

The Gordon H. Brown Lecture 2008

Displaced Legacies - European Art in New Zealand's Public Collections

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Toi o Tāmaki

In 2007 Random House invited me to write a book on European works of art in New Zealand's public collections. Such a project has been a long time coming, the only book of its kind being Peter Tomory and Robert Gaston's *European Paintings before 1800 in Australian and New Zealand Public Collections*, published in 1989, which listed the works rather than interpreting them. Tomory and Gaston had limited themselves to all works before 1800, and it quickly became apparent that the subject today was much larger than would fit in the average sized art book. A decision was reached to narrow the scope of the work, not to a clear cut-off date as was the case with Tomory and Gaston, but rather to move slightly forward into the nineteenth century, including such works that had continued in the style of the centuries before. In doing so, the project immediately became more manageable, and a possible format more logical, but inevitably it meant that New Zealand's extremely fine Victorian and Modern collections became displaced, awaiting their turn for similar attention in the future. While the project is ongoing, my research so far has made me conscious of the way in which various other forms of displacement lie at the heart of these collections and the institutions responsible for their care — displacements that are geographical, political, social and individual. Not all public galleries in New Zealand even have collections of historic European art, and some that do acquired them in an ad hoc manner, very much at the whim of fortune. While giving a brief overview of how the collections that are my focus were built up, and the benefactors who supported them, in this lecture I will also touch on the ongoing struggle that has taken place within our public art institutions to balance the art historical values of the Old World, and what many perceived them to say about culture in the broader term, alongside the growing need to represent the artistic identity of a new nation. Indeed as the twentieth century progressed, there were those who argued that European artworks were redundant, almost dangerous, if New Zealand artists were to find a voice of their own, an opinion perhaps still shared by some today. But is such an opinion justified, or is that kind of attitude a form of parochialism that, as a nation, we have now moved beyond?

The tradition of collecting works of art is an ancient one. The fifteenth-century Florentine, Lorenzo de' Medici, for example, built up a superb collection of what were termed *arte minori* — small scale decorative masterpieces not minor arts — while other generations of his family were responsible for many of the major art works now held in galleries such as the Uffizi and the Pitti Palace today. He represented a burgeoning middle class that had the wealth to

acquire and commission art works, but he was also an ardent promoter of Florentine artists and craftspeople, encouraging other rulers in Italy to avail themselves of their talents. When collecting works on any scale, wealth was a prerequisite, and kings and courtiers alike could bankrupt the state in the desire to add items to their ever-expanding collections. Private collectors created special rooms or cabinets to display their treasures, which could include minerals, skeletons, stuffed animals, materials believed to have magical or healing properties, alongside rare books, paintings and sculptures, both ancient and contemporary. The English botanist and gardener John Tradescant (c.1570-1638) and his son of the same name filled their home, aptly nicknamed The Ark, in South London with plants and 'all things strange and rare' collected in their journeys to Russia, North Africa and then America. The Ark became the first museum of its kind in Britain — you had to pay sixpence to get in — creating a model that has been developing ever since. Its contents can still be seen in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, the brainchild of their family friend, Elias Ashmole.



1. *Musei Wormiani Historia*, the frontispiece from the *Museum Wormianum* depicting Ole Worm's cabinet of curiosities.

Some collectors commissioned portraits of themselves and their collections, providing a graphic record of their acquisitions but also demonstrating their accumulation of knowledge. Created for private individuals, such 'cabinets of curiosity' foreshadowed the development of the first great public museums. The Amerbach-Cabinet in Basel, the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris and the Hermitage in St Petersburg had all opened their doors to the public by the end of the eighteenth century. More importantly, while some institutions continued to display collections that ranged across many subject areas, others were now designed specifically for the display of works of art.

The Age of Enlightenment in Europe created a wave of discoveries that were a match for those developments that had made the Renaissance so important. When the New World opened up to explorers and traders, the gathering of information was framed through the

lenses of the new sciences of cartography, geography, botany and astronomy, aided by innovative instruments that allowed explorers to chart the earth in a more scientific manner. Artists had an important role to play in recording new discoveries and expanding knowledge about exotic far-flung cultures, now suddenly accessible to the intrepid traveller. Nineteenth-century entrepreneurs utilised this information for the exploitation of natural resources and trade, but the New World was also seen to provide a possible solution to the overcrowded and often pestilent cities of Europe.



2.
John Hoyte (1835—1913) New Zealand
***An Auckland Panorama* 1869**
Watercolour, 437 x 630mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
gift of Miss Jessie Williamson, 1936 [1936/24]
<http://collection.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz/collection/results.do?view=detail&db=object&id=880>

