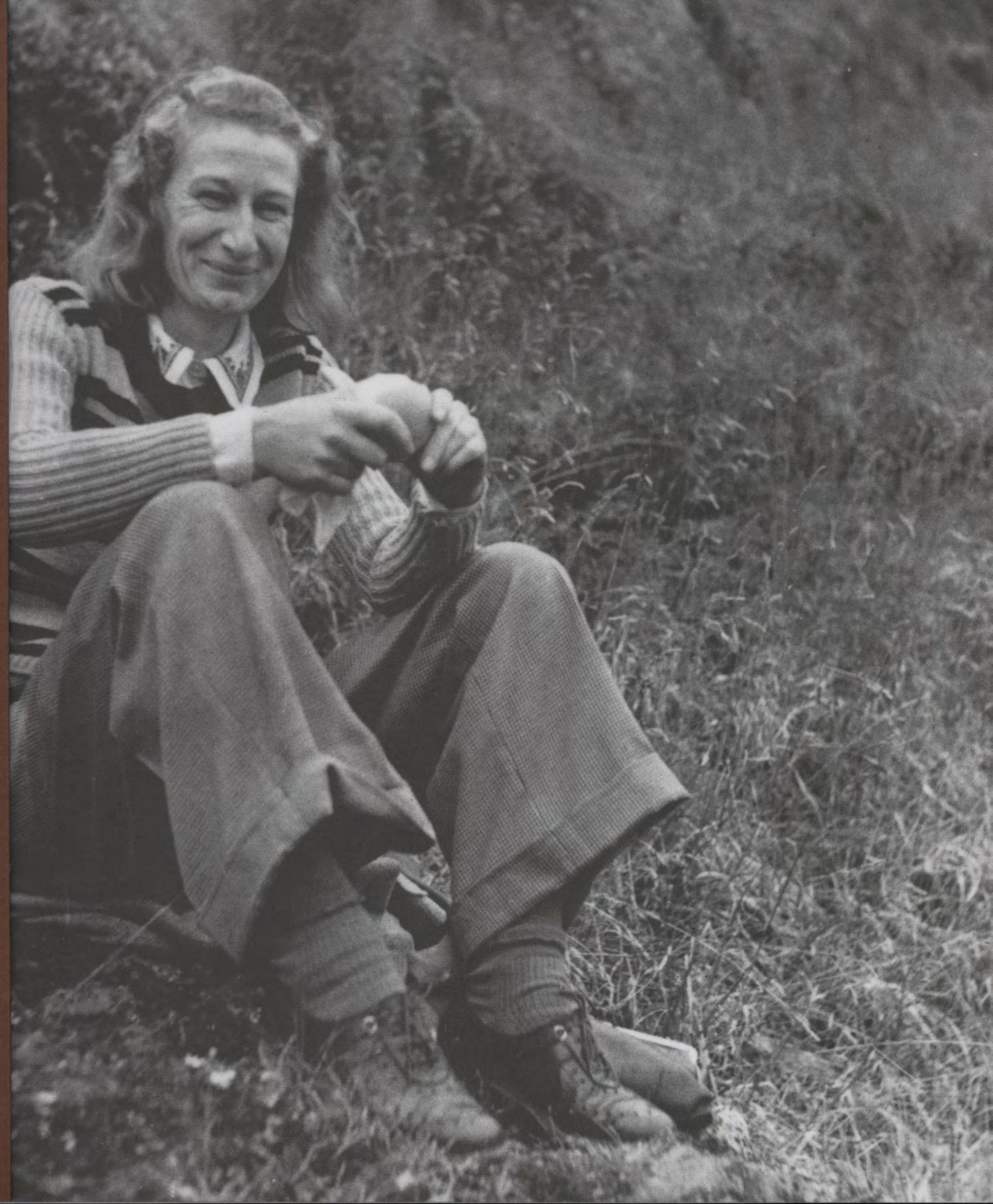


RITA LIVE TO  
PAINT &  
PAINT TO  
LIVE ANGUS

VITA COCHRAN & JILL TREVELYAN

**R**ITA ANGUS is one of New Zealand's best known artists, yet the only publication on her work—a 1983 exhibition catalogue—is long out of print. This new book *Rita Angus: Live to paint & paint to live* offers a fresh insight into the artist's working life, and explores recurrent themes and ideas in her painting. A particular focus is the extraordinary series of self-portraits which chronicle the artist's continual reinvention of herself over thirty years.

Complementing these iconic images are important examples of her landscape, cityscape and still life painting, which together offer a compelling introduction to the artist and her world. Jointly published by Godwit with the Hocken Library, University of Otago, and City Gallery Wellington, this book features essays by Jill Trevelyan and Vita Cochran, and 24 full colour reproductions of Angus's remarkable paintings.





PREFACE

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GODWIT/RANDOM HOUSE; CITY GALLERY WELLINGTON; HOCKEN LIBRARY, DUNEDIN

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FRONTISPIECE: Photograph of Rita Angus, c. 1940,  
by Betty Barrett, private collection

TITLE PAGE: The tree is a detail from an  
undated bookplate (for John Bush) by Rita Angus

## PREFACE

*If we face the fact, for it is a fact, that there is no arm to cling to, but that we go alone and that our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women, then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down . . . I maintain that she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worthwhile* VIRGINIA WOOLF

When Virginia Woolf wrote the two papers that were later published as *A Room of One's Own* in September 1929, across the world in Christchurch,

New Zealand, the 21-year-old Rita Angus was nearing the end of her two years of classes at the School of Art, Canterbury College, and had already met her future husband, Alfred Cook. Virginia Woolf's invocation to women would have struck a chord with Rita Angus who always strove to have a room of her own. Apart from the four years she spent married to Alfred Cook, she lived her life alone, committed to her vocation as a painter.

Despite attempts to yoke her to other prominent New Zealand artists such as Colin McCahon (1919–1987) and Toss Woollaston (1910–1998) Angus remains a wholly separate figure in the history of this country's art. While her landscape painting is incorporated into accounts of regionalism, the considerable body of self-portraits which began with art school works in 1929 and continued to her death in 1970, remain outside the canon. It was this group of paintings, and in particular *Self-portrait* (1936–37) which intrigued Vita Cochran, who made these works the basis for her Master's research in 1998. For the Hocken Library, University of Otago,

this study was developed into the central part of a suite of three exhibitions, each dealing with a different aspect of Rita Angus's involvement with herself, other artists and the painting genres of portraiture and landscape. These three exhibitions, 'Rita Angus and Leo Bensemann: The Cambridge Terrace Years,' curated by Peter Simpson, 'Angus by Angus: 23 Self-portraits,' curated by Vita Cochran, and 'Rita Angus and Marjorie Marshall in Central Otago' were accompanied by a weekend seminar in November 1999, which addressed aspects of the artist's life and involvements. For the City Gallery Wellington, the original three exhibitions have been complemented by a fourth focussing on 'Rita Angus's Wellington,' also curated by Vita Cochran.

Nearly two decades after the National Art Gallery's landmark touring Angus exhibition, these exhibitions and accompanying publication will introduce a new generation to the work of a singular figure in New Zealand painting. Taking Rita Angus's self-portraits as a starting point, this publication presents iconic images from the exhibition alongside two of the defining paintings in our art history—*Cass* (1936) and *Portrait (Betty Curnow)* (1942)—and a selection of lesser-known works.

We are immensely grateful to the Angus family for their support of this project; and we also warmly acknowledge Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa. This project would not have been possible without the generosity and ongoing patronage of the City Gallery Wellington Foundation Principal Corporate Benefactor, Russell McVeagh, the principal sponsor of the exhibition in Wellington.

