turned his concern to repeating the distinctive shapes of the hulls, cabins and masts, and Fishing Boats, c.1955, [33,60] are more freely and abstractly rendered, foreshadowing later developments. It was among the subjects of fishing boats and seascapes, from 1958 onwards, that the more overtly German Expressionist features emerged.

The early landscapes and portraits reveal something of Gopas's experiences as a new immigrant. He commented "you come to a new country and you are involuntarily affected by local trends".⁴⁴ These works testify both materially and artistically to the necessary process of adjustment through which the artist had to pass to re-establish himself as a painter in a strange environment after the trauma of forced migration. Many artists in the twentieth century have suffered similar experiences and Gopas provides an interesting case study of the effects of such upheaval on twentieth century artists. This provides an additional justification for the study of these pictures as a prerequisite to understanding his later work.

Some of these works, recalling scenes of his homeland, may have been painted to relieve his own feelings of exile or those of his fellow immigrants. They may, however, have served for comparison as he explored the new landscape in which he found himself and sought to adapt his style to it. Other immigrant artists before him, like Petrus van der

Velden, had responded in a similar way.

Unable to earn a living by its free practice, Gopas always seems to have preferred to adapt his art rather than take an unrelated job. The works of this period may be seen as part of that approach to life and dedication to art.

If he was to be free to paint as he wished, it was necessary for him to establish a reputation as an artist. As works which gained exposure and frequently found a purchaser among influential patrons, the early portraits, landscapes and seascapes were essential to achieving that objective.

But these works also had a more direct bearing on his artistic development. Even the more 'commercial' works sharpened his observation and understanding of the human condition while permitting the exercise of his craft, so that he acquired the facility of expression essential to his future work.

Gopas did not arrive in Dunedin with his mature painting style fully formed. He commented "My involvement with painting begins in New Zealand." It was to be an involvement that took many forms, some hesitations, some backward-looking, before it found its direction".⁴⁵ While he may have felt some of these early works had little aesthetic merit, many are important in demonstrating the artist's progress to the major works of his last period.

He had been exposed to German Expressionist influences early in his career, yet the works of these years show how muted that influence was when he arrived in New Zealand. Possibly he had still not fully absorbed the influence by that time.

This supports Dunn's contention that Gopas should not be considered the sole artist to introduce German Expressionism to New Zealand, although that does not preclude the possibility that he became a major figure in the assimilation of expressionism into the mainstream of New Zealand art during his teaching years.⁴⁶

However that may be, it is also possible that Gopas deliberately suppressed German Expressionist features in these works, feeling that it would be unacceptable to New Zealand taste. Many of the works seem to carefully parallel New Zealand painting of the period and this may have been a conscious action on the part of the artist as he struggled to establish his reputation.

Rather than arriving in New Zealand with German Expressionism deeply implanted in his art, it would seem that Gopas was still experimenting with a variety of

styles, as he evolved gradually towards an idiosyncratic mode of expression. Certainly he was still open to influence and these works indicate the sources which contributed to his more significant achievements. He looked to Rouault, Matisse, van Gogh and Cézanne, foreshadowing the 1960s in which the influence not only of German Expressionism but also Cubism, Fauvism and Post-impressionism emerged more strongly.

Endnotes to Chapter Three:

- 1 Letter: Sylvie Ronayne (Auckland) to K. F., 13 September 1986.
- 2 Interview: A Wicks (Dunedin) with K. F., 1 June 1987.
- 3 Otago Art Society (Dunedin), Otago Art Society Annual Exhibition Catalogue, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, also The Group (Christchurch), The Group Annual Exhibition Catalogue, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1958, 1959, 1960.
- 4 Otago Art Society, Otago Art Society Annual Exhibition Catalogue, 1950.
- 5 Interview: L. Spencer (Dunedin) with K. F., 21 October 1986.
- 6 E. Lee-Johnson, ed. Arts in New Zealand Year Book, no. 6, (Wellington: H.H. Tombs, 1950), p 66 included Tyrolian Peasant and Street Extension, also E. Lee-Johnson, ed. Arts in New Zealand Year Book, no. 7 (Wellington: H.H. Tombs Ltd., 1951), p 38 included Country Road, Lawrence and Fishing Boats, Baltic Sea, both n.d., also C. Brasch, ed. Landfall vol. 4 no. 3 (Christchurch: Caxton Press, Sept. 1950), facing p 221, included Charcoal Study, 1946, also C. Brasch, ed. Landfall vol. 16, no. 1 (Christchurch: Caxton Press, March 1962), facing p 24, included Head Study, 1960.
- 7 E. Lee-Johnson, ed Arts in New Zealand Year Book, preface. The Arts in New Zealand Year Book 1950 was defined as "a periodic stocktaking of [the] country's assets in the various fields of the arts".
- 8 Otago Daily Times (Dunedin), 10 February 1951, p 3.
- 9 F. Pound, Frames on the Land, Early Landscape Painting in New Zealand, (Collins, Auckland, 1983), p 11. Pound discussed the way New Zealand art critics have sought "a 'real' New Zealand landscape".
- 10 Otago Daily Times, 10 February 1951, p 3.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Press (Christchurch), 16 October 1951, p 3.
- 14 Christchurch Star-Sun (Christchurch), 4 October 1954, p 9.
- 15 Press, 14 October 1958, p 19.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, (New Plymouth:

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1982), p 8.

- 18 Ibid, p 20.
- 19 Interview: Jonathan Mané (Christchurch) with K. F., 29 April 1986.
- 20 Letter: Jonathan Mané to K. F., 27 July 1987.
- 21 Auckland City Art Gallery, Shoreline (1962), acquisition form.
- 22 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 20.
- 23 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr (Wellington) with Rudolf Gopas, 1982. TS. of Gopas's comments on his pictures.
- 24 Interview: A. Hogg (Dunedin) with K. F., 16 December 1986.
- 25 Interview: Joan Hall-Jones née Hunt, Invercargill) with K. F., 13 December 1986.
- 26 Interview: R. Hall (Ranfurly) with K. F., 19 October 1986.
- 27 Interview: Joan Hall-Jones with K. F., 13 December 1986.
- 28 Interview: A. Hogg with K. F., 16 December 1986.
- 29 Interview: Joan Hall-Jones with K. F., 13 December 1986.
- 30 Stones Otago and Southland Directory (1950), p 977. A Dr Max Simenauer had a dental surgery at 67 Princes Street Dunedin in 1950.
- 31 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 47.
- 32 R. Gopas, Nature Speaks, unpublished MS. in the collection of the Hocken Library, Dunedin.
- 33 Ibid., p 2.
- 34 Otago Art Society, Otago Art Society Annual Exhibition Catalogue, 1950, also Otago Daily Times, 10 February 1951, p 3, also The Group, The Group Annual Exhibition Catalogue, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1958, 1959, 1960.
- 35 Otago Daily Times, 7 October 1950, p 11, also Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982.
- 36 Letter: Petrus Van der Velden(Christchurch) to A.C.Loffett, 20 July 1892, also T. L. Rodney Wilson, Petrus Van Der Velden (1837 - 1913), (Sydney: Chancery Chambers, 1979), pp 94-98
- 37 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982. Gopas made this statement in relation to Untitled (Crouching Nude) which he said, with the inclusion of the apple, was an image of Eve.
- 38 Press, 29 September 1959, Canterbury Public Library.

- 39 Letter: Petrus Van der Velden(Noordwijk) to Amice,14 April 1890, also T. L. Rodney Wilson, Petrus van der Velden , p 92
- 40 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982.
- 41 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 17.
- 42 E. H. Gombrich, Meditations on a Hobby Horse and other essays on the theory of art, (New York: Phaidon Press, 1978), pp 144-149.
- 43 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 17.
- 44 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982.
- 45 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, pp 14-16.
- 46 M. Dunn, "Gopas: Remarks on his style and development", Artis (Auckland), vol. 1, no. 1, (June, 1971), no pagination.

CHAPTER FOUR

GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM REVISITED

The works of the late 1950s and early 1960s

Gopas was appointed lecturer in painting at the Ilam School of Fine Arts in 1959 and this can be seen to mark the beginning of a new chapter in his artistic development. He continued to produce some works similar to those of the previous period, but many works show his increased interest in a variety of artistic sources.

It is possible to see that, in general, his first ten years of painting in New Zealand were characterised by naturalistic, descriptive painting, as Gopas adjusted to a strange physical environment. In those years, there are only occasional references to other artists. From 1958 until about 1965 outside stylistic influences appeared more frequently in his work, as he sought to familiarize himself with modern artistic developments before moving on, at the end of the decade, to a style less dependent on those of the past.

In this process his painting became less representational and more an expression of his perception of the dynamic forces in nature, his palette became darker and more intense and his picture surface more painterly. There are several possible reasons why Gopas may have been more attracted to the work of other artists at this time. A period of settlement and re-establishment over, he may well have been at a natural point of change in his development. He had, by this time, established some firm friends with whom he shared similar interests and with whom he could discuss matters of art. Furthermore, reproductions and publications on modern art were now more readily available. There were several exhibitions of international art in Christchurch at this time. Alternatively, or perhaps additionally, his appointment to a position of lecturer at the art school may have precipitated his move away from the naturalistic painting of the 1950s.

This artistic change paralleled the changing attitude towards painting in New Zealand in general and his work in particular. Reviewers moved away from closely describing the paintings, expressing personal likes and dislikes, towards a more critical analysis of the pictorial aspects of the works.

Gopas consolidated his reputation in these years. Discussion continued to be general, nevertheless, it seems to have been during this period that his reputation as an

'expressionist' painter was established. Reviewers found his paintings "big in size and conception, strong in design, rich in colour and rugged in execution" and "powerfully constructed, painted boldly but with dignity and the colour has a splendid rich glow."¹ Expressionism was quickly accepted as his natural metier. In 1961 it was reported that "Rudolf Gopas, after some stylistic flirtations, has returned to his usual ruggedly expressive way of creating darkly glowing colours" while the catalogue to his one-man show of 1962 stated that the works had been produced "as a result of the artist's search for expression through colour and form."² Reviewers showed an interest in the artist and his method of working as well as the works he produced. Soon his opinions and feelings, his personality, would also play a part in his reception.

The view of his work as expressionist was readily accepted, with little criticism and with no attempt to suggest an alternative interpretation. Since it is among the works from this period that German Expressionist elements are most evident, Gopas came to be seen by art historians, with the notable exception of Dunn, within a German Expressionist context. Dunning represented Gopas with The Trawlers, 1959, [44,73] while Gordon Brown used The Old Wharf, Kaikoura, 1960, [50,83].³ Brown and Keith saw Gopas as having "leanings towards German Expressionism" while Barr saw him as continuing German Expressionism.⁴

However, it is evident that Gopas was interested in a variety of painters and that he was not confined by art historical boundaries. In order to determine the nature of the German Expressionist influence a careful analysis of the works is necessary. His works may be examined for the presence of similar stylistic features. Those found to exhibit several such features might reasonably be ascribed to the influence of German Expressionism and works selected in this way will be discussed in detail. The proportion of these works within the total number of known works will then serve to indicate, to some extent, their relative importance.

In discussing the relationship of Gopas with the German Expressionist movement, the painter's motivation or aesthetic must be considered. Similarities and differences in subject matter can be noted and common pictorial elements identified. Gopas's use of colour, form and shape, his choice and use of medium and the structure of his composition can be compared to their use by the German Expressionists.

There are, however, certain difficulties in making such an assessment.

German Expressionism was not a cohesive, unified movement. It was formed by a number of painters, who belonged to either Die Brücke or Der Blaue Reiter, together

with several associated painters working in and around Germany during the period of the first world war. The characteristics of both groups and those of the auxiliary painters differed in some degree from one another. It is, therefore, necessary to determine where, within the broad movement of German Expressionism, any influence originated.

There is another problem. It is often difficult to establish that certain features are derived from German Expressionism, when they are common to other movements. The Fauves, in France, for example, shared Die Brücke painters' use of arbitrary colour and active brush strokes, while both members of Der Blaue Reiter, particularly Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, and the American Abstract Expressionists developed non-representational imagery to portray their personal responses to the world. German Expressionism is the specific combination of a variety of elements. Only some of these elements are evident in Gopas's works.

The problem of assessment is, therefore, two-fold. On the one hand, works which appear to differ stylistically may have been influenced by the overall source of German Expressionism. On the other hand, other movements, which have some similar features to German Expressionism, provide possible alternative sources of influence.

Further, in addition to matters of style and subject matter, the artist's aesthetic is necessary to the discussion. Yet this cannot always be determined with certainty.

The German Expressionists painted from a need to express their inner emotional responses to the objective world. The content of their works was intensely personal and subjective. Painting was catharsis.

According to William Sutton, painting, for Gopas, was a venue for psychological outpouring, as it was for the German Expressionists.⁵ As Gopas became less concerned with naturalistic portrayal, the pictorial aspects of his works were manipulated to his own ends. In each work, subject matter, colour, form and composition were chosen to satisfy his need for personal expression. He was concerned with the atmosphere of the scenes he painted and this was the subjectively perceived atmosphere of 'mood' rather than a climatic one of air and weather.⁶

However, although he had probably read Die Brücke manifesto, he was also familiar with Vincent van Gogh's letters, in which the latter confessed "I do not know if I can paint the postman as I feel him".⁷ Furthermore, Gopas had a strong awareness of himself and of his relationship to his environment. His subjective responses were countered by his interest in astronomy and practice of analytically observing the universe through the telescope. His approach, at once idiosyncratic and yet with its own inherent

logic, is more comparable to William Blake than Ernst Ludwig Kirchner.

Die Brücke were concerned to establish a new German art. Gopas, however, disrupted from his native land, did not share Die Brücke's sense of nationalism. "Art evokes a global form, not a national one", the New Zealand Herald reported him declaring.⁸ His cosmopolitan attitude to art was more in tune with Der Blaue Reiter whose art was deliberately international.

Die Brücke's concerns led them to reject their immediate predecessors and with them their bourgeois origins and morals. They took up the cause of the down trodden and underprivileged. Nothing in Gopas's choice of subject matter at this time indicates that he shared such socialist concerns, although his later works contain urgent expressions of "Reason and Disgust" aimed at capitalism and corrupt middleclass conduct.⁹ He expressed contempt for New Zealand petit bourgeoisie and their social attitudes.¹⁰

Like many of the German Expressionists, Gopas read publications and collected reproductions to keep himself informed about artistic developments. While he had come into contact with the influence of German Expressionism at art school in Kaunas, much of his knowledge of their paintings must have come from published material. He also studied other painters, such as Gauguin, by this means, but so had the German Expressionists.¹¹

Like the German Expressionists, Gopas read modern philosophy and psychology, sharing their interest in Nietzsche in particular. Gopas believed, like Nietzsche, that art had a purpose to educate people.¹²

German Expressionism is notable for its integration of different disciplines. Der Blaue Reiter combined their artistic concerns not only with literary and philosophical interests but also musical expression. Kandinsky developed a theory of unity between all the arts and was educated in many fields. Gopas's interest in astronomy, photography, printing and poetry, as well as painting, suggests that he also saw a relationship between different fields although it was not until later that these were brought together in his art.

The German Expressionist aesthetic, whether that of Die Brücke or Der Blaue Reiter, influenced both the choice of subject matter and the pictorial aspects of painting. These were exploited for their expressive potential so that not only the subject matter but also the colour, form and composition were determined by the expressive intention of the painter. Some of these pictorial aspects, evident in German Expressionism, can be seen

in Gopas's works.

