HOTERE

OUT THE BLACK WINDOW

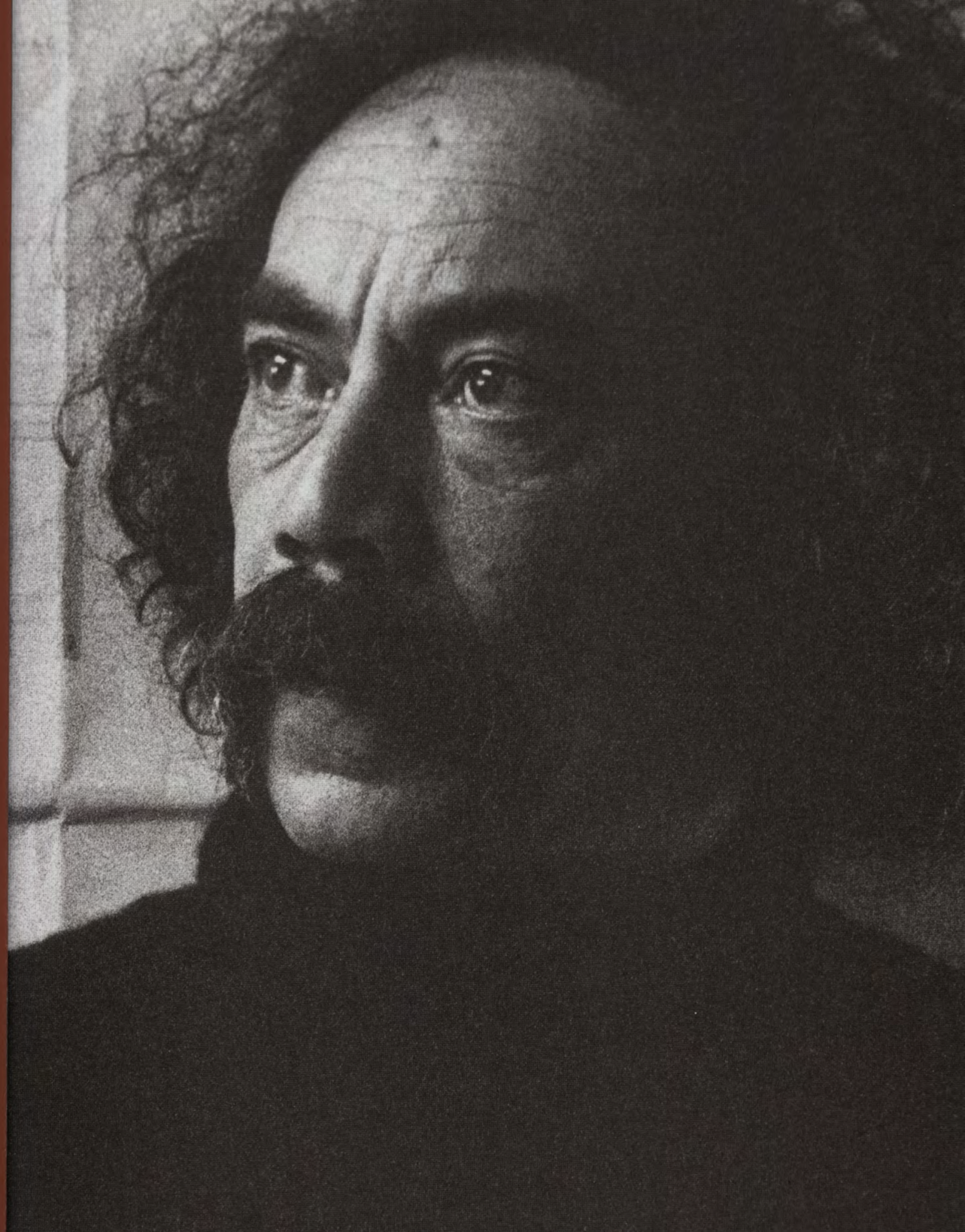
Ralph Hotere's work with New Zealand poets

Gregory O'Brien

At the forefront of New Zealand painting for over three decades, Hone Papita Raukura (Ralph) Hotere was born at the remote Northland settlement of Mitimiti in 1931. After studying in England and Europe in the early 1960s, he returned to New Zealand and has been based in and around Dunedin since 1969, producing some of his finest work in collaboration with such poets as:

Cilla McQueen
Bill Manhire
Hone Tuwhare
Ian Wedde

A member of the Aupouri tribe, Hotere has also incorporated traditional Maori poems into his artworks. *Hotere—out the black window* examines the artist's work drawing on these diverse poetic traditions. The book includes in full many of the poems and texts the artist has incorporated into his work. *Hotere—out the black window* is the first book on this important artist to be published. Text by Gregory O'Brien and an introduction by Ian Wedde provide a stimulating context for an extraordinary body of work, making this essential reading for all those with an interest in New Zealand art and literature.





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OUT THE BLACK WINDOW

Ralph Hotere's work with New Zealand poets

Gregory O'Brien

with an introduction by *Ian Wedde*

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Photographs of Ralph Hotere
by Marti Friedlander (Port Chalmers 1979)

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Most of all, I am indebted to Ralph Hotere for his assistance and hospitality, and to Ralph's dealer and long time friend Rodney Kirk Smith who, in the last months of his life, was instrumental in bringing this project to fruition, encouraging and advising me until a matter of days before his death. This book is dedicated to Rodney's memory.

Gregory O'Brien

Preface

The City Gallery, Wellington is proud to present *Hotere — out the black window*. Ralph Hotere (Aupouri) is widely regarded as one of New Zealand's most significant practising senior artists, whose extraordinarily innovative work and independence of thought have won him the continuing respect of both his peers and a younger generation of artists. Over the past four decades, Hotere has developed a rich personal iconography evoking such universal human concerns as death, war and environmental issues. Hotere's abstract images have often incorporated the painted word, his texts borrowed from a variety of sources. This exhibition explores the images created by Hotere and his most frequent literary 'collaborators', New Zealand poets.

Curated by Wellington-based poet, writer, and artist Gregory O'Brien, *Hotere — out the black window* bridges New Zealand's literary and visual art worlds. The association between the two has been resonant and vital in the development of this country's cultural history. Through this exhibition and its accompanying publication, the City Gallery is delighted to continue its own tradition of evaluating the combined effects of artistic disciplines that have hitherto received separate consideration.

While *Hotere — out the black window* is a major project, involving more than 50 important works and a treasure trove of ephemera spanning his career, it is not intended as the definitive statement on Ralph Hotere's considerable achievement. Rather, it represents an entry point into the work of a visual artist whose contribution to our culture remains active. This exhibition is a thematic point of engagement with an artist whose powers of invention continue to evolve. We feel extremely privileged that Ralph Hotere chose to work with the City Gallery to realise this significant exhibition.

The City Gallery, Wellington, gratefully acknowledges the crucial financial support of our sponsors, without whom this ambitious project could not have been achieved. We welcome the involvement of principal corporate sponsor for this exhibition, Ernst & Young, and look forward to a mutually beneficial partnership in presenting contemporary New Zealand art to a wide public audience. We acknowledge the generous support of Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising (Wellington) for their marketing expertise. We are grateful for the support lent to this project by patrons Roderick and Gillian Deane, and Jenny Gibbs.

Thanks are due also to guest curator Gregory O'Brien, for his rigorous research and the empathy with his subject which has resulted in such insightful scholarship; to Godwit Publishing, who have produced the handsomely illustrated publication; and to the poets, Cilla McQueen, Bill Manhire, Hone Tuwhare, and Ian Wedde, for their support and for their permission to allow their texts to be reproduced. Special thanks are due to Ian Wedde for his introduction. The Gallery is grateful for the generosity of private and institutional lenders to the exhibition. And finally, we thank the artist, Ralph Hotere, for his assistance, generosity of spirit, and for his ability to inspire everyone involved with this important project.

Paula Savage
DIRECTOR
CITY GALLERY, WELLINGTON

Where is the art that does this?