When the first emigrants left Britain's shores for New Zealand and Australia, the only visual representations of their destination were those created by artists who had accompanied the first exploratory voyages the century before. Aotearoa was a country dominated by the sea, yet with a grand but often impenetrable hinterland. Moreover, it was already inhabited by a culture at ease in a landscape perceived to be somewhat hostile to newcomers. Colonial artists were now charged with the task of projecting a landscape that was 'safe to live in', a landscape that looked capable, indeed inviting, of settlement. Intrepid colonists had no choice but to transport everything that might be needed to set up a home in a hostile environment, but alongside the practical tools, furniture, seeds, and plants, some carried with them small works of art, to remind themselves and others of the society they were leaving behind, and as symbols of certainty when confronting the unknown. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, a new form of philanthropy was developing in Britain. While still creating collections for their personal pleasure, the wealth built up by the middle classes on the back of industry allowed many to initiate generous acts of philanthropy, ensuring that the enjoyment of art, and

the acquisition of knowledge through exposure to such pleasures, became the right of everyone. This philanthropy proved a central focus in many of the emerging townships of colonial New Zealand in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The four main centres, in particular, recognised that if they were to amass enough of a population to claim the status of a city (rather than a township sprung up around a conglomeration of ramshackle houses and muddy streets), then the necessary appurtenances that demarcated a metropolis must be constructed. New buildings that spoke of permanence and history, paved streets equipped with appropriate lighting and modern means of transport must be seen to reside among parks and public amenities that would aid this process of civilization. Charles Brasch, in describing the role played by his relative, Bendix Hallenstein, and his family played in this kind of cultural Diaspora, encapsulates the drive shared by many:

They carried with them to the new worlds of America, Australia, New Zealand, Europe's ancient culture its accumulated wisdom, its tolerance and liberalism, which should take root and flower more freely in fresh soil, unencumbered by the trammels and shadows and prejudices of the past. It was in this spirit that he came to New Zealand; this is what he hoped of life in New Zealand.¹

In almost every smaller town, art societies played a crucial role in these early developments. In Auckland, for example, the Mechanics Institute was established in 1842, a year after the first organised wave of settlers had arrived in the Waitemata harbour. The Institute became the cultural heart of the burgeoning township, incorporating a small circulating library for members, as well as a venue for lectures and classes open to everyone. In 1869 Albin Martin was one of the founding members of the Auckland Society of Artists, the first of its kind in Australasia, which later became the Auckland Society of Arts. The first museum in Auckland opened in Princes St, on the side of Albert Park, in 1876, and could even boast its own curator, Thomas Cheeseman. It housed the somewhat motley collection of items gifted by generous citizens, but quickly proved inadequate, so when former Governor and politician Sir George Grey offered to present his collection of pictures, books and curios to the city in the early 1880s, the Council seized the opportunity to initiate the design and construction of a Public Library for Auckland.



3.
George Richmond (1809—1896) Great Britain
Sir George Grey 1854
conte, chalk, 597 x 459mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
gift of Sir George Grey, 1887 [1887/1/45]
<http://collection.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz/collection/results.do?view=detail&db=person&mode=1&id=2121>

Sir George Grey is still best known as a bibliophile, whose first collection of manuscripts, incunabula and rare books was gifted to the city of Johannesburg, where he had been Governor of the Cape Colony and High Commissioner to South Africa from 1853 – 1860. However, attached to Auckland's proposed Library was to be a gallery suitable for displaying Sir George's art collection, but large enough that gifted works presently stored at the Museum could also be incorporated into a formal Auckland art collection. On 17 February 1888, the Auckland City Art Gallery was formally opened (the Library had opened the previous year), the first permanent public art gallery to be erected in the Dominion. Along with Sir George Grey's collection of fifty-three historic paintings there were also works presented by individuals, including Albin Martin and other members of the Auckland Society of Arts. Auckland was able to open a purpose-built art gallery, therefore, with a collection already in place, which for a brief period was the largest collection of international paintings in Australasia. This changed irrevocably once the Felton Bequest was made to the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne in 1904, after which not even the Tate or the National Gallery in London had a comparable spending power.

For much of the twentieth century there was speculation concerning the provenance of Grey's collection. As it contained two Portuguese paintings by the fifteenth-century artist Juan de Juanes, one possibility was that much of it might have been inherited from his father, a

professional soldier who had spent time in Portugal, dying at the siege of Badajoz just days before his son was born in Lisbon.² The discovery of an annotated sale catalogue from Christie and Manson's dated February 13th, 1869 found in the diaries of his manager, Thomas Osborne, at Grey's Mansion House at Kawau reveals that in fact he acquired the works in person, paying the greatest sum (£50.8.0) for Gaspar Netscher's *Girl with Flowers*.



4.