Many of the paintings of the early 1960s show a continued interest in a subject which had already made its appearance in the 1950s. But in this period, Gopas's preoccupation with boats, harbours and fishing subjects tended to dominate his output. One reviewer commented in 1960 that "Rudolf Gopaz (sic) ... has again found his best form of expression in his favourite small boats..."¹³ Although he continued to paint inland landscapes as well as portraits and other genre subjects including still life, they became occasional items in his total production. From 191 works known to have been exhibited during the 1950s and 1960s, more than a quarter were seascapes, many including fishing boats.¹⁴ But in 1961 all, and in 1962 almost half, of the works exhibited were maritime subjects.¹⁵

Barr suggests that Gopas's attraction to maritime subjects resulted from an immigrants need for reminders of the past. Gopas harboured strong memories of his childhood in Silute and his paintings from memory of the Baltic coast together with those of the New Zealand coastline are seen to form "a fusion of past and present The common theme of the sea and boats acted as a bridge between the old and the new."¹⁶

Yet the Kaikoura and Lyttelton fishing boats, with their Baltic and hence European associations, may have been seen by Gopas as appropriate to the European painting styles he wished to explore. At various times, as he was attracted to different influences, Gopas seems to have chosen subjects which he felt were appropriate to those styles. My Chair, [35,62] painted in 1956, when Gopas was studying van Gogh, was a deliberate adoption of the artist's well known image. Gopas was consciously "retracing my capacities in relation to European expressionistic painting".¹⁷

Gopas may well have felt more confident experimenting with new styles on a familiar subject. Or, it may be that, once established in New Zealand, Gopas returned to the styles of his student days. Some works, such as Boats c.1955, [32,59] and Fishing Boats, Baltic Sea, c.1950, [15,23] which portray the distinctive hull and sail shapes of Baltic fishing boats, recall Fishermen's Boats (Boats in Nida) of 1937 by the Lithuanian artist A. Gudaitis, which Gopas had probably seen in Kaunas. At The Group show of 1960 Gopas exhibited a work titled Boats of Nida and although its whereabouts are now unknown, there are obvious parallels.

The earlier trips inland to Central Otago that Gopas had made from Dunedin were replaced with visits to coastal areas. By 1960 Gopas owned a motor car and spent much time making sketching trips to the Lyttelton harbour and the Kaikoura coast. Many

works resulted from such visits. Often sketches were worked up in the studio on his return to Christchurch. Rocky Coast Kaikoura, 1959, [43,72] and Boats at Brooklands, 1960, [52,85] are examples.¹⁸

The latter painting embodied Gopas's perception of the essence of nature in New Zealand. "New Zealand", he declared, "when it comes to the action of nature is a turbulent country."¹⁹ An exhibition catalogue drew attention to the importance he attributed to studying from nature, commenting "Nature studies, drawings and colour sketches have always been considered a necessary part of this painter's formative process".²⁰ He was particularly impressed with Petrus van der Velden's Otira Gorge, c.1890, hanging in the Canterbury Society of Arts, to which he drew his student's attention.²¹ With van der Velden he also shared a common interest in the chiaroscuro lighting of Rembrandt, which became of increasing significance to him.²²

German Expressionists, especially members of Die Brücke, also made trips away from the city, to the country and seaside. But then earlier painters, including Cézanne, had also emphasised this practice.²³ However, although some members of Die Brücke visited the Baltic coast and made paintings of the coast and sea, such subject matter was not typical of the group. Rather, they were concerned with the human image, which frequently took ugly or grotesque form in their works, as the painters revealed the seamy side of life, the miserable, the downtrodden and the misfits; the agonies and evils of mankind.

In contrast, Gopas's boats and boathouses make reference to human existence only in an indirect way. The distorted, tortured human figures, common to much Die Brücke painting, are largely absent from Gopas's oeuvre. Works revealing the psychology of human distress and anxiety like those of Erich Heckel, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Emil Nolde, are limited to occasional works such as Self-portrait, 1965, [61,102] and Figure Study - Immigrant Series, 1952, [20,40].²⁴ Certainly the desire to shock and disturb the viewer with images of social distress is not evident in Gopas's work at this time and his concern for humanity, expressed through grotesque images of man, only emerges in his later works.

There are some examples of boat and seascapes among the work of Die Brücke, such as Schmidt-Rottluff's Boats in Harbour, 1913, or Heckel's Harbour Entrance, Ostend, 1917, while other painters, including Oskar Kokoschka, van Gogh, André Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck, Georges Seurat and Paul Signac occasionally painted scenes of boats and harbours.

Gopas's choice of subject matter is closer in spirit to that of Der Blaue Reiter painters, who were generally more concerned with the underlying tensions and harmonies in the natural world than the pressures and distortions of modern man which Die Brücke painted. Landscapes are more numerous among Kandinsky's paintings than amongst those of individual Die Brücke painters and Franz Marc was also attracted by his natural environment, although the latter was more concerned with the wild animals, which inhabited the forests and grasslands.

In Marc's paintings animals and nature are interfused with each other. Similarly, Gopas's boats become a part of their harbours or shorelines. In Coast, Landscape, 1959, [42,71] the boats are not imposing structures on a watery background but receive equal treatment and appear as an integral part of the scene.

Although superficial comparisons of subject matter may be somewhat fruitless, at a more profound level there is a greater similarity. The German Expressionists painted subjects which held meaning for them and Gopas, also, in repeatedly painting maritime subjects, was responding to an image of importance to him.

The paintings of neither Die Brücke nor Der Blaue Reiter were limited to the creation of likenesses of a scene or place painted in a visually descriptive manner. In Boats at Kaikoura, c.1955-58, [38,66] Gopas moved away from a naturalistic rendering, in which the colour, form and arrangement of the objects depicted relate directly to those in the objective world, toward a mode of expression closer to that of many modern European painters.

Landscape, 1960, [48,78] is coloured with bright blues, reds and greens, sharing the radiant colour harmonies of Marc's Animal Destinies, 1913, which give the animal forms a strength and power beyond their natural appearances.

Although the lyrical colours of Kandinsky's Compositions are absent from these works, Gopas was influenced by his ideas on the relationship between the expressive power of music and pigment. In Landscape, [48,78] Gopas used "colour musically transformed" and commented that "any painter of capacity paints the musical colours they wish to see rather than imitating the colours ...".²⁵ Both his fellow teachers and his students recall him frequently mentioning Kandinsky.²⁶

But the Fauves and Parisian Expressionists also used vibrant colours and Gopas mentioned Matisse and Derain in relation to his work.²⁷ He also understood the musical colour theories of Cuirlionis, whose musical imagery developed in the Zvaigzdziau Sonata series, 1908, was a profound influence.²⁸

Gopas's palette gradually became subdued and restricted to darker tonalities, with touches of pure primaries in small spots to enliven his pictures. In these works, the brighter hues stand out in strong intensity against black, Prussian blue and viridian. The Trawlers, c. 1960, [51,84] is predominantly viridian, burnt umber and black in colour with cadmium yellow and red applied in isolated strokes. Like the lurid almost garish colours of Nolde's Last Supper, 1909, in which yellows and oranges blaze against black, the reds in Harbour Nocturne, 1970, [71,114] glow from the darkness. But Georges Rouault, whose sombre yet rich colours emanate from emphatic outlining, was also a possible influence in Gopas's change of palette.

It is then, difficult to relate Gopas specifically to German Expressionism on the grounds of his use of darker, more intense colours. There are German Expressionist paintings in both intense and lyrical hues while there are also possible alternative sources for his change.

German Expressionist colour, unrestricted to a particular range, whether that of Der Blaue Reiter or of Die Brücke, was determined by the motive for painting. Colours were chosen for their emotive qualities, for the mood or feeling their presence and combination create in a painting. They were unrestrained by reality and tend to be strong and expressive, whether bright or dark. Even in the darkest canvases the colours have an intensity and sharpness which strike the senses and create a particular aura. Gopas understood this use of colour, which is expressive rather than scientific, and his sombre palette, enlivened by brilliant splashes, has a similar poignancy.

Members of Der Blaue Reiter, particularly Kandinsky and Marc, developed a repertoire of colours which were thought to have universally symbolic associations with certain spiritual and emotional states. Gopas was familiar with these colour theories, expressed by Kandinsky in Concerning the Spiritual, and Tony Geddes remembers him reading them aloud in class as the students worked.²⁹ His colours, chosen arbitrarily from the objects they depict, affect the mood of his boat scenes. That his choice of colour was, to some extent, determined by his desire to arouse a particular mood or emotional state is suggested by Boats at Kaikoura, 1960, [49,79] which he thought was "a bit of a cool painting with its predominance of blue and violet".³⁰

In many German Expressionist paintings, the form and shape of objects depicted were distorted in order to increase their expressive power. As with colour, particular forms were exaggerated in a way which emphasises certain qualities and thereby reveals the painter's feelings for the subject.

In The Trawlers, 1959, [44,73] there is little attempt to record the fishing boats in a realistic manner. Gopas sought to emphasise their shapes by outlining them with thick black brushstrokes. In doing this he enhanced the repetitive, rhythmic lines of the curved bows, hanging nets and tall masts. These objects, together with the buoys and cabins, were given enlarged proportions in a similar manner to Kirchner's or Nolde's figure paintings.

Shoreline, 1962, [55,95] is fraught with tension. The slashing strokes of paint form "an expression of nature rather than a description".³¹ Gopas could readily have produced a mimetic work. "Of course I can draw fishing poles ... of course I can draw hills...", he declared. Instead he sought to create "an expression of the forces of nature by the dynamics of brushstrokes and colour ..."³²

The distinctive black lines, which form the images in many of his figure studies and landscapes, recall the way Kirchner and Schmidt-Rottluff used dark outlining to magnify the rounded, voluptuous forms of their figure studies in Milli Asleep, 1909-10, and Three Nudes, 1913.³³ However, Rouault's painting also exhibits this feature, which is traceable through Jungenstil, the cloissionism of the symbolists, to medieval stained glass windows.

Frequently painting in thick oils, which held the mark of the brush, Die Brucke painters formed writhing, swelling, swirling, tortured images with their heavy brushstrokes. This enhanced the tactile quality of their works. They were also interested in wood block printing, at least in part for its textural qualities. Similarly Gopas became increasingly interested in texture although in this he was also influenced by van Gogh and was eventually to extend its possibilities beyond the limits of Die Brucke.

During the 1960s Gopas used various techniques and mediums, as he had done in the 1950s. But as his interest in the expressive potential of texture grew, his experiments with oil paint and various additives became increasingly in evidence. In Boats at Brooklands, 1960, [52,85] he painted in oils on a surface prepared with a fine layer of sawdust while in Boats, 1961, he added sawdust to the paint.

I was beginning to recapture my capacity in oil painting. At the same time experimenting with other techniques. Stretching and framing for oil painting took too long. Here [I] used hardboard. Painted two undercoats then put very fine sawdust into the paint. Enabled use of thin oils. Thin oils on plain board would be unmanageable. It is too smooth and tends to slide away from you.³⁴

He found a rough surface more suited to his desire to apply paint thickly, with vigour and freedom. Landscape, 1960, [48,78] is an oil painting on hardboard in which the strokes of the brush are left broad and obvious. The apparently crude application of paint gives a raw but strong effect. In talking about painting Gopas referred to the surfaces used by Munch, Cézanne and van Gogh, preferring coarse canvas and later hessian to a smooth support.³⁵

Gopas shared the German Expressionists' ability to perceive the essential qualities of objects. In Coast Landscape, 1959, [42,71], inconsequential detail in the natural scene has been eliminated. He has simplified the scene, including only those elements basic to the creation of his floating images. Gopas was not "merely hacking up objects ...".³⁶ From this period his discussion of works reveals their genuinely abstract conception. Even while objective imagery remains recognisable, the compositional and structural aspects of the works were of foremost consideration. Boats at Kaikoura [38,66] is united by a sweeping curve to create "the totality of space", and in Boats at Brooklands [52,85] emphasis and cohesion come from colouration.³⁷

Further, Gopas went beyond a simplification of the visual appearance of the objects he painted. Lyttelton Landscape, 1959, [41,70] and Hillside Lyttelton, 1961, [53,88] suggest that he studied Cézanne and the Cubists. Their lessons, combined with his innate perception, led Gopas to achieve an understanding of the structure of objects and the relationship between them and the space they occupy.

Traditional illusionary perspective was abandoned and the pictorial space reduced so that the interlocking shapes tended to become flattened patterns. In works such as Rocky Coast, Kaikoura [43,72] and Boats at Kaikoura [38,66], reduction of the sky shortened the recession distance while the lack of a strong, consistent light source reduced the three dimensional quality of the images. But although such characteristics are evident in Die Brücke painting, where the lack of adequate natural space creates a feeling of anxiety, they were pioneered by earlier painters such as Pissarro and Cézanne. It may have been through direct study of those painters that Gopas developed these features.

Gopas also admitted the influence of the later works of Frances Hodgkins; "she and me at the age of sixty came to the same ..."³⁸ But more contemporary comparisons can be made. Gopas showed interest in the work of Colin McCahon, whose influence is clearly evident in some works. The curved shapes in shades of brown, green and black, organised in successive registers, of Oaro, 1965, [63,105] are reminiscent of McCahon's Six Days in Nelson and Canterbury, 1959. While Gopas was influenced by such

European masters as Kandinsky and Klee, he was also sensitive to recent and past New Zealand developments.

As a member of Der Blaue Reiter, Kandinsky's paintings moved away from representational imagery, earning him a reputation as the 'Founder of Abstract Expressionism'.³⁹ Similarly Gopas moved towards abstraction in Red and Blue, 1964, [56,97] where there is very little that is recognisable as objective reality. The floating geometric shapes, circles, triangles and squares, recall the dark outlined shapes of Klee's Dark Voyage or even Death and Fire, of 1940.

But Gopas's development may have been more complex than this implies. In Coast Landscape, 1959, [42,71] the boats are reduced to pointed oval shapes which echo the mixture of curved and angular forms in the hills and rocks. The zig-zag of diagonal lines, from the background hills, through the rocky out-crop, to the boat at the bottom right corner, which are intersected by the upright masts, create a tight pictorial structure.

The objects and their arrangement are strikingly similar to Boats at Kaikoura, 1960, [49,79]. The areas of blue water and brown land are similar but beyond that there are hill and shed forms with dinghies in front, in the top right corners of both works. There are boat forms moored at the rocky out-crops in both works. Both works have boats dragged ashore in the centre and a floating dinghy at the bottom right of their compositions. This suggests that the former work is also a Kaikoura subject.

In Boats at Kaikoura, [49,79] the objects are immediately recognisable while in Coast Landscape, [42,71] they are suggested. Such similar scenes painted in different ways, clearly demonstrate Gopas's willingness to experiment with different styles. If the more representational work was painted after Coast Landscape, [42,71] as present dating indicates, then the works are evidence that Gopas was not working progressively toward abstraction but rather that he experimented with various methods of portrayal in no predetermined order before reaching his own style.

It would seem that amongst the works Gopas painted in the 1960s, there are some which have several German Expressionist features. Boats at Kaikoura, [38,66] might reasonably be seen to have resulted, at least in part, from the influence of German Expressionism. It is the first major work, painted in oil and measuring 915 x 1225, in which German Expressionist elements are clearly evident. Although Gopas painted a number of imaginative and abstract works soon after his arrival in New Zealand, such as Untitled Composition, 1951, [18,30] and Untitled, 1952, [36], these were slight sketches, small in scale and painted in watercolour or gouache. In some larger works the strokes

of the brush are fluid and abstract but the objects depicted and their colour, form and perspective are based on reality.

The catalogue to the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery retrospective exhibition of Gopas's work attributes Boats at Kaikoura, [38,66] to the year 1955 but this date seems a little early in relation to other works Gopas was painting at that time.⁴⁰ A later date, closer to 1960, seems more probable on stylistic grounds. Furthermore, the signature and date, in red paint at the bottom right corner of the board, appear to read as "Gopas 58". If a date of 1958 is accepted, then the work supports the view that Gopas's painting shows distinct signs of his interest in German Expressionism only after a period of almost ten years in New Zealand.

The work was begun with preliminary sketches made during a trip to Kaikoura and contains references to the area.⁴¹ It is both a response to nature and a response to a meaningful subject and place to which he returned on many occasions. At the same time the pictorial elements are no longer determined by a specific scene.