Introduction by IAN WEDDE

WHEN I CAME to Dunedin in 1972 and lived in Port Chalmers I was passionate about the values and virtues of the disregarded, the provisional, the B-grade, the domestic. Our first son was called Carlos, partly in homage to William Carlos Williams, a poet in whom I loved an appetite for detail and a celebration of the piercing lyricism of ordinary things. I was suspicious of grand narratives which I associated with destructive egotisms, oversimplifications, and a lack of humour. I disliked the overexertions of self-conscious nationalism, including the nationalism of the art world, whose preciousness didn't seem very different from xenophobia. I met Ralph Hotere that year. What I liked about being around him was the way in which the details of living and the things he lived with were made vivid by appetite — were revalued by an appreciation that seemed equally committed to keeping a Provençal garlic in productive seed, heterogeneously collecting the artworks of many friends, maintaining a store of favourite implements and utensils, and deploying a deadpan, witty cunning in the face of assaults by housing inspectors (and, twenty years later, the Otago Harbour Board). It wasn't that Ralph Hotere endorsed what I believed at the time — it was more that he showed me the intelligence in ordinary things. He showed how an appreciation of them went beyond ideology.

At that time Robert May, a dentist in Dunedin, was one of Ralph's most committed collectors.

His clinic had a grand view of Mount Cargill. It was also full of works by Ralph Hotere. Robert enjoyed a certain performative style in his professional practice. He used to put on a favourite recording of an opera, usually Puccini, don his facemask and gloves, and dramatically tilt your chair so that you faced the mountain. Around you would be a fresh selection of works by Ralph Hotere. It was as though the art set a tone for the nasty business of getting a cavity drilled, which transformed it into something else entirely.

In the end, I think the art may be simply alchemical — transforming silence into poetry, appetite into ecstasy, the base into the precious, and suffering into something almost ritualised — common anguish with the grandeur of a mountain for its backdrop.

II

In late summer in Otago when the long evenings begin to shorten again, there's often a line of pale light across the north-eastern sea horizon out from Aramoana, as though the sun which is setting in the west is already backlighting its morning destination. Despite their frequent darkness, there's often a sense of illumination behind Ralph Hotere's paintings — those long rivulets of white, stencilled cutouts, windows, and even the refractive lacquers and black glass: the light seeming to break from within them, not reflect off them. And then, sometimes, the registers of ground and figure shift, and it's dark in the painting and light where you stand to look at it. Or, paradoxically, the light is dark (the 'black windows').

It's strange that such affective language as this can be used to write about art whose formalism closes out narratives — and landscapes, conversations, music, poetry, lovemaking, travel, mythologies, griefs, angers, taunts, devotions.

III

We value words — is it perverse to be reticent? Or may reticence be a way of leaving space in which the words of others can be heard? What kind of art might such a space create? Or, what kind of art might create such a space? Is there a kind of taciturnity which is a homage to the speech or the writing of others? A silence not sullen or inarticulate, but respectful? What kind of art might convey such a respectful homage? Does it have a history with its own kinds of narratives — narratives of lyrical silence? (The word 'melody' embossed as little more than a grain or texture, black over black.) Plus, a scepticism about words — the lie-detector of Malevich's black painting.

We value precious materials — is it subversive of such value to celebrate mundane materials? Does such reverse homage politicise the vernacular, making rarity banal or even vulgar? What kind of art revalues the vernacular in such a way as to make its materials precious aesthetically rather than socially? What kind of politics stresses aesthetic rather than social value — says, The power of these vernacular materials is provided by the taste of those who use them, the art that uses them is a homage to that taste. Or says, I will discharge the rare and the precious on any surface because of their beauty alone, not because of their value. (The form of a lead-headed nail, the splash of gold leaf on black glass.)

We revere the unique work of art — so does the market. Is uniqueness undermined by repetition, series, variation, excess? Or are variation and excess ways of celebrating process while concealing a summation or core somewhere in it? How do we judge the work of art that is embedded in a chaotic, repetitious and excessive field of process? Where is the market to find its unique point of sale, its benchmark, its icon? Does excess devalue the artefact, bewilder the market, distribute uniqueness, raise up process above result — or something of all of these? Where is the art that does this? How can the market stop it and single it out? Or does the market have to accept that this art does not stop time, allowing the market to see it; but flows in and through time — remembering and doubling back as well as moving on? Does the market have to accept that the works identified as major — the works that are said to stop time, to mark stages in



development — are only there because they have accreted a mass of process, a process which has had to abandon them for the time being, but which may return to them, breaking them up for their use in a new context, a newly provisional present? (Sheets of quickly sloganed corrugated iron nailed overnight to power poles along the road to Aramoana, taken down and dumped by the police the next morning. The deckle edges of lithograph sheets that look torn and provisional, because they carry improvisations that seem to have been discarded rather than distributed or marketed.)

The art market requires signature — evidence of individual making. What does it make of collaborations? Where a tradesman's skill is given equal rating in the production of the art work, or where a work signals clearly that it would not have happened within the powers of a single individual? We are not talking here about a Master or an atelier tradition, in which a hierarchy was carefully maintained (as in the workshop of Rubens that nurtured Sir Anthony van Dyck, the lithographic or Instamatic works of Hockney, the multiples of Warhol); we may be talking in part about a tradition in which the stonemason's, or quarryman's, or fresco plasterer's skills were integral to the development of the work; but in reality we are talking about work that is more about homage than hierarchy: the lacquering of a painting's ground, upon which the artist will subsequently work, will have to be at least as impeccable as the spray painter's trade will make his cars. The accomplishment of the art is raised to the level of the car. The virtue of art is raised to the level of trade. Another homage.

Connoisseurship in art separates it from other cultural production such as design, architecture, building, the domestic realm. What kind of discriminating taste inverts this order, infusing the domestic with high aesthetic values, demanding of art that it should be constructed as and in social space?

IV

And we have discovered some kind of loop here, in which aesthetic space and social space disclose each other — in which the aesthetic valuing of vernacular materials, and the social valuing of art's domesticity, become almost indistinguishable.

The silence of Ralph Hotere's art is like the silence of a host whose guests are poets. The excess of the art is like generous hospitality. The collaborations in the art are like a love of conversation.

What we love in this art is not so much what it is, as what it has already been.

February 1997

Aramoana — Pathway to the Sea, 1980
OIL ON CORRUGATED IRON AND WOOD
2430 x 820MM
PRIVATE COLLECTION



Out the black window

Some books have pictures and
some pictures have books.
R. B. KITAJ

Do you, sir, paint in fear and trembling?
WILLIAM BLAKE

RALPH HOTERE's *Black Window—Towards Aramoana* (1981) is a painting in which language and meaning have been almost extinguished. Although, after a time, traces of painterly activity begin to slowly emerge, surfacing from the depths of the artwork. Gradually a back-to-front alphabet can be discerned in the upper left hand corner—the letters awaiting words, just as the black window itself might be awaiting an image. The letters were brushed on to the surface of the painting through a stencil which Hotere keeps on a nail on his studio wall. Years of paint have accumulated between the letters of the stencil, roughening the edges of the characters, giving them a weathered, previously used look.

Just outside the painted black square, which covers much of the pictorial plane, scuffs of acrylic paint suggest the possibility of an image beneath or beyond the panel of darkness. The painting is, it follows, an obscuring of image as opposed to a revealing. The 'black window' reverses the usual function of windows as light sources, entrances or frames through which details of the outside world can be viewed. However, for all its stripping away of figurative elements—of recognisable reality—the painting, like all of Hotere's work, could not be described as aloof. And, while *Black Window—Towards Aramoana* refuses to depict 'little corners of nature' or 'beloved objects', at the same time its very existence is dependent on such details from the artist's immediate environment. An awareness of—and fundamental concern about—the natural and human-made world underlies all Hotere's work. The 'black window' can be seen as a window at night or a church window (with cross motif) — it could also be a blackboard on which words might be written, or the Southern Cross, or the letter 't'. The cross form, while carrying Christian as well as pre-Christian symbolism, also represents a view-finder or compass.