Gaspar Netscher (163-1684) Netherlands

Girl arranging flowers 1683

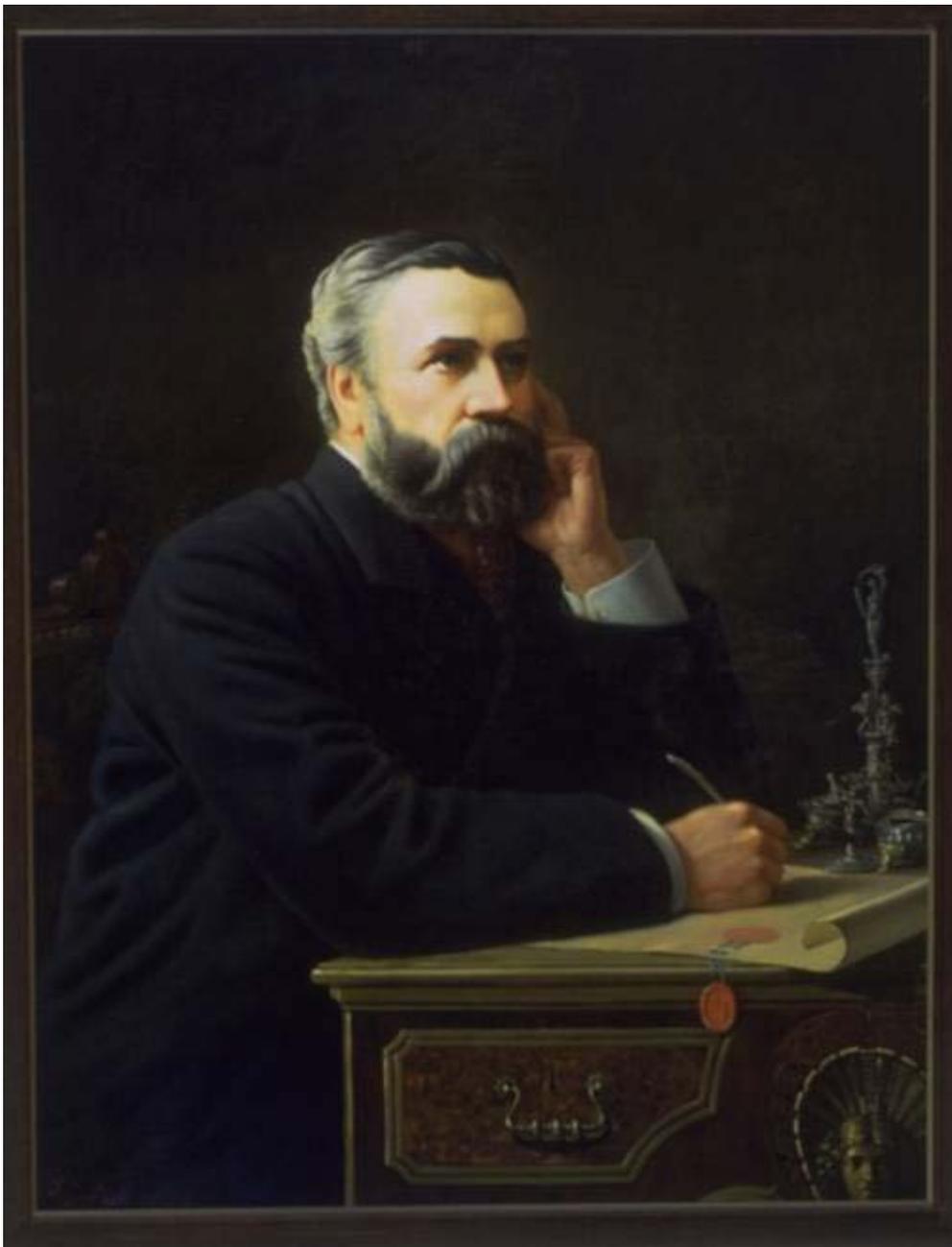
oil on canvas, 479 x 393mm

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

gift of Sir George Grey, 1887 [1887/1/23]

<http://collection.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz/collection/results.do?view=detail&db=object&id=76>

According to a note added to the Christie's catalogue (now in the Gallery's library archive), the painting had been inherited by Sir George's mother, who bequeathed it in turn to her oldest son, George's half brother. It was common practice at the time for individuals to have to buy back items auctioned or sold outright from a family estate, and one can understand Grey's desire to retain a painting with such close family associations.



5.
Louis John Steele (1842—1918) England, New Zealand
Portrait of J.T. Mackelvie, Esq 1892
oil on canvas, 1375 x 1057mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki [U/194]
<http://collection.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz/collection/results.do?view=detail&db=object&id=11599>

The original museum in Princes Street had also been a temporary home to unopened crates that formed part of the bequest left to Auckland by James Tannock Mackelvie, who had spent a mere six years in Auckland between 1865 and 1871, in the employ of John Logan Campbell. Mackelvie was interviewed on behalf of his prospective employer in Florence, and having passed a phrenological examination that indicated that his brain was the appropriate size to suit him to his new employment as a partner in Campbell's firm and a very different life in the colonies, he promptly set sail for the Antipodes. During his sojourn in Auckland, Mackelvie acquired a house in what is now Anzac Avenue, where he developed a beautiful flower garden, entertained with the assistance of his black manservant, and lived the life of Riley.

He also invested in land, shipping and the new gold mines in Thames, and it was the fortune he later made from the latter that gave him the wealth to develop his collection. Ill health may well have been a factor in his decision to return to England, (there is a small heart drawn in the margin of one of his diaries which may refer to a mild cardiac attack). However, he and other employees had also fallen out with his employer (who by now was living in London), as Campbell didn't approve of his staff investing in any type of business with which the firm had dealings.³ When he returned to England, Mackelvie took back with him a number of extremely good examples of local decorative and fine art, including carved Maori *mere* and other weapons, paintings by his friend Albin Martin, who had settled in Howick, and furniture inlaid with native woods by Anton Seuffert, who was employed as cabinet maker to Governor Grey during 1862-63. His highly intricate inlay work incorporates numerous references to Maori designs, as well as indigenous flora and fauna.

Notwithstanding that he had left England as a mere businessman, once money started to accrue from his investments Mackelvie was able to set himself up at 21 Victoria Street, just five hundred yards behind Westminster Abbey. He often travelled to the warmer climes of France and Italy for health reasons, which allowed him to make purchases first hand. His collecting tastes reflected not just the art of his time, but also those of travellers on the Grand Tour a century before.