Linda Tyler, CURATOR, HOCKEN LIBRARY, DUNEDIN

Paula Savage, DIRECTOR, CITY GALLERY WELLINGTON



FIGURE 1: MARTI FRIEDLANDER  
*Rita Angus at 194a Sydney Street West 1968*  
COURTESY OF THE PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE THORNDON TRUST

LIVE TO PAINT  
& PAINT TO  
LIVE  
  
JILL  
TREVELYAN

During the late 1960s, the last years of her life, Rita Angus became increasingly exasperated with the young art historians who were attempting to write about her. She felt that a narrow view of her art was emerging, based on a limited knowledge of her work. And she was alarmed that the facts of her life were being misrepresented.

In her effort to get her story straight, Angus made draft after draft of her letters to writers like Gordon Brown and Peter Tomory, taking pains to correct their misconceptions and setting out the facts of her life. These letters make revealing reading. Not the least of her vexations was the way in which the paperwork involved in being 'Rita Angus' got in the way of painting. In a draft letter to Gordon Brown she wrote: 'Correcting your scripts has taken a lot of my time, & I've painting to do—I as other painters do live to paint and paint to live.'

'Live to paint and paint to live'—this phrase seems to sum up a great deal about Rita Angus. Her journals and letters, held at the Turnbull Library, leave an impression of a strong-willed and independent woman. Friends spoke of her sense of vocation, and the single-mindedness with which she pursued her art. Throughout an eventful and often turbulent life, Angus never allowed herself to be deflected from her purpose.

Henrietta Catherine Angus, known as Rita, was born in Hastings on 12 March 1908. She was the eldest of seven children of Ethel Violet Crabtree and William McKenzie Angus, who began his working life as a carpenter and went on to establish the major construction company W. M. Angus Ltd.

Rita grew up with a strong interest in her heritage; Scottish on her father's side, English on her mother's. She remained close to her family, especially her parents, all her life and was grateful for their early recognition and support of her talent.

In 1927, Angus enrolled at Canterbury College School of Art to begin a four-year diploma in fine arts. From teachers such as Leonard Booth, Cecil Kelly and Archibald Nicoll, she received a sound traditional training in life-drawing, still life, and landscape painting. Art history lectures introduced her to Renaissance and medieval art—'a revelation & a new world to me.'<sup>3</sup> Like other students, Angus had limited awareness of modern art developments overseas. News filtered through by way of returning art students—among them Ngaio Marsh and Olivia Spencer Bower—and the occasional print or postcard, but it wasn't until the late 1930s and 1940s that she saw reproductions of work by artists like Picasso. She did not feel this to be a limitation, however: 'My way was clear', she later wrote, 'since art student days.'<sup>3</sup> Angus never completed the fine arts diploma, but her studies at the school continued, with interruptions, until 1933.

Angus had arrived in Christchurch at a time when the city boasted a lively artistic and literary scene. Women played a vital role in its cultural life, and in later years she cited the watercolourist Margaret Stoddart as an important example. In 1927, a group of ex-students of the School of Art had established a breakaway exhibition from the conservative Canterbury Society of Arts. Angus began exhibiting with The Group, as it became known, in 1932 and it remained a key outlet for her work for the rest of her life.

In 1929 Angus completed a painting which can be seen as a summation of her formal training. An

accomplished if conventional work, *Self-portrait* [figure 2] is of particular interest today as one of her earliest self-images. By the early 1930s she was experimenting with a more 'modern' style. The art that was dubbed 'modern' in New Zealand at the time was chiefly characterised by bold design, simplified form, and high-keyed colour; its exponents included Rata Lovell-Smith, Christopher Perkins, and Rhona Haszard. Angus knew the work of these artists and may have been influenced by their example.

In 1930, at the age of 22, Angus married fellow artist Alfred Cook, whom she had met at the School of Art. Their marriage was short-lived, however—the couple separated in 1934 on grounds of incompatibility and later divorced. Angus never remarried and lived alone for most of her life. We can only speculate as to why the marriage did not last, but as a young woman with feminist views, Angus was certainly aware of the conflict between the roles of wife and artist. Few women of her era were able to combine an artistic career with marriage and motherhood, especially if they happened to marry another artist—Edith Woollaston and Anne McCahon being the most obvious examples. Angus seems to have possessed from an early age an unusually strong sense of vocation, and, as her biographer Janet Paul writes, a 'determination to protect the painter in herself.'<sup>4</sup>

During the 1950s Angus copied a quotation into her notebook which seems an apt description of the way she lived. The true artist, she wrote, 'believes he has something of supreme importance to tell the world . . . he has to stay alone, & work alone, & believe fervently.'<sup>5</sup> The idea of the solitary (usually male) artist, sacrificing all for the sake of their work, is today dismissed as a romantic myth. But for Angus, the myth was a sustaining one—it provided a



FIGURE 2: *Self-portrait* 1929, OIL ON CANVAS, 470 X 380MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA  
TONGAREWA, ON LOAN FROM THE RITA ANGUS ESTATE [8.41209]

justification for a way of life that was highly unconventional for a woman.

In the New Zealand of the 1930s, divorce was unusual and there was a stigma attached to it, especially for women. Angus's divorce left her in a difficult position, financially and socially, but she had a circle of supportive friends and she was able to eke out a modest living with various short-term jobs. These included teaching and working for the *Press*, illustrating its children's supplement, the *Press Junior*. Later Angus would describe this as 'a very active and creative period.'<sup>6</sup> She read widely—Freud, Jung, and Oscar Wilde, and began to study Eastern religion and aesthetics. With friends like Louise Henderson, she made a number of sketching trips into the Canterbury high country.

It was one of these trips that provided the impetus for the almost hallucinatory *Cass* [plate 3], an oil painting of a small Canterbury railway station that has become an icon of New Zealand art. With its starkly lit, hard-edged form and insistent patterning, *Cass* exemplifies Angus's highly personal style and vision. But even as it looked forward, signalling her mature style, *Cass* was grounded in her study of art history. 'Cass at that time appeared as a "break away" from the academic', she later wrote, 'but resulted from an intense interest in composition of old masters, through mathematics, e.g. geometry.'<sup>7</sup>

In 1937 Angus moved to a studio flat at 97a Cambridge Terrace, and in the following year Leo Bensemann and his friend Lawrence Baigent moved into the adjacent studio. All three were pacifists and the two artists, Bensemann and Angus, shared many interests, including Chinese and Japanese art, early Renaissance painting, Egyptian art, and modern movements such as Surrealism. As their friendship

grew, they began drawing and painting each other and the works they produced are inventive and often playful constructions. In *Portrait of Rita Angus* (c. 1937–1938), Bensemann presents the older artist as a witch-like and mysterious figure, a stern, black-haired dominatrix. Her *Portrait of Leo Bensemann* [plate 6], one of her finest works, portrays him as a dangerously handsome boy, his challenging stare and clear-cut features framed by a spiky mountain backdrop. On the eve of war, 97 Cambridge Terrace became briefly a hub of artistic and intellectual life in Christchurch—the unofficial headquarters of The Group, and a meeting-place for pacifists, artists, writers and musicians. Denis Glover remembered Angus at this time: ‘She was never in good health for very long . . . Yet the life and laughter of any company, which in the late thirties she enjoyed with the best of us.’<sup>8</sup>

As the threat of war intensified during the late 1930s, Angus joined the New Zealand Peace Pledge Union. When war began she deliberately avoided work connected to the war effort. Instead, she picked tobacco with her friend, the artist Chrystabel Aitken at Pangatotara, and spent time with pacifist friends at the Riverside Community at Upper Moutere, near Nelson. In October 1944 she had to appear before the Industrial Manpower Appeal Committee in Christchurch to justify her refusal to undertake war work. Her appeal was rejected, but luckily the troops were beginning to return home, the worst of the labour shortage was over, and she escaped punishment.