Black Window—Towards Aramoana is mounted in a sash window-frame the artist salvaged from a demolition site—probably a Dunedin Hospital Board building. The window catch has been left intact on top of the frame, suggesting a larger context, that this window is (or was) but one of a number of such rising and falling windows. Hotere often uses materials, physical as well

Black Window—Towards Aramoana, 1981
Oil on hardboard in windowframe, 1100 x 900mm
Chartwell Collection, Waikato Museum of Art & History Te Whare Taonga o Waikato, Hamilton

as linguistic, that have had a previous life, a 'past' he assiduously avoids concealing or obscuring. Of the artist's fixation with materials that have either been recovered from the natural world or conditioned by the elements—the old window frames, wind-blasted canvas and rusty iron that have characterised his work in recent decades—Bill Manhire observes: 'I'm sure Ralph likes the fact that his corrugated iron paintings are going to go on rusting... There's a lot of process in them —they're not static... That organic thing is part of his politics anyway—how he felt about the proposed smelter at Aramoana and so on. It's political but it could also be seen in traditional Romantic terms.'[1]

Hotere's paintings, like the collages of Robert Motherwell, use 'the flotsam of everyday life ... to pass us through abstraction and back to common experience.'[2] The works, you could say, speak a vernacular, and here it's worth noting that the four main poets with whom Hotere has collaborated—Ian Wedde, Cilla McQueen, Bill Manhire and Hone Tuwhare—all have an ear for the spoken and written vernacular, for a poetic diction that is constantly being broken down by everyday speech. Theirs is a poetry that without its vernacular references — its salvaging of linguistic 'found materials'—would lose its *modus operandi*. The poets are also characterised by an inventive, experimental bent—their work is constantly questioning the nature and purpose of poetry just as Hotere has, since the early 1960s, questioned assumptions about painting.

Hotere's best work has a lyricism and musicality also very much aligned with the poetries of Manhire, McQueen, Wedde and Tuwhare. Cilla McQueen recalls that, on meeting Hotere in 1970, she found that the artist shared her interest in 'the visual suggestion of sound, with its consequent resonances and harmonies... In Ralph's works containing words I think there's always the sound of them as well as the look of them—an interior "voice", the spring of both words and images ...'[3] McQueen herself is a great blender of visual, verbal and musical elements—witness these lines from her poem 'Synaesthesia' which could also serve as a description of Hotere's artistic project, with its harmonic blending of both sound and imagery, of texture and form:

> *the lines the eye can see the mind can hear*
> *the sounds the eye has found the ear can see*
> *the landscape sings inside my inner ear*
> *invisibly its silent harmony.*[4]

As we will see later in this essay, Ralph Hotere's paintings also have an incantatory, elemental quality very much akin to the Maori poetry the painter was introduced to as a small boy by his father, Tangirau Hotere, who was a respected transcriber and translator of that oral tradition.

With its dark conjuring of an alphabet, *Black Window — Towards Aramoana* prefigures the language we will encounter elsewhere in Ralph Hotere's paintings—language that emerges with great reticence and only after much reflection. Informed by both the honed-down, emotionally weighted waiata and the contemporary poetry he has incorporated into his art, the eloquent voice of the painter himself emerges from his canvases, panels and drawings. Like the cantor of the Spanish 'duende', as observed by Federico Garcia Lorca (a poet, incidentally, Hotere has read avidly), the painter is 'celebrating a solemn rite, as he rouses ancient essences from their sleep, wraps them in his voice, and flings them into the wind...'[5]

1 Gregory O'Brien, 'Some Paintings I Am Frequently Asked About: Talking with Bill Manhire about Ralph Hotere', *Landfall* 191, (Autumn 1996), p31.

2 Robert Hughes, *Nothing if not Critical* (Harvill, London 1990), p294.

3 Letter from Cilla McQueen to G. O'Brien, December 1996.

4 'Synaesthesia', from *Crikey*, Cilla McQueen (McIndoe Publishers, Dunedin, 1993), p78.

5 Federico Garcia Lorca, *Deep Song and Other Prose* (Marion Boyars, London, 1980), p40.

Embarking/disembarking

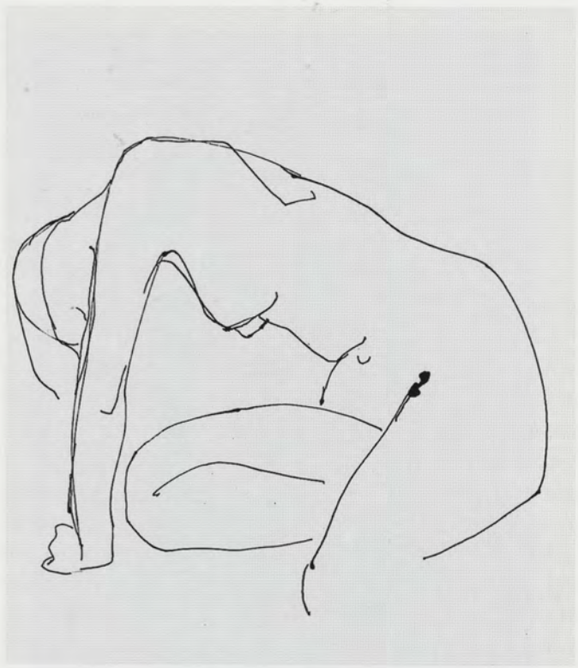
It is my strong conviction that one of the functions of Art is to help man from the bondage of transient emotions and from the slavery and prison of the world of small desires, the hypnosis of time.
CECIL COLLINS

RALPH HOTERE was born in 1931 in Mitimiti, a remote Northland settlement about twelve kilometres up the coast from the mouth of the Hokianga harbour. His tribal affiliations are Aupouri, and his childhood was spent within the close family and community ties of the Mitimiti sub-tribe. Hotere grew up with the traditional poems and songs of the Aupouri as an integral part of his environment. The landscape and language of his childhood and, importantly, the melding of inner and outer worlds embodied by the traditional poems with their constant relationship to place have remained a reference point throughout his career.

Hotere's parents were devout Catholics and sent their sons, when they reached secondary school age, to St Peter's Maori College, a Catholic boarding school for Maori boys run by the Mill Hill Fathers on Auckland's North Shore. An awareness and recurrent questioning of the nature of religious faith has been a feature of Hotere's work throughout his career. As a counterpoint to Hotere's orthodox religious background, later contact with the nonconformist spiritualities of James K. Baxter and Colin McCahon would have confirmed his desire to revisit and freely reinterpret the iconography and language of the Church without being restricted by his Catholic upbringing.

On leaving school, Hotere studied at Auckland Teachers' College and then spent time in Dunedin—his first sojourn in a city he would later make his home—specialising in art at King Edward Technical College, where, importantly in terms of Hotere's evolving pacifism, he was taught by William J. Reed (1908–1996), who had returned only a few years earlier from the Second World War, a conflict that had claimed the life of Hotere's brother, Jack. Hotere recalls visiting Reed at his home and being shown drawings of the effects of war on soldiers, civilians and the Pacific environment—subject matter that would haunt Reed for the rest of his life.

In 1952 Hotere was appointed as a school art adviser and returned to Northland, where he was based until leaving for England in 1961. At the time the region was very depressed and the Education Department—so the artist's friend Trevor Moffitt recounts—had 'earmarked quite a lot of money as an experiment, to see if they could pick up the levels of education through quite intensive art programmes.'[1] Hotere resumed, albeit briefly, this advisory work when he returned to New Zealand in 1965.