6.
Guido Reni (1575-1642) Italy
Saint Sebastian c.1625
oil on canvas, 1670 x 1276mm
Mackelvie Trust Collection
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
gift of James Tannock Mackelvie, 1882 [M1882/2/3]
<http://collection.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz/collection/results.do?view=detail&db=object&id=8974>

In 1882, he acquired a number of decorative items and paintings from the Hamilton Palace Sale at Christie, Manson and Woods, including Guido Reni's *St Sebastian*, although he wasn't prepared to pay the hundred pounds it would have taken to secure a Titian or a Tintoretto. The works acquired at the Hamilton Palace Sale were shipped almost immediately to Auckland, with a further despatch occurring the following year. However, it was only after his sudden death in 1885 that he was found to have left almost all of his possessions and investments to four trustees on behalf of the tiny city where he had made his name. His will dictated that a sum of money be used to construct a gallery for their display, thereby alarming the Auckland City Council, who were already underway with plans for the building mentioned earlier. The Mackelvie Trust set up to manage the bequest recognised that the sum left for that purpose would not be enough to carry out Mackelvie's wishes, and an agreement was

reached with the Auckland City Council to amalgamate his collection into the Council's proposed building. The Mackelvie Gallery finally opened adjoining the Library and Council offices in 1893, accompanied by a catalogue which listed the collection, which was published by Auckland Society of arts.⁴

When the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York made the first royal visit in 1901, their official historian noted that there was hardly any need for the decorative arts, flags, pots, plants, flowers and crimson carpets used to add glamour to the scene, as the 'fine collection of pictures and bronzes were sufficiently ornamental in themselves'.⁵ Further exhibition space was gained after the Council later moved to their new premises in the Auckland Town Hall in 1911. Finally, in 1858, Mackelvie's will was amended by Act of Parliament, and the Mackelvie Trust's loan collection, now grown considerably, was amalgamated with the Gallery's, thus allowing for richer display opportunities.

In 1913 John Barr, a Glaswegian who had previously been employed at the Mitchell Library in Glasgow and then the Fisher library at Sydney University, was appointed City Librarian in Auckland, a position which included the curatorship of the Gallery. The following year he wrote the introduction to a further catalogue produced by the Society of Arts.⁶ It was reviewed in *The Connoisseur* in London, which noted how gratifying it was that:

our kinsmen of the Southern Seas have consistently followed the ideals of the Old Country, so that while they are wisely giving every encouragement to the rising and already strong school of New Zealand artists, they are also buying large numbers of English works... The Collection ... is described as being 'one of the finest south of the line', a description which appears to be fully justified. Certainly it will compare favourably with those of the majority of the large English provincial towns, and contains a fine representation of modern British painting...'⁷

The collection continued to expand, both through council funding, which was initiated in 1906, and through the Mackelvie Trust.

In the 1920s and early 30s, Moss Davis gifted a number of sculptures, including Antonio Canova's *Venus italica*, and Bertel Thorvaldsen's *Napoleon I*, a replica which came from Princess Eugenie Napoleon's collection. Davis had worked most of his adult life in Auckland, and he and his wife Leah Jacobs acquired no 29 Princes St, one of the handsome merchant houses on the edge of Albert Park in 1887, the year that Auckland Art Gallery opened. His previous house had been the first in New Zealand to be lit by electricity, so he was very much a man of the moment. His acquisitions were made after he retired to London.⁸ Although his gifts have never been designated as a discrete collection, they were major gifts by a very prominent citizen and greatly enriched Auckland's holdings. Davis had been prompted to donate works to Auckland on hearing of another act of generosity, that of William Hesketh, Lord Leverhulme.



7.
James Tissot (France; Great Britain, b.1836, d.1902)
Still on Top c.1873
oil on canvas
876 x 533mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
gift of Viscount Leverhulme, 1921
1921/2
<http://collection.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz/collection/results.do?view=detail&db=object&id=436>

The latter had first come to New Zealand in 1892, developing a friendship by correspondence with Sir John Logan Campbell. In 1921, he donated Jacques Tissot's *Still on Top*, and then in 1924, a year before his death, he gave a number of extremely fine (and now very valuable) works by Edward Burne-Jones to Auckland Art Gallery and the Sarjeant Gallery in Wanganui. Even with gifts such as these, Auckland's international collection grew somewhat haphazardly during the first part of the twentieth century.⁹ A turning point came in 1952 when the Library and Art Gallery became separate identities, and Auckland's first professional director, Eric Westbrook was appointed, followed four years later by another Englishman, Peter Tomory, who was to have a profound affect of Auckland's collecting of Old Master paintings. In particular, he encouraged the Mackelvie Trust to acquire good quality British portraits as well as earlier Italian paintings, and made his own international reputation with the acquisition of thirty-seven watercolours by the eighteenth-century Romantic artist, Henri Fuseli.