The colour range has been restricted to ochres, Prussian blue and black with cadmium red largely confined to touches on the boats and boathouses. Their forms, and those of the surrounding hills, have been reduced to simplified shapes outlined in black, which are suggestive rather than descriptive of the objects. The horizon is high with little visible sky so that the foreground and sea area appear to be immediately before the spectator. The scene is painted in broad, vigorous brushstrokes. The whole has a somewhat silent quality of foreboding, whose undefineable nature is unsettling. The work might readily be compared to much Die Brücke painting although it also suggests an influence from Rouault and perhaps earlier painters such as Cézanne.

Red and Blue, 1964, [56,97] appears strikingly different and might be seen as Gopas's last 'German Expressionist' painting. It is comparable to those of *Der Blaue Reiter*, although the work also has the textural, painterly quality and dark outlining of *Die Brücke* and Rouault's painting. The abstract shapes, which float in space, have little to suggest that their imagery was drawn from the objective world. They recall works by Klee. More significantly, as Barr explained, Gopas was conscious of Kandinsky's colour theory in which music and pigment were seen to have correlating 'tones'. However, Cuirilionis had also created musical imagery which deeply affected Gopas.

Both works clearly owe a debt to German Expressionism, but the former is influenced by *Die Brücke*, while the latter shares more with *Der Blaue Reiter*. Therefore, although both suggest a German Expressionist influence, they differ

considerably from one another. Not only that, both include features from other sources and contain aspects which were foreign to that movement. While the former work contains vestiges of Gopas's representational studies, the latter gives intimations of new directions.

These works suggest that, while he was significantly influenced by German Expressionism during these years, he did not model himself on one particular German Expressionist painter, nor follow exclusively either of its two principal groups.

The German Expressionist movement is characterised by diversity rather than cohesion; a feature of much twentieth century art. The tendency to categorise artists into separate groups or movements is sometimes unsuitable when identifying pictorial features and Gopas should not be fixed too closely to any one movement. Although geographically and in time he was close to German Expressionism during his student days, it is questionable how much of that influence he absorbed at that time. It seems possible that he 'discovered' or rather 'rediscovered' German Expressionism through publications and reproductions after his arrival in New Zealand and that at various periods he 'discovered' different movements and styles, including post-impressionism, cubism and later primitive art and the old masters, and was drawn to each in turn.

Although Gopas's works cannot be confined to the category of German Expressionism, it seems true to say that many of the painters who attracted Gopas, were expressionist in a broad sense. In discussing *My Chair*, 1956, [35,62] he recalled "retracing my capacities in relation to European expressionistic painting" and it is not surprising to see him at various stages admiring the work of van Gogh and Gauguin, who are closely linked with twentieth century movements, but also earlier mystics such as Blake and Rembrandt.⁴² His taste for literature also reflects this bias, for he enjoyed the romantic writers such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.⁴³ In philosophy, it was Neitzche rather than Bergson he admired.

It is tempting to try to establish a line of development in Gopas's painting, to see his works in sequence, progressing from one stage to another, absorbing influences and moving on. However, Gopas's works do not willingly submit to such discussion.

Rudi explains his painting always came in cycles. At the beginning of each cycle he would revert to earlier works for assurance that he'd not forgotten his skills.⁴⁴

The influence of some elements of German Expressionism, which seem to be most pronounced in the works discussed, must be seen as one of a number of

movements and styles of painting which attracted Gopas at different stages of his development. It is not possible to trace a linear progression from one style to another for he moved backwards and forwards, consolidating and progressing.

His involvement with German Expressionism, its aesthetic and its pictorial features, reveals Gopas as a thinking artist. Not content with superficial mimicking, he looked beyond appearances to the inner qualities of the movement.

But even in these years, German Expressionism was only one of several movements to attract his attention. He was willing to experiment with various styles, incorporating elements into his own work as he found appropriate. In his works, the external influences were bent to his own purpose and no works were directly derivative from those of his mentors. He studied and learned from the painters he admired without becoming tied to slavish imitation. Gopas took some things from one painter and some from another but he is not heavily indebted to any and this is part of his achievement.

The paintings in which German Expressionist characteristics are most prevalent are those of boat, fishing and harbour subjects. As Gopas moved into a new subject area so too did his pictorial characteristics change. The following galactic works cannot be described as German Expressionist.

Overall the works from this period show an increasing interest in and absorption of outside influences as he moved away from the naturalistic style of many of the portraits and landscapes of the 1950s and towards a mode of expression of his own. At this time he was "more inclined to give preference to the dynamics of nature rather than to space as a unity".⁴⁵ That was not to become an all absorbing preoccupation until the cosmic paintings of later years.

While some of the works of this period benefit from comparison with German Expressionist works, Gopas soon developed in a new direction, changing his subject matter and with it his painting methods, style and perhaps also his approach to painting. Rather than being a German Expressionist painter, or even continuing "to work from where the Expressionists left off", Gopas worked through various movements and styles, including aspects of Die Brucke and Der Blaue Reiter, before emerging a mature artist and arriving at a style which is not only recognisably his own but is also a little different from anything that has gone before.⁴⁶

Endnotes to Chapter Four:

- 1 Press (Christchurch), 22 July 1960, documentary material, J. & M. Barr collection.
- 2 Press, 11 October 1961, Canterbury Public Library, New Zealand Room, newspaper collection, also Rudolf Gopas Exhibition, E.C., one man show, Durham Street Art Gallery, Christchurch, 14 - 22 July 1962.
- 3 G. Docking, Two Hundred Years of New Zealand Painting, (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1971), p 167, also G. Brown, New Zealand Painting 1940 -1960 Conformity and Dissension, (Wellington: QEII Arts Council (N.Z.), 1981), p 67.
- 4 G. Brown & H. Keith, An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839 - 1967, (Auckland: Collins, 1969), p146, also J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, (New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1982), p 10.
- 5 Letter: William Sutton to K. F., 5 October 1987.
- 6 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982. Recorded comments by Gopas on his paintings.
- 7 Letter: Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Arles, midAugust, 1888, M. Roskill,ed, The Letters of Vincent van Gogh, (London: Fontana, 1963), pp 276-279
- 8 New Zealand Herald (Auckland), 13 May 1967, Auckland Public Library, newspaper collection.
- 9 R. Gopas, Nature Speaks, Poems of Reason and Disgust, MS., 1976-'77, private collection, Dunedin.
- 10 Interview: Jonathan Mané with K. F., 29 April 1986.
- 11 Interview: Michael Trumic with K. F., 2 June 1987.
- 12 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982. Gopas thought art should educate.
- 13 Christchurch Star-Sun (Christchurch), 8 Oct 1960, Canterbury Public Library, New Zealand Room, newspaper collection.
- 14 The following is a list of the sources, comprising exhibition catalogues and newspaper reviews, for the information that 191 works by Gopas were shown between 1950 and 1969:
Otago Art Society (Dunedin), Otago Art Society Annual Exhibition Catalogue, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, also Otago Daily Times (Dunedin), 10 February 1951, p 3, review of one man exhibition held in Dunedin Public Library, also The Group (Christchurch), The Group Annual Exhibition Catalogue, 1951, 1953, 1954, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961,

- 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, also
 Auckland City Art Gallery (Auckland), Contemporary New Zealand Painting, E. C., 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1965, also
Rudolf Gopas Exhibition, E.C., one man show, Durham Street Art Gallery, Christchurch, 14 - 22 July 1962, (48 works showed plus 20 Kaikoura Sketches not included in this count because their particular subjects are not indicated by individual titles), also
 Auckland City Art Gallery, Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Ceramics, E.C., 1964-65, also
 QEII Arts Council (N.Z.), Contemporary Painting in New Zealand, 1965, also
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- 17 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982. See J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 22, for a discussion of the affinities in motif and style between the work by Gopas and Vincent's Chair, 1888, by Vincent van Gogh.
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- 21 Letter: Nola Barron (Christchurch) to K. F., 14 October 1987.
- 22 T. L. R. Wilson, Petrus van der Velden (1837 - 1913) Hague School in New Zealand, (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1976), pp 56-57.
- 23 Letter: Paul Cézanne to Charles Camoin, 22 February 1903, in H. Chipp, Theories of Modern Art. A Source Book by Artists and Critics, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p 18.
- 24 These works are discussed in Chapter Three.
- 25 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982.
- 26 Letters: William Sutton to K. F., 5 October 1987, Rosemary Greer to K. F., 11 October 1987.

- 27 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982.
- 28 Interview: Jonathan Mané with K. F., 29 April 1986.
- 29 W. Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, (New York, Wittenborn, 1947) M. Sadler tr., also Letter: Tony Geddes to K. F., 14 October 1987.
- 30 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Sleeping Woman, 1959, [40,68] and Rocky Coast, Kaikoura, 1959, [43,72] are examples.
- 34 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982.
- 35 Ibid. Gopas believed such methods to have been unknown in New Zealand before he introduced the students at art school to them. Although McCahon produced his Northland panels in 1958, using a coarsely textured hessian support, Gopas may have found his students to be generally unaware of it.
- 36 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 17.
- 37 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 H. Osborne, ed. The Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Art, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p 621.
- 40 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, pp 21, 23, 59.
- 41 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 R. Gopas, Nature Speaks, MS., Hocken Library, Dunedin contains reference to these writers in particular.
- 44 Letter: Airini Gopas to Mary Barr, 27 April 1982.
- 45 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982.
- 46 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 10.

CHAPTER FIVE

'EMERGENCE AND BECOMING'

The cosmic works of the 1960s and 1970s

An astronomer as well as a painter, [Gopas] goes beyond the global and produces cosmic images.¹

In May, 1967 Gopas exhibited Galactic Landscapes at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland.² The exhibition of twenty works was Gopas's first definitive statement of his commitment to a new type of painting, although it also included four retrospective paintings. It was important for showing the new direction in which he was moving.

The paintings of the early 1960s largely centered on terrestrial subjects, rivers and beaches, in which a human element was implied by the presence of man made objects such as fishing boats and boat houses. In those works, visually familiar and identifiable objects were included, although their portrayal tended to be interpretive and expressive rather than descriptive. A few works showed Gopas moving toward abstraction, eliminating recognisable imagery. Most included various influences, that of German Expressionism being the most pervasive.

In the cosmic works, there was a change in both the subject and the portrayal of the subject. Gopas's attention moved from his earthly environment to the wider universe he viewed through his telescope and the elimination of reference to immediate objective reality was accompanied by an increasingly abstract appearance in his art.

From an early age, Gopas had looked outwards, beyond his immediate physical surroundings.³ Star-gazing became astronomy as he began recording his observations of the moon, planets and stars. Eventually, such observations led him to develop his own theories and to draw his own conclusions about the universe. These astronomical interests began to enter his painting in this period. While initially, and for many years, his painterly and astronomical concerns remained separate activities, after 1964 Gopas increasingly assimilated them into a unified form of expression.

Not only astronomy, but also his other spheres of interest were introduced so that printing, photography, poetry and astronomy, moulded by his philosophical and cosmological beliefs, began to appear in various combinations in his work. The content, which reflected his beliefs about the universe, became increasingly important in his art.

The works assumed a mystic quality as Gopas sought to come to terms with man's relation to the universe. They are mystical in the sense of being mysterious and awe-inspiring. The simplicity and concentration of subjects and their portrayal give the works a monumentality despite their modest physical scale.⁴ Whether Gopas presented the galactic phenomenon viewed closely or from a far, many of the pictures achieve a sense of limitless space which conveys the overwhelming infinity of the universe.

But the works are also mystical in the sense of being spiritual, transcending human comprehension. Gopas declared that he "detached [himself] intuitively from all religious Creeds and Institutions and practices already at Sunday school - becoming a positive Agnostic by conviction and reasoning at the age of 15 or 16."⁵ Despite being critical of religious institutions and practices, however, he believed in a universal force which, for man, was embodied in the sun. Through his study of the universe, Gopas achieved an apprehension of spiritual truth which he expressed in the cosmic works.

In the vastness of the universe in which one galaxy stretches to the next indefinitely, Earth becomes infinitely small and man utterly insignificant. As his astronomical studies made him increasingly aware of this, Gopas sought to convey man's relationship to the universe in his paintings. His later works took on the new dimension of a socio-political message as he became concerned at man's ability to upset the natural balances of the universe by a destructive lifestyle and political power struggles. He became particularly concerned about the potential for destruction of nuclear power and armament.

The content, in many of the works, was conveyed by the use of colour, the organisation of the forms and the textural quality of the picture surface. In the later works, Gopas introduced written words to augment his message and expand his visual imagery.⁶

In this process, the obvious German Expressionist features diminished and the portrayal became more abstract. It is possible to identify painters from various periods and countries with whom Gopas shared similar ideas, but obvious stylistic dependencies were eliminated. As German Expressionist and other influences diminished, concern with space, time and light became more predominant in his painting. This reflects Gopas's strengthening belief that the answers to questions of existence lay in the wider universe. His conversations with his closest associates and his personal writings reveal his developing theories regarding space travel and alternative life forms in the galaxy.⁷

Gopas's development of a new form of expression emerged only gradually and

it's evolution can be traced. The cosmic works exhibited as Galactic Landscapes in 1967, were preceded by several transitional works, including Ageing Galaxies, 1964, [58,99] and Movement, 1965, [59,100] . These works first introduce astronomical subject matter but do not contain overt statements regarding Gopas's personal views and opinions. They are experimental in technique and progressive in style but they remain traditional paintings, being in paint on board within a frame.

But even earlier works foreshadow these developments. Such works as Red and Blue, [56,97] and Orange Centre, [57,98] both of 1964, suggest something of his growing concern with space, light and time, and contain some evidence of the changing pictorial characteristics, particularly in the use of colour and form. Gopas's recognition of the importance of earlier works to his later developments is suggested by their inclusion in his first one man exhibition of cosmic works. Gopas's manner of development was such that there were no definite breaks, where one style stopped and a new one began.

The Galactic Landscapes were soon followed by a further series of works, Paintings for the Sun, 1975-76. These introduce literary comment by the artist regarding his philosophical, political and social views, although such comment is generally balanced with pictorial imagery. They are mixed media works which begin to bring together Gopas's various areas of interest.

Finally, Gopas adopted yet another approach and exploited new technology in a substantial body of prints which fully integrate his many interests and contain overt personal statements about his political and philosophical concerns. Many of these works were incorporated into a book, intended for publication; Nature Speaks. They are Gopas's most original contribution to New Zealand art.

Careful study of these major series of works reveals their distinguishing features and indicates something of the artist's intentions. There are sources and stylistic influences for the works and they can be seen within the context of New Zealand painting. This is important in determining Gopas's contribution to New Zealand art.

The nature of Gopas's reception altered after the first cosmic works were exhibited and contemporary critical opinion is of interest.

As early as 1963 the reviewer for the Christchurch Press noted that Gopas had "struck out in new colour directions" in works of a galactic type such as Seconds in Infinity, n.d. and Attempted Transcendence, n.d..⁸ While he had some problem in formulating his criticism of this new type of painting, he noted that "Mr Gopas is working in haunting and mysterious harmonies."⁹

The difficulty for reviewers was, perhaps, in determining the degree and type of abstraction with which they were dealing. To the extent that the galactic works portrayed planets and nebulae in space they were representational paintings but in raising profound questions about creation and arousing a sense of awe and mystery in the viewer they were abstractions.

In reviewing "four beautifully hung works of an artist who has been climbing steadily in recent years" the writer commended his colour but commented

"Area of Quietness", though, contains a long shape which is almost too dark: the slight bumps of mounting coarse canvas or hessian on its support reflect incidental light in a disturbing and unintentional way.¹⁰

The next group show, in 1965, had the reviewer searching for superlatives.