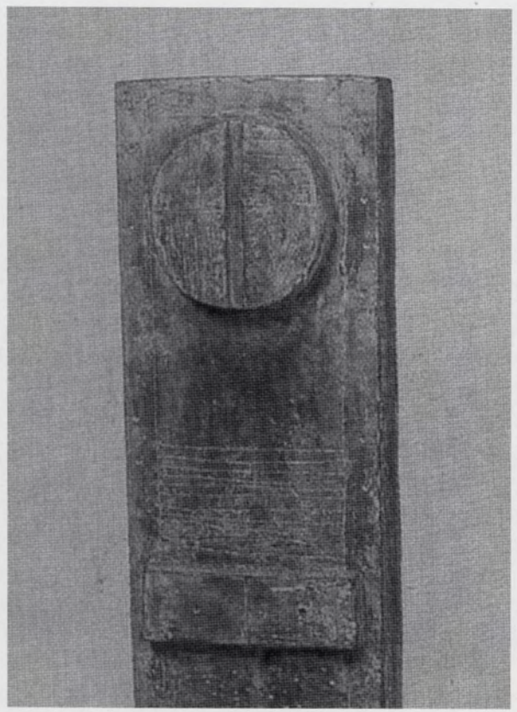


Of Hotere's painting prior to his time in England and Europe, Moffitt recalls seeing a series of 'Fauve-like' Northland landscapes hanging in the house of a mutual acquaintance in Kawakawa. The artist's friend and dealer Rodney Kirk Smith remembered some very expressively brushed canvases—'obviously the paintings of an impassioned young artist'.[2] While admitting that these were immature works, Kirk Smith said 'it was clear even at this stage that Hotere's interest was in making real art, not just pictures to be hung at the back of a coffee shop, which was how art was generally perceived at the time.'

Clearly, when Hotere started painting, he wanted to enter into a dialogue with the landscape. While his first attempts may have been floundering, their impetus prefigured a need in the artist's work from the 1960s onwards to not so much depict landscape as to enter into it, to inscribe it, integrating both what was seen and what was felt to produce such sustained meditations as the *Aramoana* works of the late 1970s and the *Mungo* works of the following decade.

A NEW ZEALAND Art Societies Fellowship enabled Hotere to travel to London in 1961 and study at the Central School of Art. He was subsequently awarded a Karolyi International

Nude Study, c1958
INDIAN INK ON PAPER, 410 X 345MM
COURTESY OF FHE GALLERIES, AUCKLAND



Fellowship and painted in Vence, France, over the winter 1962–63.[3] Hotere's time in England was pivotal to his development as an artist. It was a period of upheaval in the art world generally, with the advent of Pop Art, followed by Op Art — two movements that would prove influential for Hotere and other New Zealanders in London at the time, including Pat Hanly, Don Peebles and John Drawbridge. Also, during this period, major twentieth century English artists such as Peter Lanyon, Patrick Heron and Ben Nicholson were producing mature work using a broad abstract vocabulary to which Hotere was certainly drawn. At the Central School of Art, Hotere was taught painting, basic design and etching by the sculptor and painter William Turnbull (b.1922) and, over the following decade, he would investigate formal concerns — in particular, precisely delineated geometrical shapes — that were central to Turnbull's practice and to much English art of the time. A sculptural piece by Turnbull, *Screwhead* of 1957, incorporates incised parallel lines and a circular form — elements which Hotere has revisited throughout his career. Interestingly, whereas Turnbull's *Screwhead* related the circle and box-like assemblage of lines to aspects of human anatomy — the face and the ribcage — Hotere has tended to relate the circle and square to the sun and landscape.[4] Hotere went on to develop very much on his own terms 'the rhythmical and static qualities' that critic Bernard Cohen observed in Turnbull's work,

William Turnbull. ***Screwhead*** (detail), 1957
Bronze, 1365 x 229 x 457mm

paralleling the elder artist's 'elementalism and minimalist aesthetic'.[5] Similar elemental forms were also in evidence in the painted reliefs of Ben Nicholson, alongside whose work two of Hotere's *Sangro* paintings were exhibited at the Redfern Galleries, London, in 1964.[6]

Much to his advantage, Hotere, as a New Zealander and hence an outsider, was able to maintain a critical detachment from the major currents in English art. Although he was influenced by Pop Art and Op Art, he was also able to draw on their formal and temperamental opposite, the English Neo-Romantic movement, with its literary emphasis and personalised content. Instrumental in introducing Neo-Romanticism to Hotere was Cecil Collins (1908–1989), who taught alongside Turnbull at the Central School of Art. Collins, in his own work, stressed the visionary and myth-making potential of art in a pictorial manner very different from (but ultimately not contradictory to) that of the American abstractionist Ad Reinhardt, whose work was to become Hotere's major influence during the following decade. Ignoring for a moment the overriding differences between a non-figurative painter such as Reinhardt and a figurative painter like Collins, common ground can be found in their shared search for mythical origins and their realisation that art can be both a stimulus to and an object of meditation. In those



O. E. M[iddleton] — a portrait
[frontispiece to The Loners], 1972
Pen and ink on paper, 385 x 280mm
Hocken Library Collection









respects, a recent study of Abstract Expressionism by Stephen Polcari makes an apposite link between Reinhardt's dark minimalist abstractions and Collins's allegorical work.[7] He notes that themes of Nature and Loss are common to both artists — themes which, incidentally, have underpinned Ralph Hotere's work since the early 1960s, whether we are considering works as temperamentally dissimilar as his lyrical *Song Cycle* banners or the anti-war/anti-nuclear paintings which span his entire career, from the *Polaris* series (1963) to the ongoing *Black Rainbow* works.

Directly or indirectly, Hotere would have been influenced by D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's book, *On Growth and Form*, a scientific study of form and the patterning of nature, which was widely read and discussed by artists in London in the early 1960s. A central thesis of the book was that 'nature was a unity whether it took the form of tree, bird, egg, leaf or microbe. Hence these forms must respond to universal forces and conform to uniform yardsticks, or constant variants on them . . .'[8] Hotere has, throughout his career, related the forms and processes of his art to the natural world. By the end of the 1960s, when he was settled in Dunedin, he was using parallel lines and wind/wave/land forms which were very much in keeping with the argument of Thompson's book and which struck a common note with the work of British artists such as Victor Pasmore and Terry Frost. One of Hotere's sparse landscape drawings was reproduced on the cover of James K. Baxter's *Jerusalem Sonnets* in 1969, and a series of related drawings was included in O. E. Middleton's collection of stories, *The Loners*, published a few years later. Tony Green has pointed to the English origins of the *Loners* drawings, describing them as 'a kind of freehand variant on Bridget Riley's linear modulations of surface'.[9] The drawings also suggest an affinity with Paul Klee, whose art was bedrocked in natural process (and it is the *process* of nature, even more than its forms, that Hotere's work draws upon).

An important event in Hotere's career was a major exhibition of his paintings and drawings at the Middlesbrough Art Gallery in 1964. Featuring *Sangro*, *Algérie* and *Polaris* paintings as well as a large number of drawings, the exhibition was favourably reviewed in *The Guardian* of 28 March, 1964.[10]

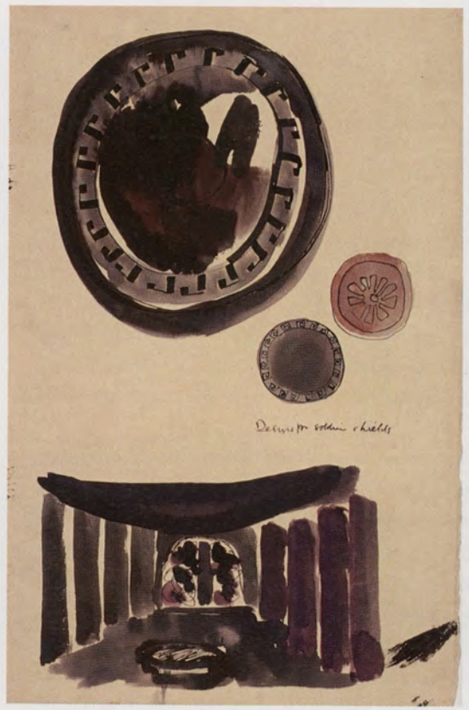
RODNEY KIRK SMITH, in conversation shortly before his death in 1996, recalled meeting Ralph Hotere on his return from England in 1965: 'He disembarked from the boat carrying strangely painted luggage which turned out to be works of art he had nailed together to make them portable.' Many of these dissembled paintings were reconfigured while others, Kirk Smith recalled, went by the wayside. Such a transmutation of art into utility object then back into art again has typified Hotere's attitude to materials throughout his career.[11]

