

Tender is the Night / PAINTING



Image credit: Liz Maw, *Robert Plant*, 2005. Image courtesy of the artist

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Curriculum links

Visual Arts: understanding the arts in context, developing ideas, communicating and interpreting
Art History: discuss artworks, examine subjects and themes in art, examine the context of an art movement
English: listening, reading, viewing and speaking

About the exhibition

How does it feel to be in and out of love? *Tender is the Night* is a group exhibition that brings together a selection of art works exploring the complex and intense nature of desire, love and loss. It is a mix-tape of emotions, a gathering of artists' explorations from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, of the sticky and exhilarating mix of longing, desire, consummation, and moments of loss that characterize the evolution of human relationships.

While courting and romantic partnerships are a key point of focus for the exhibition, so too are the complex, and not always smooth-running dynamics of familial relationships, the intense bonds between parent and child, how siblings interact and the way in which families in a contemporary context are both formed and built. Another thread running through the exhibition is that of the loss of a loved one, through relationships breaking up and through death.

In this diverse collection of art works by New Zealand and international artists, students will explore and share ideas about human relationships and the emotions of love, desire, longing, loss and grief.

Focus work: Liz Maw, *Robert Plant (2005)*

Liz Maw is an Auckland-based artist who has long had an interest in representations of the body. Sometimes using celebrity figures as subjects, the virile, beautiful people she depicts are stylised and charged with meaning. Maw draws on themes from ancient mythology which she reworks to create her own fantastical stories. Maw's almost life-sized oil paintings are created slowly with an Old Master approach that resembles air brushing in its precision. Painted on hardboard, her works are highly detailed, revealing tiny rays of light, exquisite jewellery and embroidery which adds to their sense of desire, beauty and power.

To view more works by Liz Maw, visit www.lizmaw.com or www.petermcleaveygallery.com

Other artists in the exhibition

Rita Angus (1908–70) is one of New Zealand's most significant painters. Working mainly in oil and watercolour, she is best known for her portraits and landscapes. A prolific artist, during her painting career she painted a sequence of self-portraits, totalling at least fifty five images which constitute a unique record in the New Zealand canon.¹

In this watercolour, Angus focuses on the intense bond between mother and child. This work describes the domestic experience, going about daily life complete with discarded toys. It is a touching portrait of a loved one—of Angus' sister Jean Jones with her son Anton, and a painting within a painting of Jean's husband Fred Jones in the upper left of the watercolour.

Michael Harrison is an Auckland painter who has eight small-scale paintings included in *Tender is the Night*. Harrison works to the limits of an A4 page which makes his practice portable, allowing the artist to paint at the kitchen table. Harrison's pale, modest paintings of human and animal forms are strange, secretive and creepy: "*the paintings are full of charged looks, unrequited glances, rumours of contact and pursuit. Gazes pass noiselessly between cat and bird, wolf and deer, and, most mysteriously, from painting to viewer.*"²

The beauty and tragedy of human relationships are investigated in Harrison's work and his paintings of couples are seldom as serene as the pale acrylic washes and delicate silhouettes might suggest.

To view more works by Michael Harrison, visit www.ivananthony.com and www.mhgalleries.co.nz

Francis Hodgkins (1869–1947) The image of mother and child has been a constantly reoccurring theme in Western art, yet the intensity of bond between mother and child is difficult to convey. While Christian symbolism of the Madonna and Child is prominent within visual culture, the universality of the subject matter exceeds the bounds of one faith.

Included in the exhibition is *Woman and Child* (c1912), a watercolour by Hodgkins bequeathed to the Dunedin Public Art Gallery by her brother. It is one example of intimate family scenes painted by Hodgkins in New Zealand, France and Belgium. The painting depicts the moment when a mother kisses her child's soft warm cheek, the sole focus of the work, making it a particularly tender depiction.

Henry Lamb (1883–1960) is an Australian born artist who was brought up in Manchester, England. Lamb's oil painting *Death of a Peasant* (1911) is a moving portrayal of a husband grieving for and saying farewell to his wife. The painting resulted from a harrowing experience in 1910 when Lamb witnessed Madame Favennec's death of from cancer. Lamb had been staying with the family (Madame Favennec was a mother to twelve children) in Brittany, France for the summer. The obvious difference in skin palour between the deceased and the living coupled within the close cropped compositional focus on Monsieur Favennec's forehead touching that of his wife, heightens the emotional punch of this painting.

To view this work online, visit <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz>

George Dawe (1781–1829) two large-scale oil paintings draw on literary sources for their subject matter and signal a shift in style from the neo-classical to the romantic. Both works, painted in the early 1800s, depict a moment of intense emotion and eager attempt of the characters to court and console respectively. The larger slightly later work, *Genevieve* (1812) takes its lead from a Samuel Taylor Coleridge poem 'Love' where the narrator recounts his wooing of Genevieve on a moonlit night in front of a craggy ruin and a statue of an armed knight. The smaller, more compositionally dense history painting of 1803 takes an episode from the epic narrative of Homer's *Iliad* (6–7th century BC). The relationship between Achilles and Patroclus is a key part of the myths aligned with the Trojan War. In the *Iliad* the deep, profound friendship these two men share is made clear, but subsequently and to the present day, there has been much debate about whether or not Achilles and Patroclus were also lovers.

To see this work and view other paintings by Dawe, visit <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz>

Douglas Stichbury, a New Zealand artist currently based in China, makes paintings of objects, places and scenarios that reference key events in history or canonical literary and artistic works. Romance and tragedy ties Stichbury's sequence of four paintings together in *Tender is the Night*. One of the most popular tragic love stories of all time, Romeo and Juliet is represented through a relief on the side of a highly decorated jug, a use that feels superficial and peculiar for such a dramatic tale. The artist chooses to not illustrate the 'main event', but rather he researches and selects images of the subjects a few generations down the line, which are often replicas, or re-imagined representations. The 'truth' of the pictured event or story becomes increasingly diluted and indirect, but also more complex and intriguing through the re-workings and embellishments that have occurred over time.

¹ D. Eggleton, *Towards Aotearoa*: Reed Publishing, Auckland, 2007.

² J. Paton. *Love in the Shadows*. Auckland, Artspace, 2002.