Angus subsisted on a meagre income during the war years. From 1943 she lived simply and austere in a cottage at 18 Aranoni Track, on Clifton Hill at Sumner, which her father had helped her to purchase. Art materials were in short supply and she

concentrated on pencil drawings and watercolours. Her unfinished watercolour self-portrait of 1943 [plate 8], drawn at Sumner beach, is one of her most sensitive and poignant self-images. Nature studies include the ethereal *Tree* [figure 4] and *Untitled (Passionflower)* [figure 5], while the landscapes of the period show her at her most lyrical.

Undoubtedly the most celebrated work of the war years (and arguably Angus’s most famous image today) is the commanding *Portrait (Betty Curnow)* [plate 9]. Betty Curnow is surrounded by objects, carefully selected by artist and subject, which signify her role as a wife and mother, her intellectual and artistic interests, and the history of her family in Canterbury. Angus later wrote of the inspiration for this work—her sighting of a large oil painting of an elderly ‘pioneer woman’ in the Turnbull Library, which conveyed a sense of history that she wished to express in her own work.<sup>9</sup>

Angus’s art of the 1930s and 1940s has often been described as ‘regionalist’ in its apparent celebration of a specific time and locality. She was deeply interested in New Zealand’s colonial history and cultural development, but she was wary of the self-conscious search for national identity which preoccupied Pakeha intellectual life at the time. Angus saw New Zealand as culturally dependent on the art of Western Europe and yet to develop its own means of expression. In 1947 she described her aims in the *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand*: ‘To show to the present a peaceful way, and through devotion to the visual arts to sow some seeds for possible maturity in later generations.’

‘To show to the present a peaceful way . . .’ This and other statements by Angus reveal an idealistic



FIGURE 3: Colin McCahon & Rita Angus at 18 Aranoni Track, Clifton c.1948

COURTESY OF ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY, WELLINGTON

and romantic streak—a belief that the artist has a prophetic role to play in society, and a faith in the power of art to function as a force for the common good. In this she had something in common with her younger contemporary Colin McCahon. While their work was formally very different, they shared a social conscience and an idealism that was a powerful motivation for their art. They certainly respected each other’s work and Angus publicly defended McCahon on at least one occasion. In a letter to the *New Zealand Listener* of 21 May 1948, she praised him as a ‘courageous painter’ and noted the

‘humility and devotion’ of his art—qualities which could just as well be ascribed to her own work.<sup>10</sup>

During the 1940s Angus’s friends were aware of her recurrent illnesses and depression and her increasingly solitary habits. From 1942 she was taking bromide, a sedative, to alleviate sleeplessness and anxiety, and she was also suffering from some of the symptoms of what is now known as anorexia.<sup>11</sup> By 1948 she was ill and unable to paint. In the following year, near breakdown, she was admitted to Sunnyside Hospital. Angus was treated with

electroconvulsive therapy at Sunnyside before being released in 1950 into the care of her parents at Waikanae.

The trauma of her illness left Angus more introspective and inclined to be suspicious of people's intentions. Some of her friends felt her personality had changed—'she became very mysterious and mystical'; 'she became middle-aged.'<sup>13</sup> Yet she emerged as committed as ever to painting. During her recovery she found a rich source of subjects in her parents' three-acre seaside garden. Many of her exquisite nature studies of this period were worked up into background details for major oils such as the symbolic self-portrait, *Rutu* [plate 13].

In 1951 Angus returned to Christchurch. From 1952 she at last had a small regular income from some shares in her father's construction company, but she continued to take on part-time work, such as occasional illustrating for the *School Journal* and *Te Ao Hou*. The jewel-like *Landscape with sea* [plate 12] is an unusual work from this period—a completely abstract composition. As the title suggests, however, even a work like this was inspired by nature.

In 1953, a gift of money from her friend Douglas Lilburn enabled Angus to visit Central Otago. She spent two months in the region, making numerous studies for the magnificent *Central Otago* (painted in 1954–56, but retouched and reglazed in 1969) [plate 15]. This, her most ambitious landscape painting to date, seamlessly brings together a number of 'mini-scenes' (of Naseby, Alexandra, Arrowtown and Wakatipu) in a vibrant and dynamic composition. Central Otago was a landscape which had particular resonance for Angus. Her father had been born at Naseby, and she, with her strong interest in family history, was drawn to the place of his origins.



FIGURE 4: *Tree* 1943, WATERCOLOUR, 300 X 286MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA,  
ON LOAN FROM THE RITA ANGUS ESTATE [B.37760]



FIGURE 5: *Untitled (Passionflower)* 1943, WATERCOLOUR, 140 X 136MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA,  
ON LOAN FROM THE RITA ANGUS ESTATE [I.2662]

Early in 1954 Angus sold her Clifton Cottage and left Christchurch for good, moving to Mangonui in Northland, where friends were living. But rural life did not suit her: she felt isolated and unhappy, and was troubled by the racial conflict she perceived in the district.<sup>13</sup> By winter she was back in Wellington, and in the following year she purchased an old cottage at 194a Sydney Street West, in Thorndon, which she named Fernbank Studio. In 1957 she described her impressions of the city: 'The light is beautiful . . . There seems to be a fusion of the colder south and the warmth of the far north . . . to be found in the light and colour about Wellington.'<sup>14</sup> It was to be her home for the remainder of her life, and would provide the subject matter for paintings like *Journey, Wellington* [plate 16], *View from Tinakori Road* [plate 21], and *Flight* [plate 24].

In 1955 Angus was 47 years old. Henceforth her life would follow a more settled pattern: working in her studio, visiting galleries about Wellington, and making regular trips to Napier, where her parents were now living. The excursions to Napier were highly productive for her work. Sitting in the front seat of a Newman's bus, she made the ballpoint sketches that would later be worked up into oils like *Storm, Hawke's Bay* [plate 23] back in the studio.

In 1957, Angus had an exhibition at Wellington's Architectural Centre Gallery—remarkably her first solo show. She had been painting for 30 years, and was still earning only a paltry income from her work. By the late 1950s, however, the climate for art in New Zealand was changing, due largely to the efforts of the Auckland City Art Gallery. Under the leadership of Peter Tomory and Colin McCahon, the Gallery organised regular touring exhibitions that not only promoted contemporary New Zealand art, but also confidently asserted

that there was a local artistic tradition worth recognising. New Zealand art was in the process of gaining an audience and a market. Angus was included in four Auckland City Art Gallery exhibitions during the late 1950s and early 1960s, the beginning of widespread critical recognition for her work.

Change was also evident in the emerging arts infrastructure, offering new opportunities to a small number of artists. In 1958, Angus was awarded a New Zealand Art Societies' fellowship, which enabled her to study art for a year in England and Europe. She spent most of the time based in a flat in London, and enjoyed the Tate Gallery and the opportunity to see paintings she knew from reproduction. She also took a keen interest in contemporary art, commenting favourably in her diary on the work of Jackson Pollock and other painters.<sup>15</sup> Angus took extensive notes of all she saw and did on this, her only overseas trip as an adult.

Back in Wellington in 1960, Angus accepted a mural commission for Napier Girls' High School which occupied her for most of the year. She also painted *Self-portrait with fruit* [plate 17], a radiant watercolour in which she is surrounded by aspects of her Thorndon environment. This work has a mystical quality that resonates through other paintings of the 1960s, notably a series of imaginative works derived from plant forms, such as the surreal *Moon (Leaf Series)* [plate 20]. In an even stranger work, *A.D. 1968* [plate 22] Angus deploys wisps of clouds, seahorses, a branch and two oil drums to spell out the numerals of the title. This is one of her most startling and enigmatic images.

Although critical interest in Angus's art continued to grow, the 1960s was not without its setbacks.