Drawing for O. E. Middleton's ***The Loners*** *No. 4*, 1972
Pen and ink on paper, 330 x 215mm
Hocken Library Collection

Drawing for O. E. Middleton's ***The Loners*** *No. 6*, 1972
Pen and ink on paper, 330 x 215mm
Hocken Library Collection

Drawing for O. E. Middleton's ***The Loners*** *No. 7*, 1972
Pen and ink on paper, 330 x 215mm
Hocken Library Collection

Drawing for O. E. Middleton's ***The Loners*** *No. 9*, 1972
Pen and ink on paper, 330 x 215mm
Hocken Library Collection









'The 1960s were a time of great socio-political change in New Zealand and, to the consternation of some, a number of contemporary artists wanted to engage with these issues,' Kirk Smith said. 'Ralph was not political in a self-conscious sense but he certainly was in the sense that he recognised that certain things — to do with Cuba or Algeria, for example — were happening and he had to respond. These things were *integrated* into the art. The *Polaris* and *Algérie* paintings Ralph lugged back from Britain certainly conformed to a political agenda. And the academic artists would refer to "the dirty political thing" that was sullying Art...

'At that time the critical reception was largely uncomprehending. There were limp, sniggering reviews of most modern art exhibitions. Everybody — Ralph included — was treated badly but, after a while, no one paid these reviewers any attention. Ralph just went on with his work.'

Prior to his shift to Dunedin, Hotere was based in the Auckland suburb of Epsom and working on such important series as *Zero* (1966–67) and the first *Black Paintings*.[12] Rodney Kirk Smith recalled of this time: 'Auckland was a rougher, tougher, dog-ridden city, compared with, say, Wellington, where the Academy of Fine Arts seemed to have an inhibiting effect on artists. Auckland didn't provide nice soft areas for people to relax in. The Auckland painters were getting the sense of the grain of the street underfoot... Also, in the 1960s there wasn't any separation between the painters, poets, sculptors and architects. The people who came to the shows and appreciated the work were students... architects... university people. Everybody knew everybody. It was less competitive... more positive, in a sense... During the 1970s, however, things changed. Art became looked at in a different manner, so artists behaved in a different manner.'

Hotere's sense of himself as an artist was enriched by the Auckland milieu of the 1960s. He became used to the company of poets and musicians and found much common ground with them. It is likely the collaborative nature of much of his work since then has its origins in this creative environment, where ideas moved freely and there was a broadening of interest across all the arts.

Hotere's shift south in 1969 enabled him to work in a less cluttered professional and social environment, and he has been based in and around Dunedin ever since. Kirk Smith observed: 'From the start, Dunedin provided him with a supportive environment... you could call it a "gentleman's environment".'

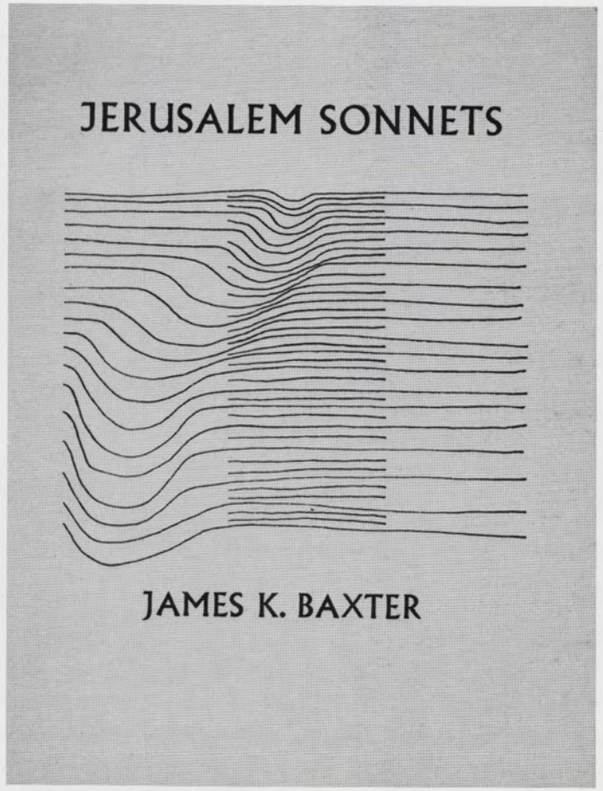
Hotere himself has stated that 'in Dunedin they accept that I'm a painter and leave me to go about my work.'[15] The city has also proved, over three decades, a good site for salvaging the disparate materials such as corrugated iron, demolition timber and old window frames his art has

The Temptations of Oedipus by Baxter
(costume and set design, shield and stage), 1970
WATERCOLOUR AND COLOURED INK ON PAPER, 460 X 290MM
HOCKEN LIBRARY COLLECTION

The Temptations of Oedipus by Baxter
(set design, movement in black and blue), 1970
WATERCOLOUR AND COLOURED INK ON PAPER, 460 X 290MM
HOCKEN LIBRARY COLLECTION

The Temptations of Oedipus by Baxter
(costume design, Ismene), 1970
WATERCOLOUR AND COLOURED INK ON PAPER, 460 X 290MM
HOCKEN LIBRARY COLLECTION

The Temptations of Oedipus by Baxter
(costume design, for female figure), 1970
WATERCOLOUR AND COLOURED INK ON PAPER, 267 X 165MM
HOCKEN LIBRARY COLLECTION



required, as well as providing useful literary resources in the many writers he has met there, including Warren Dibble, Ted Middleton, Cilla McQueen, Bill Manhire and James K. Baxter.

Baxter had been Burns Fellow the year before Hotere's tenure as Hodgkins Fellow, although the two didn't meet until 1970 when Baxter was working with director Patric Carey on the Globe Theatre production of his play *The Temptations of Oedipus*, for which Hotere designed the set and costumes.[14] The previous year Hotere had produced a drawing for the cover of Baxter's *Jerusalem Sonnets* which was published by the Bibliography Room at the University of Otago. A friend of the poet's, Colin Durning (to whom the sonnets are dedicated), asked Hotere to design a cover for the book, and the artist responded with a series of recent drawings from which the published one was selected. As well as paralleling the geometrical depictions of rolling farmland and hill country Michael Smither and Colin McCahon were producing around this time, Hotere's landscape drawings reflect both the pervasiveness of his English experience and his coming to terms with a formal aspect of the New Zealand landscape itself.

Jerusalem Sonnets, cover design, 1969
PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO BIBLIOGRAPHY ROOM

1 Trevor Moffitt in conversation with G. O'Brien, September 1996.

2 The quotations in this section from Rodney Kirk Smith are all taken from an interview with him in Auckland, late May 1996.

3 Drawings from this time were reproduced in *Landfall* 78, 1966.

4 An exception would be his early portraits of Bill Manhire which related the circle and square directly to the poet's head and body.

5 'William Turnbull, Painter and Sculptor', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1995 (this article was originally published in *Art International* after Turnbull's 1973 exhibition at the Tate Gallery, London).

6 This exhibition, entitled *Twentieth Century French and English Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture* (17 June to 25 September, 1964) was virtually a roll-call of significant artists of the modern era.

7 Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, Cambridge University Press, 1991. Coincidentally, this book reproduces on adjacent pages Reinhardt's *Abstract Painting* and Collins's *The Quest* and makes a number of valid connections between such dissimilar works: 'Neo-Romantic art often portrayed the voyage and *The Quest* . . . Cecil Collins . . . for example, represented a search for a new Eden or Arcadia in the maws of the war. Such a theme led to the sacralization of nature and landscape that was a standard feature of Abstract Expressionism [out of which Reinhardt's work evolved]' (p343).