R. Gopas once again takes one's breath away by the development that has occurred in his painting during the last 12 months. Superb textures and mysterious colour effects produce passages of indescribable loveliness.¹¹

He was, however, still uncertain in his praise and added

But the nagging thought refuses to be put away, will these pictures survive, will one become tired of them in 10 months or so?¹²

That year Hamish Keith was still trying to fit him into an outmoded concept of regionalism.¹³ By the end of 1966, however, such doubts and uncertainties had been extinguished. It was noted that "R. Gopas is steadily and quietly exploring Unchartered Regions."¹⁴

With the exhibition of Galactic Landscapes Gopas reached the height of his reputation as a New Zealand painter.¹⁵ Now he was counted not only as a leading painter but as something of a national figure of public interest and he was made the subject of a lengthy interview in the New Zealand Herald. His colourful personality, almost as much as his 'colourful' works contributed to the general curiosity and the reporter commented that

To interview him is rather like stalking a hedgehog. At first he is more than spiky on the subject of painting and especially newspapers interest in it. "Painting is not a subject for mass media", he says. "The very nature of art is that it will interest only a small group of people."¹⁶

Nevertheless Gopas went on to expound his philosophy of art.

1. A painter's obligation is to his painting, and painting is work, work, work.
2. Students come into the school with a very haphazard background in art. New Zealand education and way of life do little to exploit a natural

understanding of abstract elements.

3. Art evokes a global form, not a national one, therefore-

4. This craze by New Zealanders to find THE New Zealand painter is dangerous. All it will do is produce a closed school of painters.¹⁷

This constitutes, perhaps, the most direct and succinct evidence of his view of himself as an international rather than national painter, much less a regional one. Yet he recognised his debt to New Zealand, admitting "I'm grateful to have the opportunity for quietness and peace in which to develop my ideas."¹⁸

Ageing Galaxies, 1964, [58,99] might be taken as Gopas's first cosmic painting. The title, which announces the subject matter, gives the seemingly abstract work objective meaning. The curving and shooting lines suggest orbital paths while the patches of light and dark shapes might be stars and planets.

The divergent and intersecting lines create a sense of depth in three dimensional space, despite the lack of conventional, linear perspective. The picture frame forms a window on a part of space, rather than forming a barrier which limits and defines the boundaries of the composition. Space is a continuum, which extends beyond the confines of the frame and the picture's two dimensional surface. Other painters in New Zealand were experimenting with such concepts about this time, investigating the possibilities of denying the boundary of the frame. This was further developed by Richard Kileen who dispensed with the frame altogether.

With Gopas, to suggest the undefinable, the intangible, became a growing concern.¹⁹ The extension of space enhances the indefinable, ephemeral quality of the work. There is a sense of movement and change. Ageing Galaxies, [58,99] is not a portrayal of a fixed immobile or inanimate object or scene. The refusal to delimit the composition also tends to free the composition from a fixed point in time. There is a sense of the fluidity and continual flux of space in time. Something of the progression of time is suggested by the the word 'ageing' used in the title.²⁰

During this period, Gopas became increasingly sensitive to the importance of light which is vital to life as we know it and he sought a way to express his reverence for light. Rembrandt remained an important influence in this respect. Previously, Gopas had been interested in Rembrandt's chiaroscuro lighting effects which he used to intensify the mood of a work. With Ageing Galaxies, [58,99] however, the light has taken on such importance as to become part of the subject of the painting itself. The work was painted predominantly in sombre hues from which the brighter colours emerge as light from darkness.

Gopas's concern increasingly centered on the three elements of space, time and

light and they continued to preoccupy him in subsequent works such as Movement, [59,100] painted in the following year. But there are also earlier works, in which these concerns were beginning to emerge. Pacific Coast III, 1965, [62,104] and Oaro, 1965, [63,105] have a lunar quality with crater like floating curves. Other works, such as Orange Centre, [57,98] and Red and Blue, [56,97] painted in the same year, also show Gopas to be concerned with concepts of space and with spatial relationships.

However, these works are distinguished from the cosmic works by their dependence on strong stylistic influences. The former works are reminiscent of McCahon's earthly landscapes such as Landscape Theme and Variation: Series A, 1963, while the latter recall Paul Klee. Furthermore, there is nothing in any of these works to directly connect them with cosmic subject matter. Any such connection would be surmise based on his later developments.

There are also elements in the materials and method of portrayal which were already evident in earlier works.

Ageing Galaxies, [58,99] combines oil and P.V.A. on ivoryboard covered with hessian. These heavy media enabled Gopas to build the textural quality of his work. The paint held the mark of the brush in ridges and swirls, while the thick weave of the hessian helped to bind the paint to the picture support. The weave also enhanced the uneven appearance of the surface, creating the effect of coarse canvas. Gopas exaggerated the textural qualities, which had begun to emerge in earlier works such as Landscape, 1960, [48,78] and moved away from a traditional smooth finish.

Gopas had introduced P.V.A. into Orange Centre, [57,98] and Red and Blue, [56,97] and it gradually came to replace his use of oils. He commented that the fast drying characteristics of P.V.A. allowed him to build layer upon layer of paint without having to tolerate long drying periods. This enabled him to continue working at and developing a single canvas without the delays involved with painting in oils. P.V.A. allowed Gopas to paint a modern subject in a traditional manner.²¹

Gopas had reduced his palette to darker hues perviously in many of his boat and coastal landscape subjects. This trend continued so that eventually many of his works were monochromatic. However, while initially the change in palette may have been prompted by the sombre and moody paintings of Die Brucke as in Boats at Kaikoura, [38,66] in these works the choice of colour reflects his beliefs about the formation of the universe.

The predominance of dark colours, with dashes of bright hues symbolised the

universe's essential qualities of light and darkness. The German Expressionists had also been concerned with discovering the essence of their world and Gopas's ideas may have been stimulated by German Expressionist beliefs but the cosmic works go beyond such concerns. Gopas "was intent to have light come out of darkness as with the paintings of Rembrandt. He realised a cosmic fact that at first there is darkness".²² Petrus van der Velden wrote "'Rembrandt and Jesus have the same meaning'; 'Rembrandt made a study of light during his life and Jesus did nothing else'".²³ Although the specifically Christian reference has been replaced with a mystic one, the resemblance between the nineteenth and twentieth century European immigrant artists is striking.

Gopas was increasingly attracted to 'old masters' and his admiration for Rembrandt and Leonardo in particular was frequently stated in later years. Attempting to find a place for himself in all existence, anthropomorphic Renaissance art was relevant, as well as existential products of German Expressionism.

Ageing Galaxies, [58,99] and other works of the same time such as Movement, 1965, [59,100] can, therefore, be seen as transitional works, containing the beginnings of Gopas's major new concerns, but continuing and developing some of his previous techniques.

The works in the Galactic Landscapes exhibition show this transition to be complete. Gopas continued to develop and expand his concepts in later works, but in this collection of works he clearly stated his aims.

To use very tangible texture in order to suggest something intangible. To produce paintings for 'Living Light' revealing different aspects with the changing moods of light. To suggest a state of Emergence and Becoming, rather than to interpret finalized forms.²⁴

The title of the exhibition clearly stated the works to be a portrayal of existence beyond our immediate planet. But the use of the word 'landscape' with its earthly associations, suggests that the spectator is intended to view that existence as an extension of this world. The various titles of the individual works, such as Great Looped Nebula, n.d. and Milky Way, n.d., demonstrate that the works record various galactic phenomenon.²⁵

In quoting Etienne Gilson, however, Gopas drew attention to the abstract nature of his method. He did not choose the subject and or the title first and then continue to paint it. Rather, "it is the Plastic Form which causes the painting, and the painting in its turn causes the title".²⁶

Each work is conceived as a composition in itself and yet the series of works also forms a balanced whole. The works are successful as abstract compositions but they can

forms a balanced whole. The works are successful as abstract compositions but they can also be seen as a number of views of the galaxy, like a series of panoramic photographs of a geographic landscape. Gopas commented, "when the paintings became to suggest Galaxies and Nebulae, it was only natural for me to follow this direction."²⁷

The works continue and expand the preoccupation with space, time and light evident in Ageing Galaxies, [58,99] and Movement, [59,100] but this is achieved by exploring the expressive potentials of texture and colour to a degree unprecedented in his earlier works.

The rhythm and motion of the swirls of paint suggest vortexes and nebulae in space. Because the forms in paint have no tangible frame of reference within the context of the painting, they appear to float in an indeterminate void. They are abstract and yet their titles encourage the viewer to make objective connections. They are reminiscent of scientific photographs of moon and planet activity or satellite weather pictures which capture the atmospheric effects of cloud and wind.

The texture, to a large extent, forms the subject in each work. Although apparently randomly and abstractly placed, the textural additions are massed together or drawn out in strands to create planet or nebula forms. In the Galactic Landscapes, the textured surfaces give the paintings a physical depth which enhances the illusory depth of the works. The texture helps to create the sense of space with which Gopas was preoccupied. By projecting from the picture surface, it gives the works a tactile depth thereby increasing the apparent spacial recession. The swirling forms appear to extend indefinitely in every direction in a similar though more convincing manner to Ageing Galaxies, [58,99].

Accretions of various materials, which give body to the paint, were introduced by Gopas in earlier works. In Boats, 1961, [89], Gopas added sawdust to oil paint to augment the surface texture of the work. But in these cosmic paintings texture received even greater emphasis. He began experimenting with different types of paint, including acrylic and P.V.A. to which he added a variety of coarse particles. The surfaces of Nowhere, 1967, [67,109] and Little Cluster, n.d., two Galactic Landscapes, were built up with iron filings while Golden Past, 1965, [64,106] introduced grit and later works such as Cluster, 1968, [68,111] used ceramic chips, grit and iron filings which form a relief surface in the paint. The rough and irregular angles of the chip and grit inclusions catch the light at a variety of angles. The reflective quality of the shiny surfaces draws attention to itself. Even in reproduction the importance of the light to the conception of the work is clearly evident.

Gopas sent the New Vision Gallery detailed instructions for exhibiting the works and invented an ingenious lighting mechanism which would constantly alter the light falling on them. He wrote "Lighting will cause some difficulty as all the "Galactic Landscapes" work on Reflections and are designed to change with the mood of Daylight - (or the pass of the sun)."²⁸ He suggested:

An idea would be a mobile with 2 150 watt lights, which could easily be put together hung from the ceiling so that if necessary it can be adjusted by hand it would slowly move about with air movement in the room and so every no (sic) and again produce some fleeting highlights on the paintings.²⁹

A static, uniform light source falling on the paintings would show the works in only one way. Gopas was concerned that the works should be seen under changing conditions.

The Impressionists realised the changes in perceived reality caused by different weather and light conditions. Gopas, in a sense, extended this concept to include the painting itself, which he saw as changing with changes in the light falling on it. This suggests that Gopas thought of his works as realities in themselves, which react to their environment, rather than portrayals of reality. He required that the "Paintings ... be lifted from the wall with 3" nails or hooks to enhance their plastic nature."³⁰

Inclusions in the paint, particularly the ceramic chips and iron filings, combined with shiny paints, such as P.V.A., enamel and varnish, reflect the light and reveal the effects of light on the painted surfaces. The altering appearance of the paintings, caused by the falling light, gives the works a sense of change and hence progression through time. The works were an investigation into the universe and portray the universe in a state of constant flux.

The surfaces are carefully constructed with regard to colour. The thick globules of paint used for texture in earlier works such as Landscape, 1960, [48,78] or Shoreline, 1962, [55,95] are reduced in favour of inclusions. The use of colour is at once more subtle and yet more significant. Many of the works of the series appear to be painted in a limited colour range. M42 Orionis, 1966, [66,108] is predominantly ochre and green but closer investigation reveals a myriad of different hues. There are spots of bright yellow, blue and red and many shades between. They are tiny yet significant to the work's conception, easily overlooked by the cursory viewer, yet vital to the depth and life of the work.

The compositions are simple and uncluttered and yet, in their nuances of colour and light, created by the hues and textures, they are endlessly fascinating.

In addition to the works of the Galactic Landscapes exhibition, there were many others such as Dark Planet, 1965, [66,107], Cluster, 1968, [68,111] and Nebula, 1969, [69,112] which were exhibited separately but contain many of the same elements identified in the galactic series. He continued to produce such works as Forming Matter, 1972, [72,117] into the early 1970's. These portray types of cosmic image, in richly textured P.V.A. paint, with dashes of bright and varied colour.

Gopas stated "I thought the galactic paintings were the best paintings of my life. Afterwards [I] began to muster my resources and went into my greatest period."³¹

With the Paintings for the Sun series, produced between December 1975 and February 1976, Gopas introduced new developments.³² The generalised aims of the Galactic Landscapes series were replaced by a more tightly defined programme to present "a new Realist Cosmic Image and Solar Life Form".³³

Gopas's study of astronomy led him to something of an understanding of the way in which one galaxy extends into the next. Through his knowledge of galactic activity, including planet formation, he came to appreciate the universe as an organic, living structure, the parts of which are interdependent for harmony and balance. He recognised that within this infinitely vast universe, mankind is miniscule, a tiny part of a single solar system, dependent on the sun for existence. And yet, though small, mankind is, like other life forms, an essential part of the universe. Man has special qualities and should strive to maintain harmony but also has terrifying destructive potential. Atomic particles were, for Gopas, the underlying link between all existence, from mankind, Earth and the sun to this galaxy and the universe. But, perverted by man, the atom has immense and horrifying power to destroy, to upset the delicate balance of the universe.³⁴

The Paintings for the Sun were given a definite communicative role. Through them, Gopas sought to convey his message of concern about the effects of man's activities on the universe. Gopas assumed the role of prophet.

The series consists of twelve works which were conceived as a complete and balanced, compositional whole. There is a sense of progression from one work to the next and yet also a sense of unity and cohesion. The works are clear and sparse yet varied and interesting.

While many of the compositions are simplified with imagery reduced to a minimum, the series was enriched by the increasingly complex subject matter. His theories about the galaxy found expression in the sun-balls and planets which appear throughout the series.

Gopas had moved away from the highly textured, semi-relief works of the Galactic Landscapes exhibition. However, while the surfaces are frequently smooth, he embellished the series by expanding, still further, the variety of medium used. Acrylic and P.V.A. were joined by crayon, ball-point pen and conté as well as printed paper collage. His last productions saw the introduction of photography, on occasions, and carbon and photocopy printing. His various spheres of interest were also drawn together, with the introduction of poetry into this series.

The series is unified by the consistent colour harmony which is maintained throughout. Subtle nuances of colour were created in the tonal shades of brown in That Narrow Zone of Life, [75,124] and blue in Perhaps You Can Talk with the Weather, [77,126]. But the series was varied by the introduction of highlights in strong colour accents. Orange compliments brown mid-series, in I Conclude, [80,129] and yellow is included in the final work, Anatomy of a Star, [85,134]. These colours appear strong and vibrant against the tones of brown but the intensity is created by overpainting and tonal modulations rather than by using vivid or pure colours.

I Conclude, [80,129] is predominantly orange with dark brown rubbed on the weave of the hessian. The overpainted layers of orange, modulated by the discrete brown tones, create a soft glowing visual sensation. It is a field of warm pulsating colour like the colour-field paintings of Mark Rothko.

Gopas's technique also recalls American Abstract Expressionist methods. While his painting never became as free and abandoned as the action painting of Jackson Pollock, a photograph of Gopas at work shows him to have left the easel, painting with his works laid on the floor.³⁵ This enabled him to move around each edge of his work, painting from any direction. Indeed, in many of his works, it is impossible to determine, from the marks of the brush and the composition, which edge to call the 'top'. This was appropriate to his expression for there is no top or bottom to the galaxy. It seems possible that he did not intend the works to have a 'right-way-up', since in many, this is only established by the words and signature.

The first eight works of Paintings for the Sun depict the sun in space as a glowing light source amidst an infinite blackness. Like diagrammatic maps or star charts, they trace the location of the Earth's sun within the universe.

Name Three Stars, [74,123] attempts to suggest the relationship of the sun to other star systems, Alpha Centauri and Sirius.³⁶ A thin white line marks the distance between this solar system and those far away. Words inscribed close to the frame introduce

something of Gopas's personal astronomical observations. "At an Estimated speed $3/4$ that of light it could have reached us. - That "Disc" in front of the Sun".³⁷

Four subsequent works seem to progress closer to the sun, which appears as a source emitting light and warmth, until the eighth, when the sun is small, dominated by the darkness of space. A sense of movement is created between the works, of approaching and passing the sun.