Even at this late stage of her career, she was devastated by the rejection of her painting, *Journey, Wellington*, from the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts exhibition in 1964. She wrote immediately to resign, defending her right to paint as she wished.

Angus's many letters of the 1960s, held in the Turnbull Library, provide an insight into her daily life and her concerns. To her friend Doris Lusk, she wrote enthusiastically of the lively Wellington gallery scene, and of her interest in young painters like Brent Wong and Jacqueline Fahey. A picture emerges of an active and not unsociable life, yet one focused always on the discipline of painting. Her friends found her to have a keen sense of fun and a dry wit, but she also had a sharp tongue and was renowned for her periodic outbursts. Juliet Peter remembered her as 'a delight and a wasp in turn.'<sup>16</sup>

Angus's letters to art historians such as Gordon Brown and Peter Tomory reveal another side of her life: her distaste for what she called 'art politics', and her fierce concern to control what was written about her. She urged them to go back to the work, to study the art, not the artist. 'I suggest you relax', she wrote to Gordon Brown, 'You have been trying to make me into a legend. I am a painter, & paintings are paintings—line tone form & colour . . . you cannot make a legend out of a painter . . .'<sup>17</sup>

Always wary of attempts to pigeonhole her, Angus was annoyed when she was linked with McCahon and Woollaston as the newly-proclaimed 'big three' of contemporary New Zealand art. When it was suggested that they had all worked together in Nelson in 1939, she wrote to McCahon in anger: 'As I am several years older than you, I have been astonished & embarrassed that I have not been able to have my own art history.'<sup>18</sup> At some point in the

1950s, Angus had copied a quotation from Sylvia Ashton-Warner's novel, *Spinster*, into her notebook: 'The kind of peace in which the seed of art has time & composure enough to germinate.'<sup>19</sup> For Angus, that peace would remain elusive.

By the late 1960s Angus was aware that her capacity for work had diminished. Back problems and illness had taken their toll and she was increasingly limited to subjects she could paint in her studio. Nevertheless, when Thorndon was bisected by a new motorway, she and Juliet Peter, in a spirit of protest, documented the demolition of old houses and the removal of tombstones from Bolton Street cemetery. *Flight* [plate 24], one of her last major oils, is a visionary painting which combines a view of Island Bay with tombstones from the cemetery and the flying dove, symbol of peace.

From mid-1969, Angus suffered recurring bouts of what she described to her friends as Hong Kong 'flu. In November she entered Wellington Hospital, where she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. But even at this stage she was planning new work and looking forward to a series of hospital drawings when she felt stronger. The drawings never eventuated: Angus died on 25 January 1970, aged 61. Her Sydney Street studio later became known as the 'Rita Angus Cottage', a home for artists on yearly tenure.

Angus's reputation continued to grow in the years following her death and the market value of her work soared. In 1982 the National Art Gallery's landmark book and exhibition revealed the depth and range of her achievement, and confirmed her status as one of the outstanding artists of her generation. During the 1960s and 1970s, she had some stylistic influence on younger artists working in the

figurative tradition—Brent Wong, Michael Smither, and Robin White, for example. In the long term, however, her influence lies not so much in her style or technique, but in the powerful example of commitment and professionalism she set.

As a pioneer of modern painting in New Zealand, Angus evolved a distinctive and highly personal art.

An austere and often exacting woman, she was sustained by her belief in her vocation and a religious philosophy informed by Far Eastern thought. In 1947 Angus summed up her attitude towards art: 'As a woman painter, I work to represent love of humanity and faith in mankind in a world, which is to me, richly variable and infinitely beautiful.'<sup>20</sup>

All the manuscripts cited are held in the Alexander Turnbull Library; those with reference numbers beginning MS-P-1399 refer to the Rita Angus papers.

- 1 Draft letter to Gordon Brown, undated [c. 1 May 1968], MS-P-1399: 1/4.
- 2 Draft letter to Gordon Brown, 15 April 1968, MS-P-1399: 1/4.
- 3 Biographical notes, Notebook, MS-P-1399: 2/1/1.
- 4 Janet Paul, 'Biographical Essay' in *Rita Angus*, Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1982, p.17.
- 5 Notebook, MS-P-1399: 2/1/5. Angus defended her right to live alone. To Gordon Brown she wrote: 'Your words leave me with an impression that it may not be the thing to live & work alone. In England women creative artists have been able to live & work alone for three centuries if they chose. In the Wgtn Public Library there is a book on the First-Born, (I am one) stating that it is normal for a first born, if gifted in the arts or sciences to live alone for the sake of their work'. Draft letter, 15 April 1968, MS-P-1399: 1/4.
- 6 Draft letter to Gordon Brown, 15 April 1968, MS-P-1399: 1/4.
- 7 Biographical notes, Notebook, MS-P-1399: 2/1/1.
- 8 Denis Glover, 'Rita Angus: impressions by some friends', *Art New Zealand*, no.3, Dec-Jan 1976-77, p.15.
- 9 See draft letters to Gordon Brown, 1 May 1968, MS-P-1399: 1/4; and to Betty Curnow, undated, MS-P-1399: 1/6.

- 10 Angus's letter is cited by Peter Simpson in *Answering Hark: McCahon/Caselberg: Painter/Poet*, Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing, 2001, p.14.
- 11 Letter from Jean Jones to Janet Paul, 25 August 1985, Janet Paul papers, MS-P-5640-004.
- 12 Denis Glover, op.cit., p.15; Leo Bensemann quoted in Janet Paul, 'Biographical essay', *Rita Angus*, National Art Gallery, 1982, p.41, note 69.
- 13 See Ray Gilbert, 'Some personal notes on Janet Paul's biographical essay', 22 June 1985, Janet Paul papers, MS-P-5640-059.
- 14 'Wellington charms an artist from Christchurch', *The Dominion*, 13 May 1957, p.16.
- 15 Diary entry, 23 November 1958, MS-P-1399: 2/1/3.
- 16 Juliet Peter quoted in Jim and Mary Barr, *Contemporary New Zealand Painters*, Volume 1, A-M, Martinborough: Alister Taylor, 1980, p.18.
- 17 Notes for a letter to Gordon Brown, MS-P-1399: 3/3.
- 18 Draft letter to Colin McCahon, 12 July 1967, MS-P-1399: 1/3. McCahon wrote back sympathetically on 24 July: 'This report sounds like the jargon of certain art historians making theories.' (MS-P-1399: 1/3).
- 19 Notebook, MS-P-1399: 2/1/5.
- 20 *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand*, no.3, 1947, pp.67-68.

RITA  
ANGUS  
BY HERSELF  
VITA  
COCHRAN

**S**elf-portrait (1966): A woman wearing a red gown stands firm, bathed in moonlight. She is flanked by two groups of grey windowless buildings, behind them a hillscape. Her expression is one of formidable gravity, her gaze unflinching. Is she a gatekeeper to a holy city? A prophet leading the way out of urban blandness? The woman holds a brush and palette across her body, as if they are weapons with which she defends herself—sword and shield—or sacred trophies. The brush also suggests a candle, its paint-soaked bristles held directly in front of her heart. The daub of golden paint at its tip is a point where depiction and reality intersect: the brush depicted in the painting is also the brush which created it.

Rita Angus made this self-portrait near the end of a life which was spent painting some of the most indelible portraits and landscapes in New Zealand art. *Self-portrait* (1966) [plate 18] is an emphatic declaration of her vocation. Here we see the artist as warrior, or prophet, but this is only one of many selves Rita Angus portrayed. While it is not her most admired self-portrait, it is the one which advances the strongest claim for herself as a painter—a claim which can be traced back through a lifetime of self-portraits.