8 Robert Lamb, 'Hats off to the little amoeba's friend', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1994.

9 T. S. G. Green, 'Woollaston, Alfred Sharpe, Hotere, McCahon, Robin White, Clive Stone', *Arts and Community*, vol 10, no 7, 1973.

10 The full text of the review, by W. E. Johnson, follows:

Middlesbrough Art Gallery, making a bid for a niche in art history, is offering hospitality to a young Maori painter, Ralph Hotere. Born in the extreme north of North Auckland in 1931, and educated at St Peter's College and at Auckland University, he was awarded a New Zealand Art Fellowship in 1961. Unlike Tom Gleghorn from Australia, whose Rubinstein award brought him half way across Europe, Hotere came direct to England and to London where he studied under William Turnbull at the Central School. None of the work that he painted in his native New Zealand is, of course, included in this, his first one-man show. The exhibition opens instead with a series of paintings done just over a year ago when he went to Vence and on to Italy on a Karolyi International Fellowship Award. These are all concerned with various non-figurative interpretations of the Sangro River War Cemetery on Italy's Adriatic Coast where the artist's brother and hundreds more of his fellow servicemen lie buried.

In the best and most intellectual form of the pop art idiom many of these make use of the stencilled numbers 22, 23, 24 and 25, the respective ages of many of the fallen. In their own quiet, occasionally hard-edged way, many of these are undemonstratively anti-war, as are other pockets of resistance, set up in gallery 5, where Hotere shows his ten-strong tachiste 'white writing' Polaris series, painted at the height of the Cuban crisis and stencilled this time with the letters ICBM; and again in gallery 8, where there are five blood-red bullet-shattered works again stencilled this time OAS and FLN, in an Algeria series painted in Vence, the home of both the colonial opposition and of Matisse's famous Chapel for the Dominican Convent.

Hotere's most extended series, however, is that entitled simply 'Woman', in which many of his sketchbook pages, pressed into service to help fill the show, include a handful of square, chunky, art brut figures reminiscent of Dubuffet and one or two linear nudes that would not have shamed Picasso. Greater selection (which will be achieved when the show moves to Durham next month) would have helped considerably, but, as it is, the artist, extended over eight fair-sized rooms, has accepted a challenge which many, more experienced than he, would have declined in haste. (*The Guardian*, 28 March, 1964)

11 Following Hotere's 1978 sojourn in Europe, he brought his canvases back to New Zealand in a large box which, in keeping with this 'recycling' project, was subsequently turned into an art work when Bill Culbert inserted a fluorescent tube through it.

12 The *Zero* paintings acknowledge Hotere's debt to Kasimir Malevich and the Russian Suprematist movement. The title of Hotere's series alludes to the Suprematists' 1915 exhibition 'Zero, Ten. The Last Futurist Exhibition of Painting'. Notably, the Petrograd exhibition was the first time Malevich's *Black Square* was shown in public — a work that, in turn, influenced Hotere's *Black Paintings*.

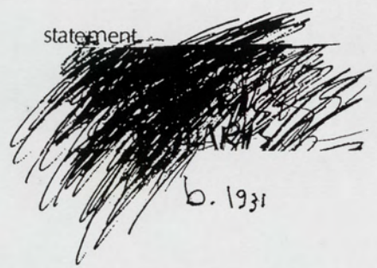
13 Quoted in *Ralph Hotere, A Survey 1963–73*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, p4.

14 Hotere was to work with director Patric Carey again in 1973 when he designed the set for John Whiting's play *The Devils*.

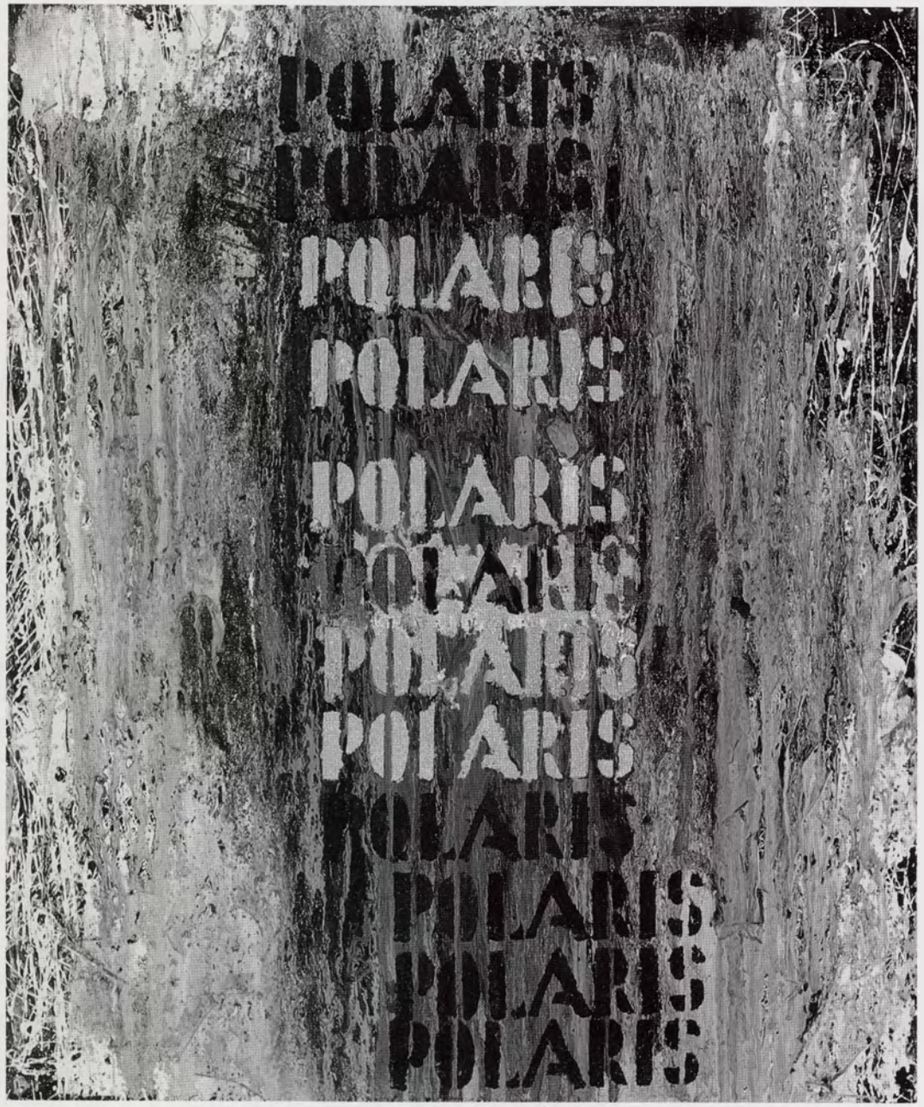
The origins of words

A picture lives on many different levels at once, it is an interpenetration of planes of reality, it cannot be analysed or anatomised into single levels because one level can only be understood in the light of others. The reality or interior life of the picture can only be realised as a total experience.
CECIL COLLINS

LIKE HIS TEACHER at the Central School of Art, Cecil Collins, Hotere refuses to discuss or explain his work, preferring to let the work exist independently on its own very broad terms. 'No object and certainly no painting, is seen in the same way by everyone, yet most people want an unmistakable meaning which is accessible to all in a work of art,' he said in 1973. 'It is the spectator which provokes the change and meaning in these works.'[1] The words and forms within the paintings should be sufficient for the audience, Hotere feels, without the need for critical or theoretical intervention. When asked to furnish an artist's statement for an exhibition at the Carnegie Centre, Dunedin, in 1981, he forwarded the following characteristic 'statement' (which was reproduced in the exhibition notes):



The first 'word-paintings' Hotere saw were by Colin McCahon (whom he met in 1953) and they impressed him greatly. When Hotere subsequently moved to England, he was confronted by a very different language-derived art: contemporary British painters as diverse as Ian Hamilton Finlay, Richard Hamilton and David Hockney were all using words in their work. He was also aware of the late-1950s work of Jasper Johns which used stencilled lettering in a manner close to Hotere's subsequent practice, although with a radically different end in mind.