Mackelvie's story is mirrored in a wide number of settlers who were prepared to come to the other side of the world to better themselves. Stepping outside of Britain's rigid class system allowed those with initiative to lay aside some of the class-based imperatives that might hamper their desire to make their mark in the world, irrespective of their birth. A fine example was Dunedin's William Mathew Hodgkins, who became the driving force for establishing an art gallery through the auspices of the city's art society. Drawn from a humble English background, Hodgkins had worked at the National Gallery in London in 1859, where he became a great admirer of J M W Turner's watercolours. By the early 1860s, he had followed his family to Melbourne and then Dunedin where he trained as a lawyer. At the time, the young Dunedin was a boom city, its character, both architecturally and socially, marked by several gold rushes. When the gold ran out, many people stayed on and established farms, thereby continuing to contribute to the wellbeing of what was then New Zealand's largest town. Hodgkins believed passionately that its scale gave Dunedin the right and duty to establish what could be a national collection of art, but as not everyone shared his views, his focus changed to pushing for a public collection for the city instead. Hodgkins himself was a fine watercolourist in the traditional manner, (although he never reached the heights achieved by his Modernist daughter, Frances) and much of his efforts to establish a proper art gallery derived from his understanding that such an institution would benefit artists and public alike. In 1875, he set up the Otago Art Society. Reproductions of famous historic works were displayed in the Municipal Chambers, a practice that was to occur in other centres as well, where finding somewhere to house fledgling collections was a common problem. In 1884, the Society took on space within the Dunedin museum, marking the beginnings of a public art collection for the city.

Over the next twenty or so years, the Society and its collection twice took up residence in buildings constructed for two New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition, the first in 1889-90, and the second in 1925-26. The latter move, resulting in Dunedin's first public gallery, was assisted by the generosity of businessman and philanthropist Sir Percy Sargood and his wife, who acquired the building and presented it to the city as a memorial to their son, who had been killed at Gallipoli in World War I. It remained Dunedin's Public Art Gallery until 1990 when the current building opened in the Octagon.

Another benefactor was Dr Thomas Hocken, who is most famous for gifting his library not just to the people of Dunedin, but to the nation as a whole. Described as 'a neat, dapper little man, with a short-clipped beard and dark lively eyes,' and with 'a winning personality and infectious enthusiasm',¹⁰ his bequest of around £800 in 1910 meant that Old Master paintings could finally be acquired for Dunedin's collection. A similar generosity was demonstrated by Peter Smeaton, an accountant who, possibly owing to ill health, had not had a great involvement with the Gallery during his lifetime. However, when he died in 1919 he left the Gallery the sum of £10,000, with the stipulation that the interest should be spent initially on British paintings, but with the proviso that purchases could eventually be more broad-ranging. For the first time the Gallery had a secure fund that allowed it to plan its international acquisitions. Its first purchase was John Hoppner's *Portrait of a Lady*, in 1930, and from this point onwards, the collection began to build in a more concerted manner, either on the advice of overseas experts, or local citizens travelling abroad who were aware of the Gallery's

needs. Works also continued to come to the Gallery through gifts and bequests, and acquisitions were aided by financial contributions from local people, including Sir Percy Halstead, who left both money and works in 1940, and Sir Lindo Ferguson, whose son and namesake was to be a long-serving member of the Mackelvie Trust in Auckland. A superb collection of over one thousand British watercolours were gifted to the Gallery over a number of years by Archdeacon F H P Smythe. He must have been rather stunned (and no doubt delighted) to be the recipient of a gift of a frozen carcass of lamb in thanks, reflecting the way in which the introduction of refrigeration had added to the city's wealth.



8.
Benvenuto Garofalo (1481- 1559) Ferrara, Italy.
***Madonna and Child enthroned* n.d.**
Oil on wood, 575 x 440mm
Dunedin Public Art Gallery
Bequest of Mrs Doris Monheimer, 1967 [10 – 1967]

In every instance, acquisitions for the public collections were greatly assisted when they were carried out by those who had a knowledge of the European market. In 1967 Mrs Doris Monheimer left the Gallery her collection of paintings, works on paper, and a wide range of decorative items, which had been on loan there since 1939. She and her husband, Dr Benno Monheimer, had fled Germany in 1933 after Hitler came to power. The couple were both very musical, and while the good doctor practised medicine in the city until his sudden death in 1961, his wife also tutored German at the university for a period. An obituary in the *Otago*

Daily Times assumed that their paintings had come from Dr Monheimer's family, when in fact his wife had inherited them. Her father, a Dr Reudenberg, had transferred both his art and his business to Switzerland in the 1920s, with the result that his art treasures escaped the fate of those of thousands of his countrymen when the Jewish pogroms began in Germany.¹¹ Other notable benefactors were the de Beer family. Esmond de Beer and his sisters Dora and Mary had grown up in Dunedin, but spent much of their adult life in London. Esmond was a respected scholar and benefactor to a considerable number of public and educational institutions internationally. While he was principally a bibliophile, a number of very fine purchases for Dunedin's collection came about through his administrations on its behalf in London. In 1963 de Beer was invited back to Dunedin to carry out a survey of the Gallery's collection. Extremely familiar with the great art collections in Europe, as well as the dealers and auction houses in England, and with a seat on the boards of both the National Gallery and the National Art Collections Fund (NACF) he was therefore in an excellent position to source appropriate works to fill some of the gaps in Dunedin's collection.