In I Conclude, [80,129], the sun is a large radiating orb in the bottom quarter of the composition. The work is, in a sense, an expression of Gopas's spiritual beliefs. He pays homage to the sun, rather than God, as the basis of human life, the 'living - loving - seeing' sun. "I Conclude After 60 Years of Observation: No God(s) Anywhere - But a Living SUN - Living - Loving - Seeing."³⁸ Our sun is one of many; "One eye of millions?"³⁹

By You Bastards, [82,131], the sun has become a huge globe, filling the entire composition. Or it may be intended to represent Earth or the moon, as the Barrs suggest.⁴⁰ The dramatic diagonal slashing of the image into two parts, one orange, the other brown, create many opposites and polarities; the opposites of light and dark, life and death, peace and war, preservation and destruction. The brown segment also represents the moon's hidden side, the dark side of the moon. The stuck-on collage inclusions refer to Gopas's belief, more fully expounded in the following work, that the American moon landings were a fraud.

The tenth painting, [80,132] is a pivotal work, with the words of a poem inscribed on the picture's surface. It is a homage to the life giving qualities of the sun, expressing Gopas's major concerns about atomic war, and the deceptive television propaganda of American space exploration. He was not convinced that the Americans had landed on the moon, believing that the related reports, photographs and film footage were a hoax. In the background of the work, Gopas made a reference to India, the location of the Arizona crater, which he believed to be the real site of the supposed American moon landing.⁴¹ The rainbow which arches over the poem is painted in watercolours of soft and delicate hues. Its presence draws attention to the beauty and wonder of natural weather phenomenon. Formed by sunlight on falling rain and with its symbolic associations with good luck and peace, the rainbow's inclusion in That Light of Freedom and of Peace, [83,132] is particularly apposite to Gopas's message.

The final two works of the series are in the nature of diagrammatic studies in which the sun is presented in a semi-scientific manner. I Saw, [84,133] repeats the concept of opposing opposites in the scientific manner of positive and negative while the last work

presents Gopas's rendering of the 'anatomy of a star', [85,134].

The works vary in size from the small Self-Portrait as a Flea, [81,130] measuring 430 x 380 mm, to the large Dedicated to the Living Sun, [79,128] of 1.222 x 1.216 metres. Their individual size perhaps reflects the relative importance Gopas attributed to the subject of each work with the painting embodying the message of the entire series given the largest format.

This was Gopas's final major series of paintings and the one he felt to be his most important. He exhibited it several times in New Zealand, first in April, 1976, at the James Hight Library, University of Canterbury, then in June, at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch and subsequently, in Dunedin during October, at the Bosshard Galleries.⁴²

The repeated showings of the series indicate the importance he attributed to it and his desire to have his message appreciated and understood. To the Barrs he declared, "these are the greatest paintings a man has ever done".⁴³

But their exhibition largely inspired incomprehension and few critics made positive comments. The following year, unhappy with its reception and in order "to bring them away from the ignorance of Kiwis.", he took the series with him on his return to Austria and gifted it to Ehrwald, the town which had sheltered him and his family immediately after the war.⁴⁴ The Paintings for the Sun are currently housed at the Ehrwald County Council and have been exhibited on several occasions, including a show at the Galerie Danté in March 1986.⁴⁵

Gopas had continued to exhibit in the late 1960s and through the 1970s but his reception gradually cooled. At the Several Arts exhibition in 1969 two of his exhibits added "another powerful note to his formidable body of work" and his asking prices were substantially increased.⁴⁶ These and other works on the galactic theme were priced at upto \$ 300.00 when they were shown the following year at Victoria University.⁴⁷ However the critics now seemed uncertain how to regard his work. With The Group show of 1970 it was noted that "Expressionist painting too has firmly entrenched itself in the New Zealand art scene".⁴⁸ But while Gopas was mentioned as an exhibitor nothing was said about his contribution.⁴⁹

In 1971 he held a retrospective one-man show with forty works covering the preceding ten years.⁵⁰ The critics found him hard to categorize and this made them tentatively disparaging. John Oakley found Gopas to be "an eclectic painter, he derives his inspiration from overseas movements and trends."⁵¹ He continued that Head and

Blue Sea, n.d. owed much to Emil Nolde, while Life Forms, n.d. was "reminiscent of the work of Wassily Kandinsky."⁵² He was not impressed by Gopas's use of reflected light, considering that the varnished finish "brings up the colour, but reflections and the scintillations of lights on the broken surfaces becomes disturbing."⁵³ While discussing the figurative works, he liked best what he thought of as an 'abstract' work Forecast for the Decade, n.d..⁵⁴

G.T.M. of the Christchurch Press dealt with the difficulty by stating vaguely "there is no single Gopas style of painting, but rather there is his powerful presence challenging the viewer."⁵⁵

Even in the mid '70s some critics had still not assimilated the galactic works. "The Galaxy painting of Rudi Gopas is still an acquired taste this critic has still not yet acquired" Hamish Keith flatly stated.⁵⁶ Dr Rodney Wilson, in a perceptive paragraph on Gopas in Art New Zealand, came closest to an accurate interpretation of his art and hinted at his emerging mental instability. "Gopas has withdrawn into his art and self".⁵⁷ His art "is a mystical extension of the Copernican sun-centered universe to an ego-centered one."⁵⁸

But Gopas was already moving into his final phase. For a Living Sun at the Bosshard Galleries, 20 September to 8 October 1976, saw the first presentation to the public of his carbon print engravings. These were offered for sale in editions of 48 at \$50.00 each.⁵⁹ In commenting on the exhibition John Middleditch noted the "transfer of the artist to the image" was particularly evident in the more uninhibited graphic works.⁶⁰ While claiming that Gopas "had not really become a New Zealand painter", this was because he was "an international one. These paintings are up to world standards and in world class".⁶¹ In September 1978 Bruce Robinson applauded Gopas's experimental use of photocopying as a tool of the artist rather than merely a cheap means of production. He remarked on the obvious affinity of the works to Leonardo da Vinci and found them "both powerful and beautiful examples of energetic, spontaneous art."⁶² But he did not attempt any interpretation.

The first public showing of Nature Speaks: Poems of Reason and Disgust, [86,135] was held at the Elva Bett Gallery early in 1979.⁶³ Heather Curnow realised that

sharp satire and black humour are the weapons that Gopas uses to attack hypocrisy, conformity, materialism, artistic and intellectual pretensions, the armament race, and man's interference in space, in fact everything which threatens the state of universal peace and harmony which the artist sees as an ideal.⁶⁴

But while noting his complex imagery and numerous influences, she had nothing

to say about his art. Similarly Neil Rowe thought the Gopas exhibition the most interesting of several shows in Wellington at the time but offered no critical comment.⁶⁵ Gordon Brown could only see these recent works as "an indulgence in introspection", while T.J. McNamara considered them to be "turgid and dull".⁶⁶

Nature Speaks continued the subject matter and message of environmental concern of Paintings for the Sun but with intensified urgency. Written language, first introduced in the twelve paintings, became a significant part of the imagery in conveying the insistent message.

Heather Curnow termed the works 'illustrated poems' and the Barrs concurred, suggesting that Gopas's role as a poet had taken precedence over his painterly activities.⁶⁷ However, the content of the works was expressed through both words and pictures and these bear a more intricate and complex relationship, requiring closer analysis, than Curnow's and the Barr's critiques imply.⁶⁸

The pictures regained a degree of representational likeness to recognisable objects. As though the subtleties of a more abstract imagery were found too obscure to convey his sentiments, Gopas returned to figures and objects of human experience. These are combined with the written symbols of language and contain an element of harsh irony not previously present.

The images were created by loose scribbly lines of ball-point pen, often complimented by free washes in watercolour. But while colouration was often applied during the process of additional drawing and reprinting stages to increase their tonal range, the numerous photocopy works were largely left without final colour touching. The integration of painting, poetry, astronomy, photography applied to prophecy, required a simplification of some of the pictorial elements as Gopas's message became increasingly involved. The colour, in many of the works, is monochromatic and the texture also was reduced to a minimum.

The works are small, in relation to those of Paintings of the Sun and several versions, each varying slightly, were produced of many of them. The Hocken Library, [91,148], the Rotorua Art Gallery, [90,147] and the Canterbury Society of Arts [92,149] hold examples of The Masterpiece which, although similar in subject, have subtle differences.

They have a strong Blakian quality. Gopas was self-deprecating in comparing himself with William Blake, acknowledging that Blake's work represented a lifetime's devotion and dismissing his own work as "just a side effort of one and a half years - some one hundred poems, fifty graphic works and a couple of paintings." ⁶⁹

Nevertheless, they form a significant part of his later work. They contain the seeds of some exciting new ideas and show that, to the end, Gopas was a growing and developing artist. He did not arrive at a satisfactory style which he then continued to reproduce over successive years, but was constantly thinking and changing, so that as soon as he achieved what he was attempting, he moved on to explore new ideas. Perhaps because of this his works never developed a 'slick', facile look but often appear somewhat unfinished.

The Barrs extend the connection of Gopas with the German Expressionists by drawing attention to their common use of the graphic medium.⁷⁰ Certainly both Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter had used printing techniques, particularly as a method of distributing their ideals and advertising themselves. But Gopas did not develop his printing methods during his German Expressionist phase. His printed works appear much closer to those of Blake or to Leonardo's notebook drawings. His experimental nature, in developing a printing process particularly suited to his needs, was more in tune with Blake or Leonardo than with the German Expressionists, who did not share Gopas's scientific and experimental approach.

But elements from both past and contemporary thought are to be found in Gopas's views on art and in his methods for creating images. He read Wittgenstein and Goethe.⁷¹ He was interested in contemporary psychology and the automatist theories of Jung no doubt influenced him. The works have a scribbly impulsive quality and Gopas commented that "I rather let the pen guide my hand...come on little atoms, here's your chance."⁷² Gopas's unconscious mind was allowed to dictate the form.

By the mid 1960s Gopas had gained considerable recognition with his expressionist land and seascapes. However, he was ready to attempt work of a more original nature. The resulting cosmic works were a departure in subject, technique, style and intent. Superficially these works appear to be abstract but their degree of abstraction is debatable.

He painted extraterrestrial phenomena or rather sought to evoke a sense of outerspace. In technique he was, initially, more concerned with surface texture than with colour and experimented with inclusions and reflective surfaces. His style became less expressionistic and more mystical as he developed his own cosmology in his Paintings for the Sun.

This involved an increasing integration of his various interests. At first words and painting were combined and this coincided with national and international trends, proving to be moderately acceptable. But before it became fully accepted by the critics, Gopas

made yet further changes in style and technique, developing his own very personalised graphic works.

With these works his major influences were no longer modern artists but rather old masters. They combined words and images in highly idiosyncratic manner but were summarily dismissed, possibly because they were difficult to categorize. Yet they may represent his major achievement.

Careful study of the relationship of words and images in the works of Gopas is required in order to arrive at a more profound understanding of what he was trying to do.

Endnotes Chapter Five:

- 1 New Zealand Herald (Auckland) 13 May 1967, no pagination, Auckland Public Library (Auckland), newspaper collection.
- 2 R. Gopas, Galactic Landscapes 1965 - '67, E. C., Auckland Festival Exhibition, New Vision Gallery, 8 - 20 May 1967.
- 3 Ibid. Gopas wrote "I do not remember what I produced first (at the age of 12 or 13) - my first painting or my first (rather flimsy) astronomical Telescope."
- 4 While some of Gopas's works are over a metre in length such as Golden Past, 1965, which measure 1210 x 1210 mm, most were smaller than this. Further, even this, on of his largest works must be considered modest in comparison with the vast canvases of some American painters. In New Zealand those of Colin McCahon frequently extended well beyond two metres in length.
- 5 R. Gopas, "Observations of a Christian", 30 May 1978, TS. private collection (Dunedin).
- 6 Gopas's use of words is discussed more fully in Chapter Six.
- 7 Interviews: A Wicks with K. F., 1 June 1987, Michael Trumic with K. F., 2 June 1987, also R. Gopas, "a warning to Humanity suppressed ?", 28 June 1978, TS., private collection (Dunedin).
- 8 Press (Christchurch), 15 November 1963, p 25.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Press, 3 November 1964, p 14.
- 11 Press, 10 November 1965, Canterbury Public Library (Christchurch), New Zealand Room, newspaper collection.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 H. Keith, Contemporary Painting in New Zealand, E. C., Auckland City Art Gallery, November 1965, no pagination.
- 14 Press, 7 November 1966, Canterbury Public Library, New Zealand Room, newspaper collection.
- 15 The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery retrospective exhibition of Gopas's work has, however, allowed a subsequent reassessment to be made.
- 16 New Zealand Herald (Auckland), 13 May 1967, Auckland Public Library, newspaper collection.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 R. Gopas, Galactic Landscapes 1965 - '67, E. C., includes a statement by the artist signed and dated 'R. Gopas April 67'.
- 20 Although titles are sometimes changed and are not always those chosen by

the artist this work was titled as Ageing Galaxies when it was included in J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, E. C., (New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1982), this gained Gopas's approval, Letter: Jim Barr (Wellington) to Paul Johnson (Govett-Brewster Art Gallery), 24 May 1982.

- 21 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982. Record of Gopas's comments on his paintings.
- 22 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 33.
- 23 T.L.R. Wilson, Petrus van der Velden (1837 - 1913) The Hague School in New Zealand, (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1976), p 57.
- 24 R. Gopas, Galactic Landscapes 1965 - '67, E. C.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Letter: Rudolf Gopas to Kees Hos (Auckland), 18 April 1967, Auckland City Art Gallery Artist Files.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr with Rudolf Gopas, 1982.
- 32 R. Gopas, Paintings for the Sun, E. C., TS., Auckland City Art Gallery (Auckland).
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid., also
R. Gopas, Nature Speaks, MS., Hocken Library (Dunedin).
- 35 New Zealand Herald, 13 May 1967, Auckland Public Library, newspaper collection.
- 36 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 40.
- 37 R. Gopas, Name Three Stars, also
R. Gopas, Paintings for the Sun, includes a transcript of the words on Name Three Star, also
R. Gopas, a warning to Humanity suppressed ?, 28 June 1978, TS., Gopas recorded having seen the activities of other life forms and space travellers on several occasions.
- 38 R. Gopas, I Conclude, also
R. Gopas, Paintings for the Sun, includes a transcript of the words on I Conclude.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 J. & M. Barr, p 41.
- 41 Ibid.

- 42 R. Gopas, Paintings for the Sun, E.C., TS., James Hight Library, University of Canterbury (Christchurch), April, May 1976, also Robert Mcdougall Art Gallery, Rudolf Gopas - Recent Paintings and Drawings June 28th - August 2nd., TS., also Bosshard Galleries, Rudolf Gopas. Paintings, Drawings, Graphics, E. C., TS., 21 September - 8 October 1976.
- 43 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 41.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Letter: I. A. Gamtsl, (Burgermeister, Gemeideamt Ehrwald, Austria) to K. F., 9 January 1987.
- 46 Press, 18 February 1969, Jim and Mary Barr collection, documentary material.
- 47 Victoria University (Wellington), Rudi Gopas, E. C., TS., University Library exhibition, 18 May - 7 June 1970.
- 48 Press, 23 November 1970, p 5.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Canterbury Society of Arts (Christchurch), Rudolf Gopas, E. C., TS., April 1971, also Press, 12 April 1971, p 12.
- 51 Christchurch Star (Christchurch), 10 April 1971, Jim and Mary Barr collection, documentary material.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Christchurch Star, 12 April 1971, p 12.
- 56 Auckland Star Weekender (Auckland), 15 June 1974, Jim and Mary Barr collection, documentary material.
- 57 T.L.R. Wilson, "Christchurch", Art New Zealand, no 1 1976, p 9.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Bosshard Galleries, Rudolf Gopas Paintings and Drawings "For a Living Sun", exhibition opening invitation, TS., also Bosshard Galleries, Rudolf Gopas. Paintings, Drawings, Graphics, E. C., TS., 21 September - 8 October 1976.
- 60 Otago Daily Times (Dunedin), September 1976, Dunedin Public Library, McNab Room, newspaper collection.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Press, 27 September 1978, Jim and Mary Barr collection, documentary material.
- 63 Elva Bett Gallery (Wellington), Elva Bett Gallery Newsletter, no. 11, May 1979, TS., also

R. Gopas, Rudolf Gopas Nature Speaks, exhibition invitation, December 1978, signed 'R. Gopas'. Gopas had held an earlier exhibition of these works at his own home where viewing was by personal invitation.