As a visual element, words surfaced in Hotere's paintings as early as the 1962 *Polaris* series and the *Sangro* works of the following year. They intermittently appeared on such works as the 1966 construction *Red Square* (a punning title of a political nature), until Hotere's first major collaboration with Bill Manhire, the *Malady* paintings and accompanying book production.

Words carry a carefully measured visual as well as linguistic weight in Hotere's art. In *Polaris* (1962) a word is obliterated in a cataclysmic splattering of paint, invoking the nuclear age and the erosion of language by the possibility of a nuclear holocaust. (Hotere would return to the word 'Polaris' in his anti-nuclear works of the 1980s, often smudging and erasing the word, at times burning or scratching it on to a metal surface.)

Hotere's first *Sangro* series was painted after a visit to the Second World War cemetery at Sangro, near Anzio, where his brother Jack lies buried. In *Winter Landscape, Sangro River* the words visually spell out a crucifix:

SANGRO
SANGRO
SANGRO
SANGRO
SANGRO SANGRO SANGRO
SANGRO SANGRO SANGRO
SANGRO SANGRO SANGRO
SANGRO
SANGRO
SANGRO
SANGRO
SANGRO
SANGRO

The repetition of 'Sangro' is at once like the beating of a drum or the insistent percussion of gunfire or a panicked stutter. The words are also an invocation, like the 'Kyrie Eleison' from the Catholic Mass or a Maori waiata. In the top left hand corner of the painting, numbers float in dark space denoting the ages of New Zealand soldiers killed in the battle at Sangro, Hotere's brother among them. These are presented in a detached manner — almost statistical in their lack of inflection — and are also reminiscent of numbers on mailboxes or the stencilled lettering on freight.

Polaris, 1962
Oil on canvas, 610 x 507mm
Paris Family Collection

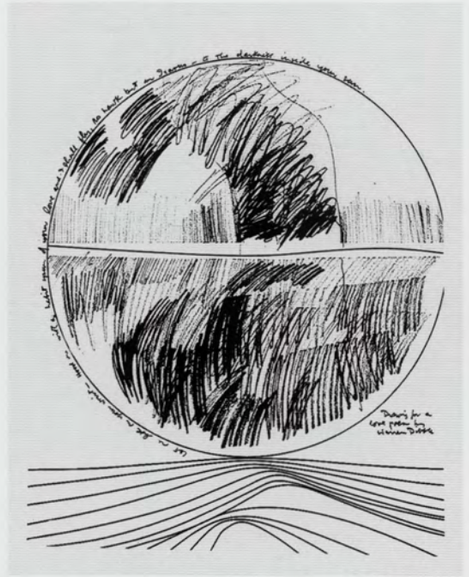
Beyond that, *Winter Landscape, Sangro River* is, compositionally, a parody of a Union Jack flag (a motif Hotere would return to years later in his *Black Union Jack* works). While the painting retains the muddy palette and a few other literal aspects of landscape such as a horizon, these are broken up into planes or shards of colour. The landscape is one irrevocably changed by humanity — a site of suffering, loss and remembrance. A place where fragments of language are left to denote human history, where events have been reduced to the abstract form of a cross, the numbers and lettering on a multitude of graves.

As well as establishing the seriousness of Hotere's creative project — its dark, brooding tonal base — the *Sangro* paintings achieve a tentative beauty, their roughly hewn elements elegiac yet at the same time playfully inventive in their reconfiguration of numbers and shapes. Like the *Black Window*, with which this essay began, the *Sangro* paintings are reflections on death, but they are more concerned with reconciliation than terror — the darkness they contain is not so much a purposeless void as *an infinity*, a redemptive darkness, a place of limitless potentiality rather than closure. Amid their chaotic assemblage of numbers and harsh surface textures, there is an underlying order suggestive of peace, of resolution.

The best *Sangro* paintings are Hotere's most eloquent works until the *Black Paintings* of the late 1960s, which developed into the *Malady* works using Bill Manhire's text. Hotere realised



Winter Landscape, Sangro River, 1962-64
Acrylic on masonite, 735 x 967mm
Collection of Dunedin Public Art Gallery



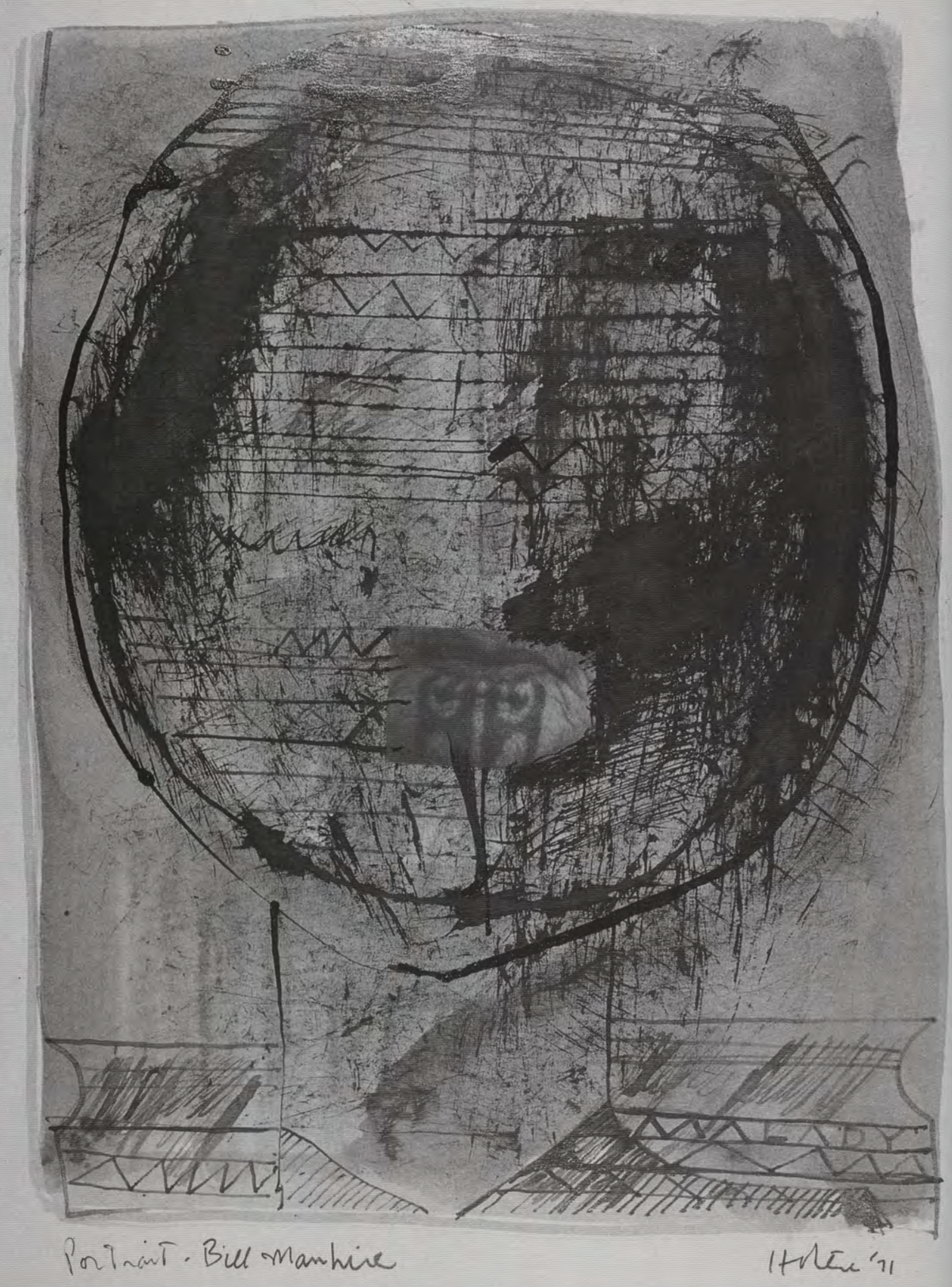
early on that words, rather than narrowing meaning or explaining it (in the manner of captions or titles), could add layers of ambiguity and significance. They could enter the paintings and *affect* them.