9.
Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788) England and John Hoppner (1758-1810) England
Charlotte, Countess Talbot 1784
oil on canvas, 2380 x 1455mm
Dunedin Public Art Gallery
purchased through the NACF, London, 1958 [6 -1958]
<http://dunedin.art.museum/collection.asp?searchtype=>

The spectacular portrait of *Charlotte, Countess Talbot* (c.1784), painted by Thomas Gainsborough and John Hoppner, was purchased by the Gallery with assistance of the NACF, which also enabled purchases for a number of New Zealand's public institutions.

A similar story played itself out in Christchurch. The Canterbury Society of Arts had its first exhibition in 1881, attracting eight separate newspaper reviews, and although most of the works were painted in New Zealand and were of New Zealand subjects, alongside a small group of painted or photographic copies of European works was one genuine old master painting.



10.
Gerard Dou (1613–1675) Netherlands
The Physician 1653
oil on copper, 489 x 368mm
Collection Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu
Heathcote Helmore bequest, 1965 [69/292]
<http://collection.christchurchartgallery.org.nz/results.do?id=26354&db=object&view=detail>

Then attributed to Jan Steen, *The Alchemist* has been identified as a version of *The Physician*, by Gerard (also known as Gerrit) Dou. The work, originally lent to that first exhibition by Mr H Gray, was left to the city as part of the Heathcote Helmore Bequest in 1965. However, it wasn't until 1932 that a public gallery, sited at the edge of the Botanic Gardens, opened its doors. Robert McDougall, Managing Director of Aulsebrooks and Co,

gifted the building to Christchurch, and among its first displays was the art collection of local farmer James Jamieson, bequeathed to the city five years earlier. It was only when Miss May Scheslinger and others left money to the new Gallery in 1935 that the gallery was finally able to start purchasing works of art in a consistent way, among which are a number of historic paintings.

Wellington differed from the other three main centres, in that a fledgling art collection had been housed in the Colonial Museum from 1865 onwards. Its supporters were formalised as The Fine Arts Association of New Zealand in 1882, before being incorporated as the New Zealand Academy of the Fine Arts. The museum expanded, taking on the title of the Dominion Museum in 1907, although under the separate management of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts. Finally in 1913, the Science and Art Act was passed through Parliament establishing the institution of a national gallery within the Dominion Museum. The Academy continued to lobby government in the 1920s, who agreed to provide funding to construct a national art gallery, provided their commitment was matched by public donations. In 1930 the National Gallery and Dominion Museum Act was passed, the two institutions opening under the one roof in Buckle Street in 1936. The Academy could see the benefit of sharing the building, so long as they remained autonomous from the Gallery's day to day running, so they contributed the sale proceeds of their own accommodation (which had been provided by Government in the first place), and took up residence in separate rooms on the ground floor when the new building opened. In 1948 Stewart B. Maclennan, initially employed as the Gallery's education officer, was appointed as professional director, the first full-time position of its kind in New Zealand.¹² This position remained independent of the Dominion Museum until the two were amalgamated with the establishment of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in 1992, after it had been decided that the Buckle Street building no longer met either the Gallery or what was now the National Museum's requirements.

11.

John Singleton Copley
Mrs Humphrey Devereux 1771
oil on canvas 1180 x 975
partial sign. LL date 1771
Gift of the Greenwood family, 1965
[1965-0013-1]

<http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/objectdetails.aspx?oid=41241&term=Copley>

Although building a collection of international historic works has not been a priority, the National Art Gallery has received a number of gifts from private individuals, amongst which those of the Greenwood family stand out. Most famous among their possessions was the remarkable portrait of *Mrs Humphrey Devereux*, mother of the American artist John Greenwood, who commissioned the work from John Singleton Copley in 1771. John Greenwood's descendant Miss Elizabeth Greenwood gave the painting, which had hung for many years in her Eastbourne home, to the National Art Gallery on permanent loan in 1961, before gifting it to the nation four years later, along with five works by John Greenwood himself. As with the other public collections in New Zealand, the National Gallery, and more recently Te Papa, have continued to benefit from the generosity of private individuals.

The fifth and final collection that comes within the sphere of my research is the Sarjeant Gallery in Wanganui. Henry Sarjeant immigrated around 1860, and settled in the Wanganui area where his brother Isaac was already established as a farmer. He married late, at the age of 63, to Ellen Agnes Stewart, who was 40 years younger, and together they joined the Wanganui Arts and Crafts Society. In many ways, Sarjeant was similar to James Tannock Mackelvie in his support of the various educational and philosophical groups created to provide a cultural base for their fledgling towns of residence. However, unlike most of the other benefactors from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Sarjeant was wealthy enough to travel back and forwards to Europe, and so was personally familiar with current developments in many of the famous art institutions overseas. Wishing to ensure that the town where he had made his livelihood and home continued to benefit after his death, he bequeathed property in trust to the Wanganui Borough Council for the construction and maintenance of an art gallery, a project tirelessly promoted and supported by Charles Mackay, the mayor of the time. The Sarjeant Gallery, which opened its doors in 1919, richly deserves its reputation as one of New Zealand's iconic regional buildings. Sarjeant's widow then married John Armstrong Neame, continuing support for the gallery through purchases while abroad.