Angus's self-portraits form the most striking and sustained episode of self-scrutiny in this country's art history. Angus depicted herself throughout her forty-year career; more than fifty painted and drawn self-portraits remain. They range from simple portrait studies to compositions steeped in personal symbolism to playful masquerades. In them we see Angus become a divine creator, a modern woman, a determined artist, a cross-cultural goddess and

more. Any self-portrait is strange: the artist paints herself from her reflection, and the viewer looks at the artist looking at both herself and at us. But to this basic fascination Angus added an intensity of gaze, a mysterious reserve, and a passion for self-invention which continue to draw viewers to her work.

Why did Angus return again and again to herself as subject? A desire for immortality? A means of showcasing her skill? A wish for self-knowledge? The convenience of using herself as a model? A belief in the power of the artist, the self-portrait being a genre which reinforces the primacy of the maker? We can look for answers in the works themselves and also in their social and material life. All but two of the self-portraits were in Angus's possession when she died (though sometimes exhibited they were usually marked 'not for sale'), and she retained many unfinished self-portraits and sketches of herself.<sup>1</sup> In short, Angus was the primary audience for Angus's self-portraits. A self-portrait always hung in her studio, where it conceivably served as a validation and reinforcement. After all, the life Angus chose for herself—that of a professional artist working in New Zealand—was a highly unconventional one, especially for a woman. Given how few precedents there were for such a vocation, the self-portraits can be seen as the means by which Angus gave shape to her life as an artist, and, in doing so, confirmed her own fitness for the task.

But the self-portraits also had a public function: Angus ensured that they were widely seen. She was represented by *Self-portrait* (1936–37) [plate 5] and *Cass* [plate 3] in the National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art, which toured the country in 1940 and was the most important exposure of



FIGURE 6: *Self-portrait (Grisaille)* c.1940,  
PENCIL AND WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER, 293 X 224MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA,  
ON LOAN FROM THE RITA ANGUS ESTATE [R.6655/06]

Angus's early career. In 1947 the first notable mention of her work in print appeared in the *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand*, and Angus again chose a self-portrait to represent her work, alongside a flower painting. In the early 1950s Angus submitted her most unusual self-portrait, *Rutu* [plate 13] to be part of an exhibition of New Zealand paintings which Helen Hitchings toured to London. When Gordon Brown and Hamish Keith chose *Cass and Portrait (Betty Curnow)* [plate 9] to represent Angus's practice in their nationalist *Introduction to New Zealand Painting* (1969), Angus insisted that they instead reproduce a little-known Hawke's Bay landscape and a self-portrait. She objected to the narrow view of herself as a landscape painter which was developing. Most commentators grouped Angus with Colin McCahon and Toss Woollaston as painters who taught New Zealanders how to see the national landscape. While her iconic landscape paintings justify such a categorisation, the self-portraits complicate this history profoundly and courageously. They celebrate and invent *personal* rather than national identity and they vividly bring into being the figure of the female artist in mid-century New Zealand.

The self-portrait has long been seen as a kind of showcase for the artist's skill, an embodiment of her person and her prowess. Angus subscribed to the idea of the artist as a special person and of the self-portrait as a way of indicating this specialness. To represent oneself is a powerful act, a way of taking command of public perception. Alongside these complex motivations, however, must be set practical ones. An entry in a 1968 exhibition catalogue says that 'Rita Angus implied that they (self-portraits) were sitting ducks to paint, like an exercise, since the sitter does not have to be considered.'<sup>2</sup>

### *The artist as model*

Angus completed her earliest self-portraits when she was about twenty-one, in a painterly but conventional style. She shows herself as an attentive, serious young woman, already looking—and looking at herself—with concentration. From here onwards, she turns to her own reflection again and again. In a watercolour from the early 1940s [figure 6] we see Angus poised on a chair, her knees functioning as easel so that she can view herself full-length in the mirror. On close examination we can see that the hand which has painted the portrait is the one detail which Angus has left unfinished, an absence which seems to point to the intrigue at the heart of the self-portrait project: namely, that it involves the body as both posing subject and artistic agent. Angus paints with the hand she depicts. There are many small-scale paintings, like this one, of the artist at work, as well as many unfinished sketches and fleeting watercolour studies of her face.

Though they are minor works never intended for exhibition, some remarkable watercolours Angus painted of her naked body in the early 1940s provide a clue to the nature of her self-portraiture. In western art the female nude is most commonly painted from a hired model by a male artist for a male audience. Indeed, many male artists included nude models in their self-portraits, asserting their bohemianism, their artistic prowess in mastering the nude, and locating the source of their inspiration in the muse-like beauty of the female model. In her works, Angus is model *and* artist, and an independent woman in command of her own body and sexuality. Her strong broad shoulders and long, athletic arms do not conform to the stereotypical female body type, especially not the fleshy female nudes often seen in historical art.



FIGURE 7: *Sketch* C.1940, PENCIL AND WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER, 420 X 284MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA,  
ON LOAN FROM THE RITA ANGUS ESTATE

Angus's gaze is self-possessed and her body language strong—hand on hip in one image, standing tall with a modern Amazon's pride. In a pencil drawing from the same time, Angus presents her body as a thing of bones and sinews, to the extent that it seems almost cadaverous. Yet at the same time it is a sexual body, with a dramatically narrow waist and full breasts and thighs. The drawing bears the inscription 'study for carving', suggesting an attempt to present herself as a totemic figure, and it is this body shape which she gives to *Rutu*, her self-portrait as goddess, a decade later. While at first we might assume that Angus used herself as the model for these works for the sake of convenience (as did her contemporary Lois White who painted semi-nude self-portraits in the 1930s when she found it difficult to acquire professional models), a closer look at the images suggests otherwise. In these works Angus has begun to reshape the conventions of the academic nude study so that they carry new and more complex meanings.

### *Inventing the self*

The conventional view that self-portraits show a mimetic likeness of their subject, through which the viewer can access the subject's 'inner self', is now largely discredited. Self-portraits do not merely record the self, but rather are a way of bringing the self into being. As Laurence Simmons puts it, 'we assume that life produces the self-portrait as an act produces its consequences, but can we not more accurately assume that the act of self-portraiture may itself produce and determine the life?'<sup>3</sup> *Untitled (Self-portrait at the hairdresser's)* [plate 4] from the mid 1930s can be seen as an allegory of the self-portrait process. Here Angus deftly and wittily turns the situation of compulsory self-scrutiny posed by a haircut into an opportunity for a self-portrait. The mirror is a central tool of the self-portraitist as well as a tool of



FIGURE 8: *Photograph of Rita Angus painting Self-portrait (1936–37)*

PRIVATE COLLECTION, AUCKLAND

modern dress and grooming. In this work Angus merges those two functions. Mirrors are often thought to be instruments of truth which reflect back to us our objective selves. But as Anne Hollander observes, 'the mirror viewer must, so to speak, always watch himself looking at himself. Under these circumstances the unguarded face is impossible to see.'<sup>4</sup> The person looking in a mirror always adopts an expression and pose, making mirror gazing an exercise in artfulness rather than truthfulness. The same is of course true of the self-portrait—an artist cannot create an unconscious self-image. In this work Angus does not meet the viewer's gaze, and by extension her own, in the mirror. It is as if she has not yet decided which expression to try on. We see here appearance in mid-process: her perm is unfinished, as is the work itself—a painting without its make-up on. Angus shows herself as a woman acquiring a new look: someone being made up in both the mundane and profound sense.

Angus projects a vivid and imposing self in her iconic *Self-portrait* (1936–37) [plate 5]. Here she is the embodiment of the New Woman—sophisticated, urbane, intelligent. She invokes the chic of 1930s film stars as well as a fashionable androgyny. Her cigarette signals her wilfulness. Her expression is at once proud, determined, disdainful, wary and knowing. It commands attention and refuses to be outstared.