- 64 H. Curnow, "Rudi Gopas March 26 - April 6 1979", Elva Bett Gallery Newsletter, no. 11, May 1979, T. S., no pagination.
- 65 Evening Post (Wellington), 31 March 1979, Alexander Turnbull Library (Wellington), newspaper collection vol. 7, p 137.
- 66 G.H. Brown, "Rudolf Gopas Philip Trusttum Philip Clairmont", Art New Zealand no. 13, February - April 1979, p 13, also New Zealand Herald, 20 June 1979, Alexander Turnbull Library, newspaper collection vol. 10, p 137.
- 67 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 44.
- 68 Closer examination of the relationship of word and image in Nature Speaks and related works is made in Chapter Six.
- 69 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 45.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Letter: Tom Taylor (Christchurch) to K.F., 15 October 1987.
- 72 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 45.

CHAPTER SIX

WORDS AND IMAGES

In his final and most creative phase Gopas made extensive use of words. While little remained of German Expressionist and other direct stylistic influences, words became a significant part of his art.

The immediate reasons for their appearance seem obvious. Gopas wished to proclaim his belief in the sun, to protest against the threat of a nuclear holocaust, capitalist exploitation and degradation of the environment. Words provided a comprehensible way to do this.

But there were other reasons. Gopas inherited his father's love of poetry, conjuring images and ideas in words as well as in paint. He also had an abiding interest in astronomy. In these years he made a deliberate attempt to draw these various concerns together in a unified and coherent statement. The introduction of words into his paintings can be seen as an essential part of this process. Gopas was probably further encouraged in the use of words by their extensive use in the art of contemporary New Zealand painters, although they had first made their appearance in art long before this time.

Words as a compositional element entered modern art at an early date. Certainly they are a firm feature of cubism, where Picasso stencilled letters onto Torero, 1912, and Kurt Schwitters included the random words on discarded packaging in his mixed media collages. Pop artists of the 1950s and '60s adopted written symbols and signs of modern life, introducing them into their compositions.

In New Zealand they are evident in the early religious works of Colin McCahon. Initially, as in The Virgin and Child Compared, 1948, they are subordinate to the main figurative subject, serving as a title or explanatory text. Yet even in these works some attempt has been made to integrate them into the composition. Clearly there is little concern here for a 'natural' representation of the subject. Instead the elements, including the words, have been arranged with regard to the internal compositional integrity of the painting as a work of art.

Words, as abstract symbols, fit as readily as any other image into an abstractly conceived composition. Exploited in this way, the various elements attempt to convey to the viewer more than a conventional narrative and to do it in a manner essentially of the

day.

While McCahon made words the subject of his painting, even to the exclusion of other imagery in works like I Am, 1954, Gopas was more concerned to explore the relationship of words to pictorial images. He found inspiration in the works of Leonardo da Vinci and William Blake and eventually succeeded in merging words and pictorial images in a new form of expression. Suited to his own needs and of his own time, it also established a link with some of the great masters of the past. His work, therefore, is related not only to contemporary New Zealand and foreign art but also to the development of western art history.

The revival of the use of words in painting during the twentieth century recalls some of the uses and characteristics of earlier times but also demonstrates new and interesting developments. While writing, as pictographs, evolved naturally from the stylized art of such long lasting conservative cultures as that of Egypt, the use of words in modern art has occurred in unstable societies and rapidly changing circumstances.

This is reflected in the works of Gopas, where words appear in isolation or as lines or passages and, in his printed works, are often written or scribbled over so that they are difficult or impossible to read. They take on the quality of graffiti or of snatches of information from mass media. Thus, while his works have obvious affinities with the works of William Blake or the notebooks of Leonardo, they should not be viewed as merely derivative but as original contributions.

The sporadic words, phrases and passages, used by Gopas, are in English, German and, occasionally, Lithuanian. These teutonic and slavic languages are based on phonetic rather than pictographic symbolism and do not involve the same close relationship of word and picture fundamental to Egyptian and Chinese script. Nevertheless, it was natural for Gopas to combine the two, in much the same manner as the Egyptians and Chinese did in their art works, since both word and picture had interested him for many years.

Written words make their first appearance in his paintings in the mid-1970s. While words may have occurred earlier in the form of notes jotted down on sketches to jog the memory at a later date, Name Three Stars, 1975, [74,123] is the first instance of the inclusion of words as a deliberate element in a fully finished painting.

Name Three Stars, [74,123] can, therefore, be seen as a seminal work, marking a new step in Gopas's artistic development. Over the previous decade Gopas had incorporated his astronomical interests into his painting. Ageing Galaxy, 1964, [58,99]

revealed a change of subject matter from his immediate environment of countryside, harbour and city to the wider universe he viewed through his telescope. In Name Three Stars, [74,123] his interest in written language, previously expressed in his passion for poetry, makes its first debut in his painting.

The work forms the first piece in Paintings for the Sun, which were numbered in sequence and hung, on completion, as a self-contained exhibition. It would seem, then, that Gopas consciously sought to draw attention to these works and to separate them from others he produced at the same time.

Within the individual paintings Gopas explored various uses of words while at the same time maintaining the unity and cohesion of the collection as a whole.

In the first painting [74,123], the words emerge from the upper quarter of the dark, heavily painted canvas. A single word 'reason' is repeated three times, in various sizes, at intervals across the picture space. Secondary words appear to the left and right. An illegible word is painted up-side-down while 'compassion' runs, in small letters, off the right hand side of the canvas.

A fine, light line, falling diagonally to the bottom of the canvas, is all that draws attention to tiny letters which relate a few lines of the astronomical theories Gopas had been developing. "At an estimated speed $\frac{3}{4}$ that of light it could have reached us." The letters seem squeezed on, only barely distinguishable. The statement hints at his belief in space travellers but is expressed with characteristic obscurity.

The words emerge from the darkness and seem likely to be swallowed again by it. The letters are printed carefully so that they can be read but they do not jump boldly from the board. Rather they seem to be floating as if in space. By varying the physical size of the letters, Gopas uses the words to create a sense of undefined depth, forward and backward into the canvas. The effect is enhanced by the various angles and directions the words take. By placing the words at opposite edges of the canvas, they seem separated by an infinite void.

But apart from their compositional purpose, of both creating and questioning the pictorial space of the painting, Gopas uses the words for their linguistic meaning. Written language subscribes to certain predetermined codes and conventions. The inclusion of words raises certain expectations and assumptions in the spectator and the artist is free to satisfy, question or tease these assumptions. By altering the codes and conventions the equilibrium of the spectator can be upset, but their alteration is also a means by which the artist can work towards a new expression of his ideas.

In Name Three Stars, [74,123] the words anchor minute points within the vast space. The title suggests that the words label and identify these points for the viewer. However, such an assumption is upset by the three main stars all being given the same name. This has an important effect. The spectator is encouraged to look more deeply into the painting in search of an explanation for the apparent incongruity between title and painting. The complex relationship between painting and title draws attention to the complexities of the content of the work, which dwells on the universe and man's reliance on it. The spots of bright paint in the abyss of dark green and blue, singled out by the words, are intended to map the arrangement of the stars from Earth. The unexpected repetition of the word 'reason' forces the viewer to consider the idea the word embodies. In this way Gopas draws the viewer to the meaning of the work, his message calling the world to exercise reason and compassion toward the universe, of which man is only a small part.

Gopas stated that "Putting in lettering is quite a fashionable thing, but often too obvious. But if there is lettering it has to have meaning".¹ However, the inclusion of words by Gopas, in this work, is much more than "an added method of reasoning with his audience".²

They function compositionally to reinforce the pictorial effect already created in paint. They are recognisable symbols and encourage the spectator to consider the work and its meaning in greater depth. They carry with them all the meaning embodied in them by the English language and are an aid to the artist in his search for self-expression. Because the spectator tends to assume that the words are written for him to read, they help to introduce him to the painting, which might otherwise seem inaccessible. They help to establish a relationship between spectator and painting. They are also a key to the work's meaning. They bear an intimate relationship to the words of the title. The title is no longer a descriptive footnote to the painting but a command, instructing the viewer in his approach to the work. Together the words of the painting and the words of the title are an important clue to the meaning and content of the painting.

The importance of the words of the title for unlocking the meaning of the painting is even more evident in the second work of the series [75,124].

The words are included only at the very bottom of the canvas in a similar manner to those which appear at the bottom of the first work of the series. Here the words repeat directly the words of the title, That Narrow Zone of Life, [75,124] and continue a second line from his poem by the same title "in which the sun sustains us. If she stops just for 1 hour ?".³ Again the words are part of Gopas's method of communicating with his

audience. His concern for the life giving force of the sun, which he has depicted above as a glowing ball emitting light into the surrounding darkness, is more clearly stated than before. The words become progressively more important in communicating Gopas's ideas until they take the form of a full poem.

The use of words is continued in some but not all of the subsequent ten paintings of the Paintings for the Sun series. However, even where no words occur, the spectator's aroused expectations lead him to look deeply into each work, searching in anticipation.

Words are used consistently but to different ends from the middle of the series onwards. The sixth work is entitled Dedicated to the Living Sun, [79,128] and depicts a burning sun in the centre of the canvas. Over the top of it are inscribed the letters 'M' and 'E'. They are the symbols for mass and energy and refer to Einstein's equation $E = mc^2$. They are Gopas's method of producing a direct relation between his painterly and astronomical interests and also of communicating the reasons for including a depiction of the sun. The letters refer to a basic equation of existence and their inclusion here points to the vital necessity of the Sun for life as we know it.

But Gopas made a joke of 'me' by including, at the bottom, the declaration 'its me your sun'. The words are used to make a visual and phonetic pun as well as again 'spelling out' his message to his audience. The letters suggest the objective pronoun 'me' and thereby draw attention to the relationship between artist, painting and spectator. The letters are a self-proclamation by the artist and, when read, they state the presence of the spectator. Wystan Curnow discussed a similar function of the words 'I am' in McCahon's painting. He writes "It is language which ... enables the speaker [or reader] to posit himself or herself as 'I' as the subject of the sentence", while McCahon stated "I talk all my paintings to myself."⁴

Words were being used to make humorous but poignant comment by other New Zealand painters at this date. Ian Bergquist made a play on words in Thinking is Out of Sight, It's All in the Mind - You Know, which he painted in 1976, the same year that Gopas painted the majority of the Paintings for the Sun. Bergquist parodies contemporary slang by using 'out of sight' and 'you know' while also drawing attention to the intellectual side of art. The work by Gopas makes a pun on the use of 'ME' as mass x energy (the sun) and the objective pronoun (Gopas himself). Furthermore, 'sun' refers to that depicted on the canvas and phonetically to offspring; 'son'. Again the relation between the sun and life is conveyed through the linguistic pun. But the punning is black humour in the face of possible annihilation by nuclear war. It seems unlikely that Gopas intended to make a joke of the issue but rather to emphasise its seriousness,

through the use of contrast.

Written language and scientific equations are the abstract symbols of the ideas they convey and their use allows a full statement of content without resorting to illustrative depiction. Words are an economical means of expression which avoid the clutter of representational imagery.

Poetry enters the series as a recognisable entity in the eighth painting, Self-Portrait as a Flea, [81,130]. The poem extends over eighteen lines, printed neatly in a column to the left of the canvas. The author is identified at the bottom as 'by me'. The work demonstrates the influence of other painters, who used words in their paintings, as well as Gopas's need for self-proclamation.

The artist's concern with himself is evident, initially in the title which claims the work as a 'self-portrait'. The word 'me' is repeated five times through the poem and at the end. The words of the poem seem to be describing the way Gopas saw himself; as a prophet, of little account but of long vision.

Gopas's reference to the flea recalls the work of the mystic, William Blake. In later works, especially those which form Nature Speaks, the debt to Blake is even more apparent. But this work can be seen to be a direct homage to Blake in a similar, if more subtle, way to that of My Chair, [35,62] which paid homage to Van Gogh. Its title recalls Blake's Ghost of a Flea, c.1819, while the crescent moon and cross-like television antennae parallel Blake's incorporation of allegorical symbols and cosmological references. Gopas considered William Blake to be the only English painter of merit. As Dunn points out, "among English artists Blake alone commanded his respect".⁵

In Self-portrait as a Flea, [81,130] the words form a block of printing and are placed on the canvas with a view to their compositional effect. They are a formal element in the picture, a part of the imagery, in a similar way to the speech bubbles and areas of writing in some of McCahon's works of the 1940s. Curnow remarked on the way in which McCahon was inspired by the Italian primitives such as Fra Angelico, who used scrolls of script in his religious paintings.⁶

Gopas may or may not have studied the use of words by earlier artists, as McCahon had, in forming his own compositions. Nevertheless, it is interesting to compare Gopas's use of words in this work with the Egyptians' inclusion of registers and columns of hieroglyphics in their pictorial panels. In Self-Portrait as a Flea, [81,130] Gopas deliberately altered the lay-out of his poem for its inclusion in the painting. He moved the poem from the centre to the far left of the composition and omitted a verse for its inclusion in the painting.⁷ Similarly, the Egyptians did not hesitate to alter the

construction of their sentences to better suit the pictorial composition. When appropriate, they would write their sentences from each end toward the middle to emphasise the symmetry of the work and to avoid leading the eye away from the centre of the composition.⁸

Poetry returns in the tenth work [83,132] of the series, but here fills the composition and becomes the full subject of the work. It is a poem of peace and conservation, celebrating the life giving qualities of the sun, deprecating the destructive forces of nuclear armament and space exploration. Gopas used words in the form of poetry to make a political comment.

You Bastards, [82,131] has a more abstract and deliberately modern feel. The mixed media, which combines P.V.A. with paper collage, recalls the work of many post-war artists. Wolf Vostell also made political statements, with the use of newspaper cuttings. Gopas's paper 'stuck ons' suggest pages from a notebook and can be compared to Peter Schmidt's use of old works and written material. Schmidt continued "to make pictures, aware that at any moment a better possibility may occur."⁹ The canvas was becoming a 'blackboard' for the working out of ideas.

Subsequent works [84,133], [85,134] become increasingly reminiscent of diagrammatic studies in which the artist's concept is conveyed by cryptic diagrammatic lines and annotated comments. In I saw, [84,133] Gopas recorded his own astronomical observations of the sun by a combination of labels, comments, suggestions and drawings.

The final work of the series is even titled as if a diagram. Anatomy of a Star, [85,134] has something of the appearance of a preparatory study. It might be compared to the working drawings of Leonardo da Vinci, which are similarly filled with notes of instruction to the artist. But here the work is presented for exhibition as a finished work in a way Leonardo's drawings were never intended to be.