While New Zealand's galleries may not be able to boast of extensive holdings of old master paintings, the same cannot be said for our prints and drawings. Bishop Monrad's collection was gifted to the people of New Zealand in 1869, allowing the public tangible access to representations of many of the major movements in European art; a remarkable starting ground for the future national collection. The National Art Gallery also inherited major international print collections in the twentieth century, notably those of Sir John Illott and Harold Wright, whose position at P & D Colnaghi, purveyors of fine prints in Bond Street, London, made him the perfect source for advice when private and public connoisseurs alike were building collections of works on paper. Christchurch received a large gift of British and European prints from the widow of Joseph Kinsey in 1936, and more recently has benefited from the generosity of Gordon Brown, along with other public institutions. In Auckland, Dr Walter Auburn also took Wright's advice when he decided to use the reparation money paid by the German government after the World War II to build up a *kupferstich*, or print collection. The London dealer sent him a small folio suggesting that he go through it and decide on particular works he liked, and then focus on acquiring those artists over others. As a result, Dr Auburn's Jacques Callot collection is second only in size to Queen Elizabeth II's, a major achievement by anyone's standards. When he died in 1981, he left 1361 etchings by Callot, Stefano della Bella, Giambattista Piranesi and Wenceslas Hollar to the Mackelvie Trust in Auckland. Nor was the relationship between dealer and collector one-sided. Harold Wright worked assiduously alongside his clients, knowing that public collections would eventually benefit from his expertise, and at his death his collection was gifted to the National Art Gallery and the University of Melbourne. In 2004, in honour of his long-term association with the Gallery, Auckland also acquired Peter Tomory's collection of old master prints.

Now while each of the main galleries might never have been established, let alone built up collections of international historic art, without the generosity of individual and local governmental support, in every instance it was the appointment of professional staff that allowed each institution to really plan the acquisition and display of artworks in a cohesive manner.¹³ Tomory and Gaston's book mentioned at the beginning of this lecture had found its beginnings in 1959 in the exhibition *Old Master Paintings in New Zealand*, which Peter Tomory curated while director at Auckland City Art Gallery. Some of the paintings he borrowed from private individuals are now themselves in public collections, or have been lent to them on a long-term basis. The first exhibition of its kind, it toured New Zealand after closing in Auckland in June that year, and stands as a testimonial to the depth of Tomory's scholarship. In the days before the internet, researching paintings was a long and arduous process. Photographs that he sent overseas were in black and white, and it often took months before the opinions of international experts arrived in response to Tomory's requests for attribution. Auckland's archives demonstrate that he undertook this kind of correspondence on what was almost a weekly basis, a task that would have proved impossible if he hadn't had the training and the introductions to international scholars he had received in Britain before moving to Auckland. Much of his correspondence was addressed to leading European art historians of the time, including Professor Ellis Waterhouse, who in the 1950s was Director of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts in Birmingham and; Dr Ulrich Middeldorf, Director of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence. As well as exhibitions, the galleries themselves have done much to promote their holdings through publications. Wellington and Dunedin used brief articles on Picture of the Month to research and promote individual works in their collections, while Peter Tomory instituted the *Gallery Quarterly* creating a springboard for discussion of both local and international acquisitions and exhibitions. Newspaper editors kept a sharp eye on collecting practices, and for much of first half of the twentieth century at least, were more likely to approve any acquisitions of international historic art than works tainted by what they saw as the curse of modernism.

Inevitably researching some of the lesser-known works for this discussion has not been without its difficulties. Paintings change with age, and often lack a signature, causing headaches for art historians and collectors alike. Other works, though originally signed, have lost these invaluable identifiers over time, perhaps from over-zealous cleaning in the days before trained conservators were at hand, or because canvases were trimmed, a not uncommon practice when owners had works reframed or relined. Faced with these erasures, long periods may be spent by researchers hoping to identify a particular artist's hand. Often the closest an attribution gets is the ubiquitous 'Unknown' or 'After' or 'School of' a particular artist. If anything, this field has become more rather than less complicated over time, and art historians often struggle to agree over attributions. As a result, there has been a tendency to relegate problematic works to a 'second best' category, even though their subject matter may be of interest, and the works themselves may be well painted. And finally, there is the world-wide problem of artworks that have ended up in public collections in an ad hoc manner, but which are not exhibition standard for a variety of reasons, but which institutions have a duty of care to retain.

Collections prosper when they have advocates to defend, care and promote them, even if their actions are not all approved by the public. Annette Pearse, Curator and then Director of Dunedin Public Art Gallery from 1946 onwards, focused on enlarging the gallery's international collection. She purchased works in person on trips to Britain, often with the advice and assistance of Sir Alec Martin, the managing director of Christie's,¹⁴ and had played an important part in courting Doris Monheimer and Archdeacon Smythe to part with their works of art. Yet Pearse was heavily criticised at the time for this practice. While it had seemed natural enough for such a focus at the beginning of the twentieth century when New Zealand was very much the colonial daughter of Britain, and older members of the colony still had a living memory of life 'at home', this changed after the two world wars. It was replaced with a heightened sense of New Zealand's identity as an independent nation, and a strong need for art that reflected local experience.