The portrait exudes an obvious theatricality, from its sallow hues reminiscent of early colour film to the schematic flatness of its background, which recalls a painted stage set. Angus does not anchor the work in a specific geography. Rather, she stages her performance against an anonymous cityscape whose hazy yellow smog could as likely be industrial Europe as Christchurch, where she lived at this

time. Equally, though Angus had yet to travel overseas, the noir-ish aspect, swank attire and racy beret in *Self-portrait* (1936–37) locate the painting in the ambience of the European metropolis. Angus's prominently brandished cigarette gives her both film star glamour and masculine assertiveness, though in fact she was not a committed smoker. An examination of *Self-portrait* (1936–37) half finished [see figure 8] reveals Angus deliberately edited her appearance to fit with the fashionable severity of the New Woman: the softening waves of hair which surround the sitter's face are eliminated in the finished version. Through the strange and powerful agency that characterises the self-portrait genre, the painting has given dimension to a possible or imagined life. For many, this portrait is the quintessential image of Angus: the painting has invented the life rather than the life determining the painting.

### *Masquerade*

As we see from Angus's *Untitled (Self-portrait at the hairdresser's)*, self-portraiture can be akin to dressing up. Many of Angus's self-portraits show her awareness of human identity as an artful process, open to manipulation. In the late 1930s Angus produced several self-portraits in which masquerade—the drama of the glamorous exterior—becomes the central theme. The cosmetics of the self-portrait genre, usually seen as something to be dissembled in the attempt to project a convincing 'likeness', are the very subject of these works. Some of these self-portraits present the face as an inscrutable mask; in others, she plays in the gap between overt dress-up and seamless disguise.

A 1938 work of wit and panache [plate 7] shows Angus wearing a fashionable green halter-neck shirt with outlandish pointed collars and three large

peppermint buttons. Her mannered pose, elegant outline and marble skin recall 1930s fashion photography. Noting the work's title—*Cleopatra*—we see that Angus's profile pose with elbow at her side and hand held up recalls the stances of women in ancient Egyptian tomb paintings. Angus had a strong interest in ancient Egyptian art, whose mystery and precise geometry she admired. It is historically playful, and very charming, to telescope ancient Egyptian art into contemporary fashion, so that we might wonder whether we are looking at Angus, or at Angus posing as a 1930s fashion plate, or at Cleopatra updated for the Art Deco era. The work's emotional mood is sealed by Angus's gaze which is neither confrontational nor coy, but slightly mischievous. She watches us watching her striking a pose.

In *Untitled (Self-portrait)* (c.1936) [plate 2] Angus's face has the lifelessly staring eyes and smooth symmetry of a mask. The head-and-shoulders composition links this painting to the no-nonsense format of official portraiture such as passport photography. Angus's 'man-tailored' shirt, a style fashionable in the 1930s, is as stiff and angular as a toy soldier's uniform. Likewise, her hair is moulded into curving forms, like that of an art deco mannequin. Angus's stylised face, which seems derived in part from Byzantine icons, is the most fascinating part of the composition. The lips are scarlet, the eyes rimmed with intense violet, and the eyebrows arch in crisp shiny lines.

Before 1920 make-up was not supposed to be seen for itself—rather, its intention was to deceive—but by the 1930s make-up had become an end in itself, a paint for making the face into a stylised mask. In this self-portrait Angus blurs the distinction between paint and make-up, to create an artificial

face reminiscent of a painted doll. This painting explicitly repels traditional expectations of portraits—the viewer's attempts to divine the 'self' behind the exterior are firmly denied, and we are made to look instead at the heroic artifice of modern fashion itself.

### The 'natural'

To turn from these cosmetic self-portraits to the group of works that encompasses *Self-portrait* (1947) [plate 11] and *Self-portrait* (1945) [figure 10] is, it first seems, to turn from the false to the sincere, from the disguised to the revealed. But here it is crucial to recall that works like *Self-portrait* (1947) deliberately use effects that repress artifice in favour of a natural-seeming transparency, just as the works from the 1930s use devices which play up artfulness. This self-portrait shows the quiet simplicity and meditative poise which for Angus were exemplified by the Eastern philosophy she studied. She depicts herself in a plain blue top, hair held back with a simple pin and her make-up free face rendered in detail so that we see each eyelash and every line of her forehead. The very medium underlines this sense of transparency—watercolour, of course, does not allow for the over-painting and alterations which are possible in oil paint, so the painting seems naked and pellucid both in style and character. One has the sense of a person patient and unconcealed by stylistic tricks or deceptive surfaces. The painting's liquidity and jewel-like glow are eerily life-like. The qualities that the portrait projects—patience, precision, perfection—are embodied in its very technique.

*Self-portrait* (1945) shows the artist, calm and contemplative, against a background of autumn leaves. She wears a dress of her own creation, which

also appears in a street photograph of Angus taken in the early 1940s [figure 9]. Embroidered flowers wend their way up the bodice of the dress, full and colourful where the foliage behind is brown and parched. 'I like to paint with the seasons, and devote time to the observation of sky, country, sea and people's' wrote Angus in 1947, and this painting depicts the cycles of nature and regeneration happening around and through her. New season's buds can be seen between the expiring leaves, and seed-bearing grasses enter the composition at the right. The flowers on Angus's bodice, which she embroidered in appliqué, are given a second life in the painting—Angus's handiwork is literally made to flourish within the painting's symbolic scheme.

The natural world again provides the symbolism in *Self-portrait with fruit* [plate 17], a work which is as much still life as self-portrait. Angus's truncated body is positioned to look like a sculpted bust, her skin as cool as marble while the fruit in the foreground is given colour and prominence. Angus has gathered around herself a multiculture of floral and vegetable forms—a thistle representing her Scottish heritage, English and Chinese roses, an aubergine (exotic in 1960s Wellington) and a native punga. Each flower is depicted as delicate yet strong, and marked out as special. They function as Angus's objective correlatives: objects in the outside world which have parallels with a person's internal state. The forms in this painting exist in a fluid, shifting space. Scale and distance are distorted and there is much overlapping of objects, giving an impression of the inter-relatedness of the artist and her surroundings. This fusing of self and surroundings perhaps reflects Angus's study of Buddhism, and in particular her sense that all living things are bound in delicate and intricate webs of connection.



FIGURE 9: *Street photograph of Rita Angus c.1940, wearing embroidered dress from Self-portrait 1945*  
COURTESY OF ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY, WELLINGTON



FIGURE 10: *Self-portrait 1945* WATERCOLOUR, 490 X 340MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA  
TONGAREWA, ON LOAN FROM THE RITA ANGUS ESTATE [F.6656/01]

### Symbols

In her self-portraits Angus often surrounds herself with objects whose meanings can be mysterious, but which, like those in *Self-portrait with fruit*, draw out the sitter's internal state, or comment on some aspect of personality. In an unfinished self-portrait from 1943 [plate 8] Angus positions herself in front of the curve of Sumner beach. A caterpillar ascends her shoulder and below it rests a butterfly. Behind Angus is a female figure, perhaps a personification of Spring, who is traditionally depicted as a woman holding a spade or hoe. Metamorphosis and regeneration are being alluded to here. Angus wrote to her sister that year 'I am working on my self-portrait with a background of women'—she intended to introduce more figures and evidence of them can be seen in the pencilled outlines at the left. A pencilled snake on the right shoulder conveys threat, or perhaps alludes to Cleopatra who is often depicted with the snake whose bite caused her death (we encountered Angus's interest in the Egyptian queen in the 1938 self-portrait). This fascinating work was left unfinished, perhaps because it was too unusual or ambitious, but it is important as a predecessor for later paintings, such as the 'goddess' works, which use the female form as a symbolic vehicle.