This is closer to the contemporary interest in the process of making art, in the cerebral activity of the artist at work. Artists in America and Europe, such as Claes Oldenberg in Proposed Colossal Monument to Replace the Washington Obelisk, Washington, D.C.: Scissors in Motion, 1967, displayed working drawings as the 'work of art'.¹⁰ In New Zealand, Peter Nicholls exhibited the drawings, which contained the concept of an environmental work.¹¹

Yet despite such diversity, there is a sense of unity and consistency throughout the series, which has, in part, been created and maintained by the use of words. This is done

in several ways. Gopas has repeated some of the ways the words are used and the ways they are presented. The words in the first painting suggest labels, just as they do in the final work and also in several works in between, such as Paintings for the Sun, no. 6, [79,128] and no. 11, [84,133]. In Paintings, no. 8, [81,130] and no. 10, [83,132] the words are formed into poems, while in Paintings no. 1, [74,123], no. 2, [75,124] and no. 7, [80,129] the words are discrete sentences, pushed to the edges of the canvas. Gopas has also repeated actual words, so that 'Solar' appears in the title of Solar Explosion, [76,125] and in the heading and annotations to the diagram in Anatomy of a Star, [85,134]. In contributing to the meaning of the paintings, the words also carry the meaning throughout the series.

There is a sense of progression, development and evolution through the series which is also created, in part, by the words. The words increasingly predominate so that while in the first works they are barely visible, in the final works they cover the canvases in declarations of practice, in Paintings for the Sun, no. 11, [84,133] statements of theory, in no. 12, [85,134] and essays of warning to mankind, in no. 10, [83,132].

Throughout the series Gopas experimented with many different uses of the written word and incorporated a mixture of sources and influences from earlier and contemporary art which enrich the content and substance of individual works and the series as a whole. His work contains vestigial references to his own and other cultures. With the inclusion of words his works responded to modern developments overseas and in New Zealand and shared some common ground with other works in which painters were concerned to express their personal views and feelings on political issues. At the same time he remained independent and his use of words is as much a statement of his existence as a vehicle for the communication of a message to the spectator.

Rudolf Gopas was increasingly working toward a personal statement of his own concerns and beliefs in his other principal project of this time, a work intended for publication entitled Nature Speaks.

In this substantial body of poems, statements, comments, drawings, illustrations and diagrams, Gopas was working toward a complete synthesis of his various spheres of interest. In the paintings already discussed, the painterly nature of the works tends to predominate, particularly in the first half of the series. In Nature Speaks, he brought written word, pictorial image, content and subject-matter together in balanced combination.

Much of the richness of Nature Speaks rests on the integration of word and image, which is essential to the conception of the work.

It is appropriate that the sources and influences, to whom Gopas paid tribute in his work, should have been drawn from both artistic and literary fields. He proclaimed the genius of both Leonardo da Vinci and William Shakespeare and allowed both to influence his work. But it is especially appropriate that the principal source of inspiration for Nature Speaks should be a figure who combined artistic and literary expression with social protest; William Blake.

Like Blake, Gopas brought together written and pictorial imagery within a single composition so that one illuminates the other. The word and image are inseparable in the sense that each contributes to the meaning and quality of the other. The pictures are not purely illustrations for the poems nor are the words solely explanations of the pictures.

During the late 1780s, Blake developed a form of copper plate printing which allowed him to make multiple copies of his works at little expense and only as they were required. After printing he embellished the prints with hand colouring as he chose. In this way he escaped the slavish copying of conventional printing. He was free to develop each a little differently or to make desired modifications without the tedium of reproducing the whole work. By modifying the colour and the style of his line he could alter the mood of the print.¹²

Carbon-copying and then photocopying of his drawings in ball-point gave Gopas similar advantages. Several of his works in the photocopy medium were hand coloured, either before or after copying and in different shades and to different degrees, in order to vary the tones of the works. Like Blake, he was modifying the use of modern technological developments to suit his own ends. Gopas's adaption of the photocopy technique to play an extensive role in his artistic production, was a significant contribution to New Zealand art .

This technique allowed increased production and enabled him to 'distribute' his art to a wider audience. He gave away numerous such works to his friends and associates and to those he hoped to influence by them.¹³ He also offered them to institutions such as the Hocken Library in Dunedin and the Robert McDougall Art Gallery in Christchurch.¹⁴ He attempted to have his work published so that his concerns about the space ventures of the super-powers and his beliefs about the universe could be made widely known.¹⁵ He claimed to have been foiled by the United States Embassy in his attempts to have the work printed and, in an open letter , he gave "'A Warning to Humanity' which I was prevented from publishing ".¹⁶ In the photocopy technique he found a medium which suited his political purposes in spite of being refused publication.

Gopas was in the habit of acknowledging the artists he admired by direct references in his work. He had paid tribute to William Blake in his painting Self-Portrait as a Flea, Painting for the Sun, no. 8, [81,130], and a printed version of this work was included in Nature Speaks.¹⁷ But while Gopas owed much to Blake, he was also influenced by other artists and literary figures. The names of Leonardo da Vinci and William Shakespeare recur throughout Nature Speaks and there are poems dedicated to each.¹⁸ The influence goes deeper than this. Words from Shakespeare are quoted, sometimes with individual words changed, or ironical twists of meaning.

To be or not to be -
That is the question -

To betray - or not to betray -
is that the question?¹⁹

The derivation from Shakespeare's Hamlet is undisguised although altered to suit his purpose. Gopas also used the same disconcerting combination of the vulgar and the intellectual as Shakespeare. One poem has the same coarse humour as the Porter in Macbeth, Act 2 Scene 3.²⁰

Furthermore the name Gopas used to sign his works varied from one to another. Barr suggested that his choice of the pseudonym 'William Push' "was a humorous adaptation of that of Wilhelm Busch, changing the surname because he liked its aggressive connotations", while Nola Barron recalls "he said his painting name was GOPAS his poetry name PUSCH because other people did not accept that a person could work in both media."²¹ However, Gopas used 'Rudolf', 'William', 'Gopas', 'Push' and even 'R', 'W', 'G' and 'P', in different combination apparently with no such distinction. Perhaps this was a deliberate adoption of Shakespeare's practice of using various spellings of his name.

Paintings for the Sun, no. 12, [85,134] used words to create the effect of a diagrammatic study in the manner of a Leonardo sketch-book drawing. Similarly, some of the poems of Nature Speaks have something of the appearance of Leonardo's analytical drawing. Pages such as the sixty-ninth and seventy-seventh, record Gopas's studies of the solar system through his telescope.²² He made observations of space activity and what he called the United States space fraud. Through the use of photographs, drawings and annotated comments he put forward his theory that there had not been a moon landing and that there was lunar activity from other life forms. Like Leonardo, his postulations were viewed by his contemporaries with a certain amount of scepticism.²³

Gopas made reference to a number of other literary and art historical figures, such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Goethe, in Goethe in Italy, [93,159] and Rembrandt in

Rembrandt, Where are you ?, [88,146].²⁴ So Spoke Christ, [92,155] quotes the Bible, but the work may also allude to Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra, the modern equivalent for a world in which 'God is dead'.²⁵

In Nature Speaks, words and pictures are combined in the creation of visual images. As in Paintings for the Sun, Gopas used the words and images for both their literary and pictorial values. Many of the works from the collection were presented by Gopas as individual pieces and many of them stand on their own merits, offering at once riddles and lucid meaning to the viewer, who must return repeatedly to a work to reap its full richness.

The collection as a whole presents a great variety of possible combinations of words and pictures. In some of the plates the words are typed and appear bald on the page without any pictorial embellishment. The words appear as anonymous statements in which personal contact with the artist is suppressed behind two layers of mechanical process. At the opposite extreme are the very personalised prints such as So Spoke Christ, [92,155] in which the lettering and imagery become inseparably entangled in a mesh of entwined lines. In such works the message, conveyed by the words alone in the typed works, is conveyed by the mood of the work. The dark masses of heavy lines in Cash - Dollar - Cash, [141] create an ominous foreboding, while in Glory - Glory Be ! the light-filled plate has a lyrical quality of optimism.²⁶

Between these two poles Gopas developed a multitude of different presentations. There are those with the closest affinities to Blake's poems. The words appear almost as vignettes, handwritten in Gopas's fluid script, and with areas of drawing beside, above or below the lettering. Such plates as That Light of the Sun have the decorative appeal of Blake's Songs of Innocence.²⁷ The rhyming and animated figure drawings of Leonardo da Vinci, [94,160] have the childlike quality of nonsense poetry.²⁸ Other poems reveal a biting perception of the reality of existence more in tune with Blake's Songs of Experience. In such works the heavily drawn images crowd in around the written words, swallowing up some of the letters. The serious connotation of the words is continued into the distorted, anguished figures of old men, who loom from the darkness.²⁹ In still other works, the words remain clear and easily readable in type but are accompanied by drawings, sometimes recognisable images, sometimes purely decorative lines and squiggles.³⁰

The words have aesthetic appeal as well as intellectual meaning. They are not only for verbal communication, although this is important, but also to be looked at. They are placed on the sheet with regard for their quality so that the words themselves form the image. In some works the words enhance the form and structure of figures and objects,

while in others, the shapes made by the words remain more abstract. In Recto/Verso no 11, 1985, Julia Morrison used words in a similar way. The words are not additional to the pictorial image, they become the pictorial image.

In Nature Speaks, the words reveal Gopas's methodical approach to his work. Several versions of Nature Speaks were produced and each subsequent volume varies slightly from the one before, as Gopas selected, edited and rearranged the pieces in a progression towards perfection. A copy in private hands is very much a manuscript, with pages of poems and drawings appearing as if stuck in a scrap book. Works which were later omitted are here included, loose and untitled. There are also works specifically dedicated to the owner which are not present in subsequent volumes.³¹ The version Gopas took to show the Hocken Library was in a more 'finished' state with all the pages numbered consecutively and repetition of individual poems eliminated. Furthermore, the illustrated and handwritten poems are often accompanied by typed and unadorned versions in which the words are clearly legible.³² This suggests that the words were of great significance to Gopas and not included incidentally even if their meaning is not always immediately comprehensible to the viewer.

Words allowed Gopas to make literary references to the artists and authors he admired, creating a richness of historical reference, without being merely derivative. Although Gopas's use of the written word stands in the tradition of word and picture passed down from the ancient Egyptians, the works he produced are strikingly original. While for the Egyptians, the words grew out of the images, for Gopas, the images grew out of the words.

The words are a significant feature in Gopas's presentation of his message to the viewer. They can clarify his content which, on occasions, he states emphatically. They are also a way to create confusion, insecurity and doubt in the mind of the viewer.

Worringer's analysis of aesthetics discusses the way in which artistic creation is the result of artistic volition which in turn is formed by the society to which the artist belongs.³³ Art is a sign of its time and this is no less true of the work of Gopas. His poems and drawings in Nature Speaks are variously poignant and ridiculous, lucid and irrational, vulgar and lyrical. In an age of materialism, in which destruction and violence are common place, artists have experienced a sense of alienation and loss of purpose, their productions are not always readily accepted. Dadaist works met incomprehension in their day. Similarly, the works of Gopas have not always been appreciated by his contemporaries, who attempted to comprehend what is sometimes incomprehensible.

A major retrospective exhibition of 1983-84 sought to rehabilitate Gopas and his

reputation has been considerably aided by that event. At a recent sale his works were offered at substantially increased prices. An early work, Untitled (St Joseph's Cathedral from Rattray Street, Dunedin), c1950, [11,18] was priced at \$6,850.00, while \$8,750.00 was asked for a work in what was probably a German Expressionist mode; Boats in Composition, n.d.. A cosmic work of 1971 was priced at \$9,500.00 while a carbon-print, Goethe in Italy, 1979, [93,159] was set at \$1,500.00.³⁴

The retrospective exhibition aimed at firmly establishing him as "the founding father of expressionism in contemporary New Zealand painting".³⁵ But this aim stopped short of evaluating his total oeuvre. In particular the later printed works received little attention. It was assumed that

having exhausted the potential of paint to communicate his ideas, Gopas developed a unique mixture of illustrated poetry and astronomy in hand coloured xerox prints. These are strongly reminiscent of Blake's illustrated poems and the drawings of Leonardo da Vinci.³⁶

Reviewer's comments ranged from dismissing these works as an irrelevant appendage to a preoccupation with their message and sources. T.J. McNamara added to his report:

There are also some very late works that the artist did by lettering and drawing on carbon paper and colouring the resultant image.³⁷

Avenal McKinnon, however, felt these works

grapple with the destiny of mankind and the potential fear of a holocaust with all the fervour of missionary zeal. They are vehement works, dark with foreboding, and draw upon a rich fund of sources from medieval cosmologies, Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt and Courbet.³⁸

But while most critics treated the works at best as illustrated poems, two at least realised they had greater significance than that. For Bridie Lonie

They look like old master drawings, etchings or leaves from da Vinci notebooks, close to they are revealed as light combinations of fragments of words, pieces of scribbled notes. They have poems and letters on them. The words are urgent, with the chaos of desperation, but the images remain aesthetically ordered, desolate but beautiful.³⁹

Perceptive comments were made by an unnamed critic in the Christchurch Press who realised that these works are

very esoteric in their meaning, and often physically obscured by overdrawing, so much so that not even many of his closest friends could fully comprehend them. The elegance of his draughtsmanship and the over-all strangeness of the works, makes them fascinating viewing.⁴⁰

Clearly Gopas was not primarily concerned to convey a written message. But the

writer went on to ask "if these works do not communicate their message with the urgency that Gopas obviously intended them to, how successful are they as art works?"⁴¹ Yet it is in the nature of art to withhold its message rather than to state it boldly, which would reduce it to propaganda. Like Blake, he might have said "What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care".⁴²

The writer continued by questioning whether art works "with a preoccupation with the use of language and containing complex illusions (sic) to art history, Shakespearean poetry, astronomy and interglobal politics" can stand the test of time.⁴³ He sees this as a problem for many modern artists, for

such pioneers as Malevich, Kandinsky and Mondrian ... whose aspirations of spiritual content, through symbolism and sign systems, are conveniently ignored or forgotten. For Gopas too his work will be appreciated for its formal inventiveness and craftsmanship, but its literary content will remain forever impenetrable.⁴⁴

The deeper attraction of Blake is not merely that of 'illustrated poetry' but the inner content of his works and the esoteric inter-connected meaning of text and image which is better understood now than it was in the artist's lifetime. This problem is no greater for Gopas than for Blake. He realised that art will only appeal to the few, who take the trouble to understand.⁴⁵ Rather than remaining 'forever impenetrable' it means, perhaps, a challenge for future artists and academics.