Lecturing on 'Art in New Zealand', at the Trades Hall under the auspices of the Workers' Educational Association, in October 1921, Wellington's first commercial art dealer, Murray Fuller reflected this concern, observing:

New Zealand started with a vigorous culture of a high standard and sound British tradition, but its people must not blind themselves to the danger inherent in this initial advantage. It was often more difficult for the people of a colony with a highly developed imported culture to evolve an adequate expression of the spirit of the new life than for such as had strong primitive forms on which to build.¹⁵

Two years before he died, Peter Tomory described to me how he and Colin McCahon had spent hours perched up ladders with torches, examining Guido Reni's *St Sebastian* at close quarters. McCahon believed he could count at least fifteen changes in tone between the saint's brow and his eyelashes – something that spoke of an original painter rather than a mere copyist. What drew McCahon to Reni, then, was his painterliness – but also possibly the fact that three centuries stood between him and the Baroque master's practice. Yet when confronted with Victorian paintings, and in particular the vast Edward Burne-Jones works donated by Lord Leverhulme in the early 1920s, his rage was so great that according to one of his colleagues McCahon was seen to strike what is now one of our most valuable paintings. What angered him in this instance was the praise heaped on such works by New Zealand's public at a time when local Modernists were struggling to claim their own place in the sun. Hamish Keith told me of finding Tomory and McCahon wrestling on the office floor after one heated debate on the subject. Yet while McCahon's anger was understandable in the early 1960s, it was somewhat misdirected, for in fact Tomory did much to promote New Zealand art in his time at the gallery. Fortunately, one hopes that time has rectified the causes of McCahon's ire. While galleries have continued to acquire holdings of international art, the focus in the last fifty years has been on the development and analysis of New Zealand's own artists, and rightly so. New Zealand's public collections demonstrate the important role artists continue to play in defining our national persona. Yet I would argue that our international historic collections are an equally important part of New Zealand's history. Displaced geographically, and all too often relegated for much of the latter twentieth century to storage as either outmoded, irrelevant, or archaic, they too deserve their place in the sun. New Zealanders, no matter what the newspapers might tell you, have always been travellers.

People with a love of culture, and the means to support it have traditionally travelled overseas in search of a broader world history.

The purpose of my forthcoming book, therefore, is to attempt to redress this imbalance, offering the New Zealand reader a sense of how individual works in our collections illustrate the wider themes in the history of western art which have fascinated collectors and lovers of art for many centuries, serving as a *theatrum mundi* or theatre of the everyday world. I hope to appeal to any reader with a curiosity about the changing meanings underlying works of art, and the place these holdings have in the wider history of European art. For much of the twentieth century art history faculties at universities in New Zealand traditionally encouraged the study of well-known artists because far more material relating to their practice was readily available. Today, however, when international travel is taken for granted and the internet allows immediate access to many institutions and their archives, some are seeing the wisdom of selecting someone lesser known as a focus of their research, thereby making their mark within the knowledge economy. Such endeavours can only add to our body of knowledge about our public collections.

I hope my lecture tonight has given some insight into the inherent struggles involved in setting up public collections, from both an institutional and individual viewpoint, and in particular give recognition to the generosity and foresight of private and public benefactors who gave, and continue to give, works of art to public institutions.

¹ Charles Brasch, *Indirections A Memoir 1909-1947*, Oxford University Press, Wellington, 1980, p. 55, quoted in Robin Notman, 'A Privileged Life: Dora Hallenstein de Beer (1881-1982)', unpublished thesis, University of Otago, 1999, p. 6.

² Peter Tomory voiced this opinion in the 1960s.

³ There was some suggestion at the time that a number of employees were using Campbell's funds to invest on their own behalf, although it was never proven.

⁴ Auckland Society of Arts published the *Descriptive and Historical Handbook to the Auckland Art Gallery and Mackelvie Collection*.

⁵ Quoted in *Quarterly of the Auckland City Art Gallery: The Gallery's First Eighty Years*, no. 49, March 1971, p. 7.

⁶ *Catalogue of the Auckland Municipal Art Gallery – also of the Mackelvie Collection with brief illustrative notes on the artists, etc*, which had been prepared by the Secretary of the Auckland Society of Arts.

⁷ Gil Docking, *Quarterly of the Auckland City Art Gallery: The Gallery's First Eighty Years*, no. 49, March 1971, p. 7.

⁸ Sir Ernest Davis was Mayor of Auckland from 1934 – 41. For more biographical information see <http://www.teara.govt.nz/1966/D/DavisSirenestHyamKt/DavisSirenestHyamKt/en>

⁹ For the previous thirty-nine years, the Gallery had been under the care of the City Librarian, John Barr.

¹⁰ <http://www.library.otago.ac.nz/hocken/drhocken.html>

¹¹ Otago Daily Times, 10 May 1939.

¹² 'ART GALLERIES', from *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, edited by A. H. McLintock, originally published in 1966. Te Ara - The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 18-Sep-2007 URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/1966/A/ArtGalleries/en>

¹³ The first professional appointment in New Zealand was Robert Neilson, who took up the position of Curator at Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 1922.

¹⁴ Peter Entwistle, *Treasures of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 1990, p. 26.

http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/dnzb/default.asp?Find_Quick.asp?PersonEssay=5P20

¹⁵ Ann Calhoun, 'Two Wellington Entrepreneurs of the 'Thirties The Murray Fullers: 1 Edwin Murray Fuller', *Art New Zealand*, no. 126, Autumn 2008, p.21.