*Rutu* (1951) is Angus's most fully fledged symbolic work. In this image of wished-for cultural harmony Angus gives herself the complexion of a Polynesian and the straw-blond hair of a European. The painting brims with magical details: Angus's hair is like yellow kelp washed up from the ocean behind her; her eyes are the colour of that ocean; and background foliage frames her modernist throne with the perfect symmetry of an icon painting. The painting has rich and diverse iconography: Angus

holds a lotus flower which is a central motif of Buddhism; she wears a Christian halo whose golden disc is also the sun rising above the ocean; the fish on her neckband recall the early Christian symbol for Christ and also her star sign Pisces. Angus identified with her star sign—which also appears in the clouds above the artist in *Self-portrait* (1966) [plate 18]—Pisces being considered the most sensitive and receptive of the signs. In *Rutu* Angus conflates Western and Eastern iconographies to show herself as a multicultural goddess.

Throughout history artists have alluded to their divinity through the self-portrait—Dürer painted himself as Christ at the beginning of the Renaissance, centuries later Gauguin secreted a self-portrait into a painting of a crucifixion. In *Rutu* Angus also alludes to the divinity of the artist, but she does so by combining diverse traditions to create an original, *female* divinity. *Rutu* is Angus's most explicit use of religious imagery, but variations on the halo form appear in several self-portraits: dancing plumes of cloud encircle her head in *Self-portrait* (1964), and in *Self-portrait* (1967–68) [plate 19] a distinctively kinked branch from her magnolia tree arches overhead, as though nature were accommodating her presence and marking her out as special. In *Self-portrait* (1966) a prominent halo encircles the moon above Angus's head. Male self-portraitists' allusions to Christ served not only to suggest their creative powers but to hint, in the Romantic mode, at the suffering they underwent as artists. In a similar vein, the gown Angus wears in *Self-portrait* (1966), reminiscent of both a painting smock and the gowns worn by saints in historical paintings, has a horizontal cut in its chest which suggests a holy wound or stigma. Angus subscribed to the Romantic idea of the artist as a visionary outsider, who suffered for their art but who had

insight denied those leading conventional lives. Throughout her self-portraits there are hints at her special status as artist: her expressions of contemplative wisdom, her expressions of suffering, but most of all her inimitable, penetrating gaze.

This ability to look at the world and at oneself with intensity is, Angus seems to say, what sets the artist apart. It is this intense gaze which characterises her last self-portrait from 1968. 'I was trying to paint age into it,' the artist wrote of this portrait, and the work does project a calm wisdom. She positions herself against cubistic tree forms, rendered in a less naturalistic way than the rest of the composition: Angus, one realises, has given herself a painting as a backdrop, showing that she inhabits a painter's world, and that the background, like herself, has been invented by her brush.

- 1 *Self-portrait* (1936–37) (Dunedin Public Art Gallery) was in a private collection; *Self-portrait* (1966) was bought by the National Art Gallery in 1967.
- 2 Antony Murray-Oliver, *Rita Angus Notes on 1968 Exhibition* at the Victoria University Library. ATL MS-P-1399 3/2.
- 3 Laurence Simmons, 'Tracing the Self: The Self-Portraits of Rita Angus,' *Artic* 4, 1988, p.41.
- 4 Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*, New York: The Viking Press, 1978, p.392.
- 5 Rita Angus, 'Rita Angus,' *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand*, no.3, 1947, p.67.



PLATE 1: *Untitled (Self-portrait)* c.1929, OIL ON CANVAS, 420 X 329MM

COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA, ON LOAN FROM THE RITA ANGUS ESTATE [B.36804]



PLATE 2: *Untitled (Self-portrait)* c.1936, OIL ON CANVAS, 470 X 379MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA, ON LOAN FROM THE RITA ANGUS ESTATE [B.38836]



PLATE 3: *Cass* 1936, OIL ON CANVAS, 375 X 474MM  
COLLECTION OF THE ROBERT MCDUGALL ART GALLERY, CHRISTCHURCH



PLATE 4: *Untitled (Self-portrait at the hairdresser's)* c.1936, WATERCOLOUR, PENCIL AND INK ON PAPER, 305 X 215MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA, ON LOAN FROM THE RITA ANGUS ESTATE [F.6655/08]



PLATE 5: *Self-portrait 1936-37*, OIL ON CANVAS, 490 X 390MM  
COLLECTION OF THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY, DUNEDIN





PLATE 6: *Leo Bensemann* 1938, OIL ON CANVAS, 360 X 300MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA, ON LOAN FROM THE RITA ANGUS ESTATE [B.37761]



PLATE 7: *Cleopatra* 1938, OIL ON CANVAS, 464 X 376MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA, ON LOAN FROM THE RITA ANGUS ESTATE [B.38150]



PLATE 8: *Portrait* 1943, PENCIL AND WATERCOLOUR, 396 X 254MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA, ON LOAN FROM THE RITA ANGUS ESTATE [F.6656/03]



PLATE 9: *Portrait (Betty Curnow)* 1942, OIL ON CANVAS, 775 X 647MM  
COLLECTION OF THE AUCKLAND ART GALLERY TOI O TAMAKI, AUCKLAND



PLATE 10: *Self-portrait (nude seated)* c.1942, PENCIL AND WASH, 420 X 284MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA, ON LOAN FROM THE RITA ANGUS ESTATE [F.6655/02]

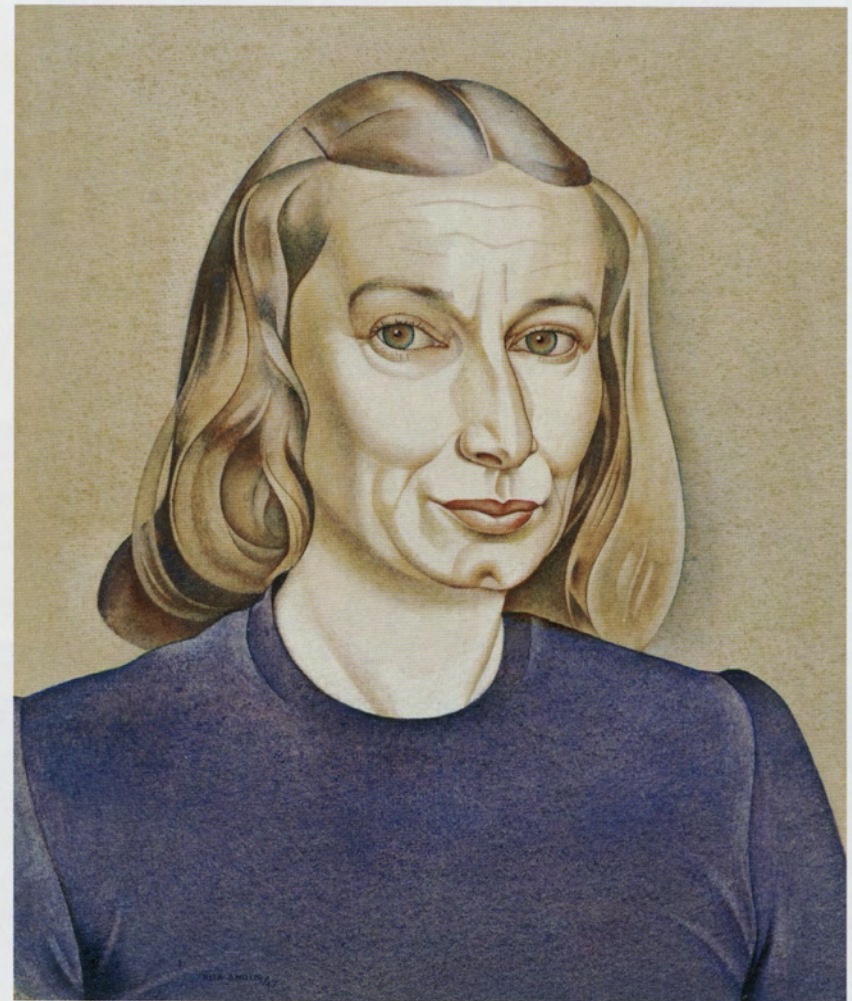


PLATE 11: *Self-portrait* 1947, WATERCOLOUR, 290 X 244MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA, ON LOAN FROM THE RITA ANGUS ESTATE [F.6656/07]