Endnotes for Chapter Six:

- 1 Interview: Jim and Mary Barr (Wellington) with Rudolf Gopas, 1982. Transcript of Gopas's comments on his works.
- 2 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, E. C., (New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1982), p 40.
- 3 R. Gopas, Paintings for the Sun, E. C., TS., James Hight Library (Christchurch), University of Canterbury, April - May 1976.
- 4 W. Curnow, I Will Need Words: Colin McCahon's word and number paintings, E. C., (Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1984), p 3.
- 5 M. Dunn, "Rudolf Gopas A Teacher and Painter in Retrospect", Art New Zealand, no. 27, May - July 1983, p 28.
- 6 W. Curnow, I Will Need Words, p 2.
- 7 R. Gopas, Nature Speaks, MS., Hocken Library (Dunedin), p 63, the words form a poem included in Nature Speaks where the differences in presentation are evident.
- 8 K. Michalowski, Art of Ancient Egypt, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1968).
- 9 G. Woods, ed. Art Without Boundaries: 1950 - 70, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1972), p 178.
- 10 P. Selz, Art in our Times A Pictorial History 1890 - 1980, (New York: Abrams, 1981), pp 472-473.
- 11 F. Dickinson, New Zealand Drawing 1982, E. C., (Dunedin: Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 1982), p 40.
- 12 K. Raine, William Blake, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971).
- 13 Interviews: A. Wicks (Dunedin) with K. F., 1 June 1987, Michael Trumic (Dunedin) with K. F., 2 June 1987.
- 14 Tim Garity, Curator, Hocken Library (Dunedin), pictures collection, verbal communication, also Neil Roberts, Curator, Robert McDougall Art Gallery (Christchurch), verbal communication.
- 15 In particular his observations which he interpreted as evidence of space travellers from other life sources.
- 16 R. Gopas, a warning to Humanity suppressed ?, 28 June 1978, TS., private collection (Dunedin). He noted "30 copies about - sent out" at the foot of the page.
- 17 R. Gopas, Nature Speaks, MS., Hocken Library, p 70 .
- 18 Ibid., Leonardo da Vinci, p 39, also buy Shakespeare p 23.
- 19 Ibid., pp 26, 27, 36

- 20 Ibid., p 59, also
Shakespeare's Tragedies, (London: Collins, n.d.), pp 194-195
- 21 J. & M. Barr, Rudolf Gopas, p 44, also
Letter: Nola Barron (Christchurch) to K. F., 14 October 1987.
- 22 R. Gopas, Nature Speaks, MS., Hocken Library, pp 69,77.
- 23 Interview: A. Wicks with K. F., 1 June 1987, also
Letter: Tony Geddes (Christchurch) to K. F., 14 October 1987.
- 24 R. Gopas Nature Speaks, MS., Hocken Library, pp 86, 48, 61.
- 25 Ibid., p 45.
- 26 Ibid., pp 60, 57.
- 27 Ibid., p 5.
- 28 Ibid., p 51
- 29 Ibid., for example p 61.
- 30 Ibid., for example p 37.
- 31 R. Gopas, Nature Speaks, MS., private collection.
- 32 R. Gopas, Nature Speaks, MS., Hocken Library.
- 33 W. Worringer, Abstraction and Empathy. A Contribution to the Psychology of Style, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953).
- 34 Ferner Fine Arts (Auckland), Inaugural Exhibition of works by Rudolf Gopas, sale exhibition catalogue, 22 June 1986.
- 35 D. Brett, Rudolf Gopas, exhibition prospectus, TS., (New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1982).
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 New Zealand Herald (Auckland), 21 May 1984, Auckland Public Library (Auckland), newspaper collection.
- 38 Evening Post (Wellington), 27 April 1983, Alexander Turnbull Library (Wellington), newspaper collection, vol. 22, p 203.
- 39 Otago Daily Times (Dunedin), 20 October 1983, p 22.
- 40 Press (Christchurch), 24 August 1983, p 20.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 J. Bronowski, William Blake, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1958), p 220, letter: William Blake to Revd. Dr Trusler, 23 August 1799.
- 43 Press, 24 August 1983, p 20.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 New Zealand Herald, 13 May 1967, Auckland Public Library, newspaper collection.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Rudolf Gopas was one of the more recent immigrant artists who have enriched New Zealand art from time to time since the early years of European discovery. But his east European origins meant that he brought rather different cultural values from the majority of such immigrants, who came from Britain. He may be compared, in some respects, to an earlier Dutch immigrant, Petrus van der Velden, whose work he admired. Both were expressionist painters, van der Velden in a late Romantic mode and Gopas in a more existential one. Both had an intense dedication to their art and both felt they were misunderstood and under-rated. Both had rather manic personalities. Displaced by the upheavals of war, Gopas's experiences were more traumatic than those of van der Velden but he arrived in a land with more time and money for art than the one van der Velden had found.

The Second World War displaced numerous European artists to America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and Gopas is interesting as the most noteworthy New Zealand example. This diaspora hastened the development of an international art already in formation and Gopas was conscious of that process, of which he saw himself a part. At the same time, however, as the most recent British colony to have reached maturity, New Zealanders were searching for a national identity and Gopas was criticised for not becoming a 'true' New Zealand artist.

In fact Gopas was conscious of the need to be accepted by New Zealand art circles and made efforts in that direction during his early years in the country. The war had come at a most unfortunate moment in his career; after he had completed art school but before he had had time to establish a reputation for himself in Lithuania. It took five of his most critical years, followed by four more in a displaced persons camp in Austria. When he arrived in New Zealand, therefore, he was already thirty-six years of age but still needed to establish himself as an artist. In contrast artists such as Willem de Kooning arrived in America with established reputations.

Gopas seems to have realised that, in order to be readily accepted, he had to conform to the 'Sunday-painter' aesthetics of the art societies of those years. Consequently he soon became accepted as an artist by the middleclass patrons, becoming something of a society portrait painter.

Subsequently he repudiated most of the works from those years. Nevertheless the early works deserve study for several reasons. They helped to establish his early reputation as an artist. They show the artist adapting to his new environment. They helped to provide a livelihood. They provided practice in technique, developing facility for his later more significant works. Some are experimental in which he sought to assimilate new influences. A few contain the seeds of his subsequent artistic growth. Gopas recognised this and claimed that he used two signature formats but they are an unreliable guide and individual works must be considered on their merits.

A striking feature of these early works is the almost total absence, in most of them, of any sign that they devolve from German Expressionism. This suggests that the claim that Gopas introduced German Expressionism into New Zealand is mistaken, since Michael Dunn indicates other sources of this style at this time. However, it appears that Gopas was exposed to German Expressionist influence in his youth, albeit at second-hand. Its absence in these early works, was either because it was deliberately suppressed, as unacceptable to his public, or because, although aware of it, he was not yet fully committed to it.

However that may be, Gopas built his reputation steadily during the 1950s and in 1959 was rewarded with a teaching post at the Canterbury School of Fine Arts. The next few years saw a rapid increase in the number of his works which show a substantial German Expressionist influence. This would seem to indicate that such tendencies had indeed been actively suppressed in the preceding years, since it is improbable that they would otherwise have come to such sudden flowering.

These works are mainly seascapes with boats. They have been seen as harking back to his early years on the Baltic Coast, an expression of hiraeth. But while a Baltic reference cannot be denied, practicalities may have dictated his choice of subject. He was now assured of a satisfactory income and could afford a motor car but his teaching duties may well have proved onerous and have restricted him to subjects within easy reach of Christchurch for much of the year. In addition the subjects needed to be readily interpreted into a German Expressionist idiom and the boats and coastal scenery offered the broad shapes, facilitating suppression of detail, that this demanded.

Now that Gopas had achieved the security of an institutional appointment he could afford to be less circumspect. Indeed the situation demanded that he become a leader in artistic endeavours. German Expressionism provided a suitable vehicle for him. At that time it would still have appeared daringly avant-garde in New Zealand art circles. But at the same time it would have been appreciated that since it had proved acceptable in Europe it must have some merit.

The expressionism he practiced, however, was never entirely derivative. He followed neither Die Brucke nor Der Blaue Reiter exclusively, nor can individual works be ascribed to the influence of either group alone. Rather he blended elements from each group to which he added influences from other sources together with his own subject matter.

These are the paintings which are usually taken as representative of his work and it is necessary to realise that they were mostly concentrated into a brief period of five years. They form only a small part of his oeuvre and while important they are less significant than the works that were to follow.

Gopas worked hard in his new role and his reputation soared in these years, so that he could be numbered with the top few artists in the country by 1967.

He became something of an artistic guru, who would brook no disagreement with his doctrines, an early symptom of mental disease perhaps. He inspired deep feelings in his associates. Teachers and students at the school had to be either with him or against him. He undoubtedly had considerable influence on those he taught and several of his students have emerged as leading New Zealand artists in an expressionist mode.

His influence has been so profound that, while he may not have been the first painter to introduce German Expressionism into the country, he may yet be considered to be the father of modern expressionism in New Zealand.

Having achieved a high level of recognition he could strike out more boldly in his own direction. Even during the early 1960s he produced occasional works relating to his preoccupation with astronomy. From 1965 he devoted his energy to producing the first major series of his career, Galactic Landscapes. These works involved him in what, in a New Zealand context, were advanced use of acrylics and various inclusions to produce heavily textured surfaces, not immediately possible with oil paints. But he avoided the use of brilliant colour associated with acrylics, and his palette became sombre, enlivened with numerous but small flecks of brighter hues. In that way he dissociated himself from most other artists working in the new medium. In addition he developed a highly reflective surface to make use of random light falling on the painting from outside sources which was an essential part of the evolving and constantly changing quality of his works.

He was not solely concerned with novel techniques, however, but wished to give deeper meaning to his art. He became intrigued by the works of Rembrandt, Blake,

Leonardo and with Indian art, seeking to develop a mystical dimension in his painting.

With Paintings for the Sun, words began to appear in his work and these functioned both as compositional devices and as 'messages'. But they are messages of a peculiar type. They direct the thoughts of the viewer but do not instruct him. They have that ambiguity necessary to evoke a mystical and spiritual response in the viewer.

The cosmic works have a professional finish and a superficial abstract quality that now makes them easily 'accepted' by the New Zealand viewer. But at that time they were so advanced in technique and disturbing in intention that they left reviewers unable to commit themselves for the most part, although Hamish Keith frankly confessed his scepticism.

The works were not condemned but neither were they applauded, perhaps the worst possible response for someone of Gopas's irascible temperament. He would, no doubt, have preferred outright rejection by the art going public since he would then have been justified in adopting a lofty hauteur. As matters stood he left the country with what he declared were his best works and gifted them to the town of Ehrwald, Austria. Whatever his feelings may have been, the works are an important part of his oeuvre and their removal from the country is a loss for New Zealand art history.

He had expected to remain in Austria but he was no more gratified by his reception there. The works would have been incomprehensible to the uninformed but by that date they would have appeared competent but perhaps dull to aficionados of such a cultured country. Disillusioned he soon returned to New Zealand.

Before leaving for Austria he resigned his position at the art school, where his position had become untenable. Relations with some members of staff were very strained. There was no question of his returning to teaching at the school. Consequently he had considerable time to devote to his art. Even so his output was prodigious. Excessive artistic output is a further symptom of a certain mental disorder. Van Gogh's production was also remarkable in the final months before he shot himself.

Gopas experimented with a new printing technique involving xeroxing and over-printing with hand colouring at various stages of the process. He produced literally stacks of such prints, from which he selected a few to form Nature Speaks.¹

Gopas prided himself on his intellect and culture. Throughout his career he exposed himself to numerous influences. These he attempted to assimilate and integrate into his art and at the same time combine his disparate interests in astronomy, poetry,

photography, drawing and painting in a unified form of expression. These final works are remarkable for the extent to which he achieved this objective. In this final phase he was particularly affected by the works of William Blake and Leonardo da Vinci.

He was interested in them for several reasons. Both Blake's printed works and Leonardo's notebooks related words to pictorial images, while both could be readily adapted to his printing process. In addition the layout of Leonardo's notebooks lent itself to plans of telescopes and diagrams of stars and constellations.

Blake was a mystic who evolved a personal religion and Gopas in his Paintings for the Sun and Nature Speaks affected a similar role, hinting at some cosmic force that might be more than raw energy. In these years Gopas was alarmed by man's destruction of nature and the threat he thought nuclear power posed to the solar system. He sought to warn of this in his works. Similarly Blake had protested against industrialisation and its attendant social ills.

Both Blake's and Leonardo's works had a further significance for Gopas. Both were not readily accessible to the viewer. Blake used a symbolic system that required considerable scholarship to decipher, while Leonardo used reversed writing in his notebooks. The element of mystery created in these ways was important for Gopas. He wished to protest in his works but to have done so plainly and without ambiguity would have reduced him to a demagogue. Instead he tried to convey a sense of protest rather than to make a direct statement. His works are consequently expressionist rather than mere propaganda. Paradoxically the message they convey is stronger for being incomplete, obscure and confused. The graffiti-like images he created, the statements rendered illegible by scribbles and overwriting, the odd words and phrases that leap out from the page, the poems without form, all express the agony of modern man. At the same time the possibility that some code or symbolic system waits to be discovered in these works cannot be discounted.

These late works have obvious affinities with Blake and Leonardo but closer examination reveals that they are imitative only on the most superficial level. They are works of great originality and of their own age. They are endlessly fascinating for their allusions and arcane messages. They have an elegance of draughtsmanship and are "aesthetically ordered, desolate but beautiful".²

The works of Rudolf Gopas are difficult to survey and evaluate. He attempted to assimilate so many varied influences that his oeuvre seems at times to be an odd assortment of imitative exercises, though these are enlivened by his own originality. His works fall into several phases which did not evolve smoothly from one into another, within a single overall style but instead made sudden changes of direction that critics

found hard to accommodate.

He made his name with the works of the early 1960s which have a strong German Expressionist flavour. Thereafter he tended to be categorised by them, although they form only a small part of his achievement. The earlier works are more varied and also hold considerable interest, while the later cosmic works show greater originality. It is, however, the latest works, the printed works, that have the most significance.

They have a depth of expression that has yet to be plumbed. They will be mined by future artists and Gopas's posthumous reputation may well come to rest on them.

Endnotes to Chapter Seven:

- 1 Letter: Nola Barron (Christchurch) to K. F., 14 October 1987.
- 2 Press (Christchurch), 24 August 1983, p 20, also Otago Daily Times (Dunedin), 20 October 1983, p 22.

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APPENDIX

Exhibitions

List of the one-man and major group exhibitions of works by Rudolf Gopas.

1950	Otago Art Society Annual Exhibition, Dunedin
1951 Feb	Rudolf Gopas, one man show, Dunedin Public Library
1951	Otago Art Society Annual Exhibition, Dunedin
1951 Oct	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1952	Otago Art Society Annual Exhibition, Dunedin
1953	Otago Art Society Annual Exhibition, Dunedin
1953 Oct	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1954 Oct	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1958 Oct	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1959 April	a group show, Gallery 91, Christchurch
1959 Oct	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1960 July	Contemporary New Zealand Painting, toured by Auckland City Art Gallery
1960 Oct	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1961	Contemporary New Zealand Painting, toured by Auckland City Art Gallery
1961	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1962 Jan	Contemporary New Zealand Painting, toured by Auckland City Art Gallery
1962 July	Rudolf Gopas Exhibition, one man show, Christchurch
1963	Contemporary New Zealand Painting, toured by Auckland City Art Gallery
1963 Nov	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1964 Nov	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1964-1965	Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Ceramics, toured by Auckland City Art Gallery to Japan, India, Malaysia
1965	Contemporary Painting in New Zealand, toured by QEII Arts Council to Commonwealth Institute, London
1965 Nov	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1965 Nov	Contemporary New Zealand Painting, toured by Auckland City Art Gallery
1966 Nov	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1967 May	Galactic Landscapes 1965-'67, Auckland Festival Exhibition, New Vision Gallery, Auckland

1967 Nov	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1968 Feb	Rudolf Gopas, one man show, Several Arts Gallery, Christchurch
1968 Nov	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1969 Feb	a group show, Several Arts Gallery, Christchurch
1970 May	Rudi Gopas, one man show, Victoria University Library Exhibition, Wellington
1970	New Zealand Art of the 1960s, a Royal touring exhibition
1970 Nov	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1971 April	Rudolf Gopas, one man show, Canterbury Society of Arts, Christchurch
1971 Nov	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1972 June	a group show, Peter James Gallery, Auckland
1972 Nov	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1973 Sept	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1974 June	a group show, Peter James Gallery, Auckland
1976 April	Painting for the Sun, James Hight Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch
1976 June	Rudolf Gopas, Paintings, Drawings and a Solograph, Robert Mcdougall Art Gallery, Christchurch
1976 Sept	Rudolf Gopas Paintings, Drawings, Graphics, Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin
1976 Oct	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1977 Sept	one man show, Ehrwald, Austria
1977 Nov	The Group Annual Exhibition, Christchurch
1978 Sept	Nature Speaks, one man show, Canterbury Society of Arts, Christchurch
1978 Dec	Nature Speaks, one man show, the artist's home, Christchurch
1979 March	Nature Speaks, one man show, Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington
1979 June	Gopas, Trusttum, Clairmont, New Vision Gallery, Auckland
1980 Sept	a group show from the Fletcher Collection, Auckland
1982-'84	Rudolf Gopas, retrospective exhibition organised by Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
1984 May	Rudolf Gopas Paintings and Drawings, John Leech Gallery, Auckland
1985 Feb	Three Decades of New Zealand Painting 1940-1970, National Art Gallery, Wellington
1986 March	Paintings and Drawings by Rudolf Gopas, sale exhibition, Ritchies Fine Arts Gallery, Christchurch
1986 June	Rudolf Gopas, sale exhibition, Ferner Fine arts, Auckland