PLATE 12: *Landscape with sea* 1953, OIL ON CANVAS, 382 X 247MM  
COLLECTION OF THE ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY, WELLINGTON



PLATE 13: *Rutu* 1951, OIL ON CANVAS, 712 X 552MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA [B.41196]



PLATE 14: *Central Otago Landscape* 1940, OIL ON CANVAS, 414 X 536MM  
COLLECTION OF THE HOCKEN LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO, DUNEDIN



PLATE 15: *Central Otago* 1954-56/1969, OIL ON CANVAS, 524 X 636MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA [B.41146]



LATE 16: *Journey, Wellington* 1962, OIL ON HARDBOARD, 610 X 863MM  
PRIVATE COLLECTION, WELLINGTON



PLATE 17: *Self-portrait with fruit* 1960-61, WATERCOLOUR, 610 X 480MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA [B.41088]



PLATE 18: *Self-portrait* 1966, OIL ON HARDBOARD, 755 X 451MM  
COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA [B.41095]

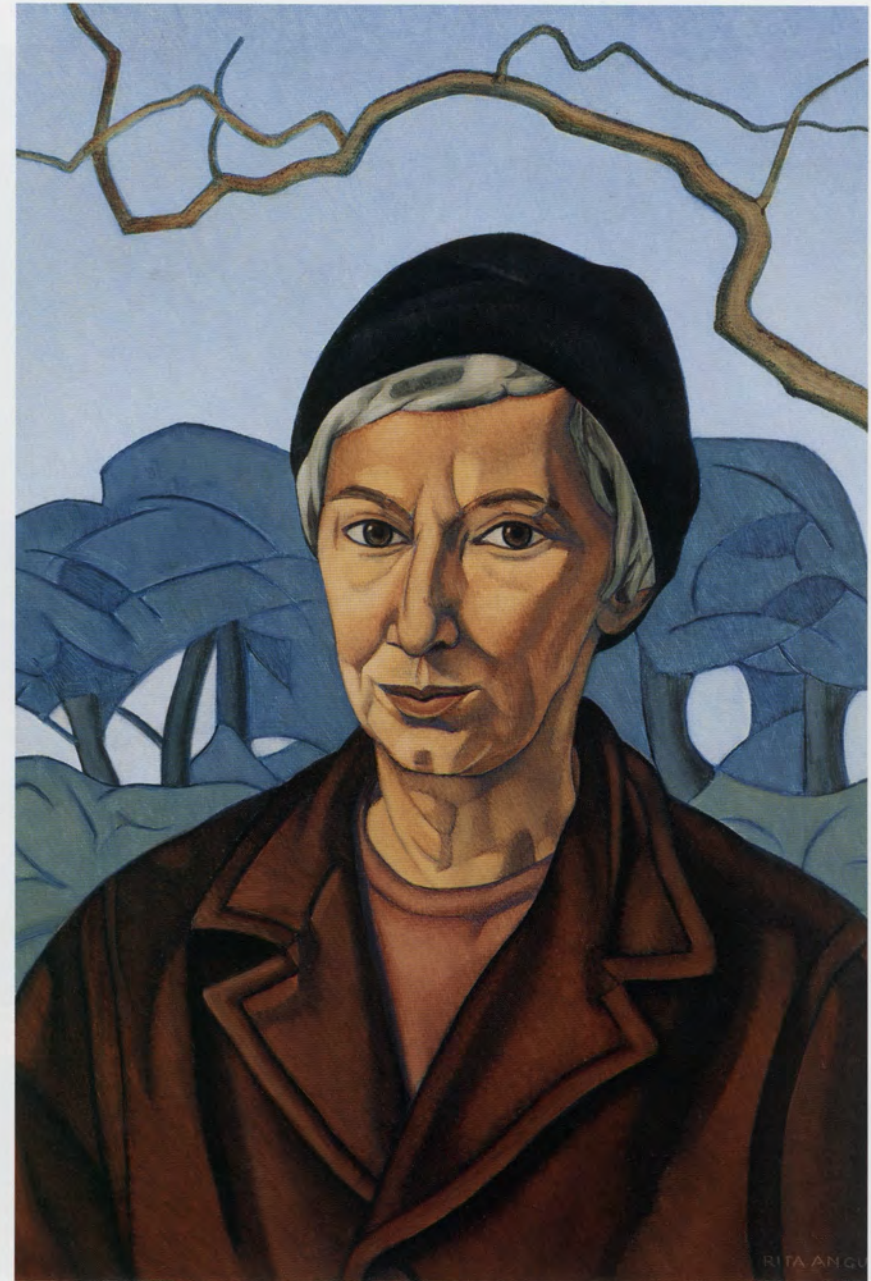


PLATE 19: *Self-portrait* 1967-68, OIL ON HARDBOARD, 577 X 405MM  
PRIVATE COLLECTION, WELLINGTON



PLATE 20: *Moon (Leaf Series)* 1965, OIL ON HARDBOARD, 310 X 378MM  
PRIVATE COLLECTION, WELLINGTON



PLATE 21: *View from Tinakori Road* 1966-67, OIL ON HARDBOARD, 590 X 583MM  
COLLECTION OF THE HOCKEN LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO, DUNEDIN





PLATE 22: *A.D.* 1968 1968, OIL ON BOARD, 587 X 595MM  
PARIS FAMILY COLLECTION, WELLINGTON



PLATE 23: *Storm, Hawke's Bay* c.1969, OIL ON HARDBOARD, 600 X 600MM  
PRIVATE COLLECTION, WELLINGTON



PLATE 24: *Flight* 1968–69, OIL ON HARDBOARD, 590 X 596MM  
 COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA TONGAREWA [B.41094]

Rita Angus was born in 1908 and studied at the Canterbury College School of Arts in Christchurch. In the 1930s she exhibited at the Canterbury Society of Arts and with The Group while working as a graphic artist. She painted extensively in Otago, Canterbury, and later Hawke's Bay and Wellington. In 1954 she bought a cottage in Thorndon, Wellington, where she lived and worked until her death in 1970. A major retrospective of her art toured the country in 1983–84.

VITA COCHRAN was born in Wellington in 1975. She graduated with an MA in art history from the University of Auckland in 1999, writing a dissertation about Rita Angus's *Self-portrait* (1936–37). She lives in Dunedin where she works as a designer.

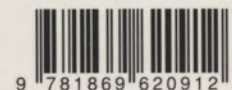
JILL TREVELYAN lives in Wellington, where she is currently Exhibitions Curator at the National Library Gallery. Her 1999 exhibition *Artnotes* included works by Rita Angus from the Alexander Turnbull Library collection.

FRONT COVER: *Self-portrait* 1967–68 (detail),  
 OIL ON HARDBOARD, 577 X 405MM,  
 PRIVATE COLLECTION, WELLINGTON

BACK COVER: *Storm, Hawke's Bay* 1969,  
 OIL ON HARDBOARD, 600 X 600MM,  
 PRIVATE COLLECTION, WELLINGTON

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'AS A WOMAN PAINTER,  
I WORK TO REPRESENT  
LOVE OF HUMANITY  
AND FAITH IN MANKIND  
IN A WORLD, WHICH IS TO ME,  
RICHLY VARIABLE  
AND INFINITELY BEAUTIFUL.'  
RITA ANGUS 1947