Ralph Hotere's first collaborative work using poetry dates from the late 1960s. Two drawings in the Hocken Library which incorporate a poem by Warren Dibble are dated 1965, although the artist believes these dates to be incorrect and that the pictures were probably done around 1969.[2] In *Sun-Love Poem 2*, the words of the poem arc around the outside of a large circle, a sun-shape which hovers over a linear landscape not unlike the one Hotere would develop in his drawings for O. E. Middleton's *The Loners* in 1972. Similar in tone to Bill Manhire's 'Song Cycle' poems, Dibble's poem is dream-like and lyrical: 'Let me live on your wrist. Hood me with a habit spun of your love and I shall fly, no hawk but an Icarus, to the darkness inside your sun.' As well as encapsulating the sombre mood of Hotere's paintings, Dibble's phrase 'the darkness inside your sun' is a suitably paradoxical image of light and dark—of fullness and emptiness—one which the artist's forms, both geometric and organic, continue to engage with to the present time.

1 Garth Hall, *Waikato Art Gallery Bulletin No. 4*, 1973, p8.

2 In conversation, Hotere had no memory of doing the drawings although he recalled meeting Dibble sometime after arriving in Dunedin in 1969. Interestingly, although the artist could not recall the drawings, he did remember the poem and recited it perfectly while driving his stationwagon from Port Chalmers back to Dunedin.

Sun–Love Poem 2 c.1969 (dated 1965)
Ink on paper, 565 x 445mm
Hocken Library Collection



The *Malady* paintings

Two old maladies that should no doubt
be considered separately: the malady of
wanting to know what to do and the malady
of wanting to be able to do it . . .
SAMUEL BECKETT

IN THE LATE 1960s Bill Manhire was a postgraduate student and part-time tutor at Otago University. He was also a promising poet in his early twenties whose work had been discovered by Charles Brasch and was already appearing in *Landfall*. Hotere, one suspects, would have been drawn to the enigmatic quality of Manhire's poetry, the fact it was at once clearly stated and oblique — a paradoxical endeavour not unlike his own. The lack of 'closure' in Manhire's poetry — of resolution, in a sense — left room for a painter to enlarge upon or extract from it.

After the *Zero* series of 1966–67, Hotere had been concentrating on an extensive series of minimalist *Black Paintings*, using, in most cases, Brolite lacquer on board to eliminate any trace of brushwork.[1] Colour, in these paintings, was confined to thin bands etched into the surface of the black lacquer. After the intense, obsessive reductiveness of these works, Hotere may well have felt drawn towards some kind of overt content and Manhire's poetry offered this, without the artist having to negotiate a re-entry into the pictorial mode which he had left behind a decade earlier. *New Zealand Herald* reviewer T. J. McNamara observed that, with the *Black Paintings*, Hotere 'appeared to have painted himself into an inescapable corner' but the *Malady* works at the Barry Lett Galleries in 1970 proved to be 'a triumphant extension beyond what seemed an impossible extreme.'[2]

Manhire recalls the genesis of the *Malady* collaborations: 'I had written this concrete/pattern poem which was just three words — four words, actually, but three articulations: *malady…melody …my lady*. And I'd made them into a typewritten booklet — pages of word patterns. I must have given a copy of the *Malady* book to Ralph at some stage. He presumably flicked through it and started making the paintings which became the *Malady* series.'[3]

Manhire prefers to think of his poetry as a catalyst or an agent for diversification, rather than as a message-bearing, authoritarian structure. In the 'concrete poetry' he was writing at the time he met Hotere, he was influenced by Ian Hamilton Finlay, the English artist and poet who from the 1950s onwards made puns and shifts in meaning the *modus operandi* of much of his creative output. Like Finlay, Manhire believed that the visual patterning of words had the potential to be

Portrait of Bill Manhire, 1971
MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER, 312 X 266MM
PRIVATE COLLECTION





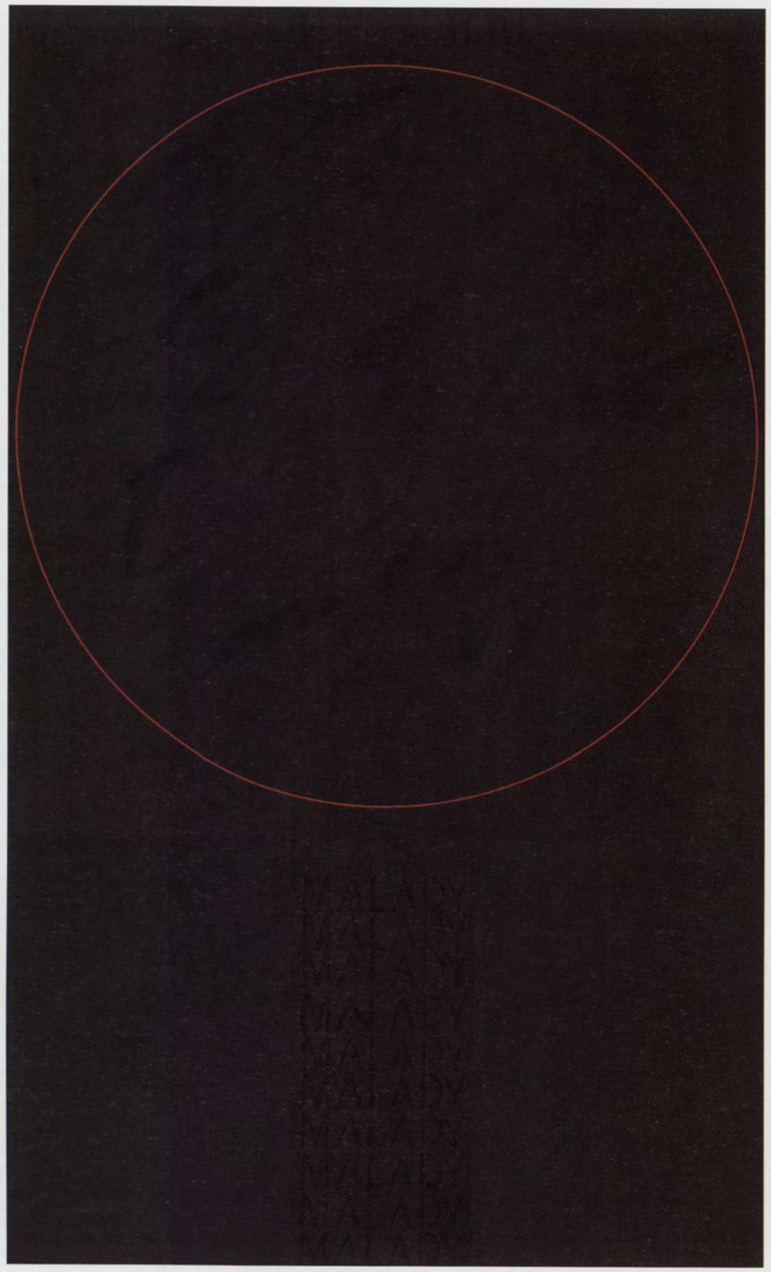
as important as the words themselves. Manhire's experimental poetry also drew on European sources from earlier this century including Apollinaire, the Italian Futurists and Russian Suprematists. His poems were often improvisations, predominantly light-hearted typewriter-works which he would photocopy and give to friends.

As well as the appearance of words—and the way repetition altered, enhanced or undermined them—Manhire was interested in their musicality; an emphasis implicit in the word 'melody' which is posited at the centre of the *Malady* enterprise. In hindsight, Manhire regards that poem, like much of his work until the late 1970s, as essentially a lyrical outpouring, a 'very sloppy old love poem, really'.[4] It goes without saying that it proved a fertile starting point for Hotere, who extended the minimal text far beyond its originating impulse and circumstance. In some of the *Malady* works the words float freely across the dark pond of the painting. At other times, they form a geometric shape within the picture frame, or a pillar, or a cross. The words inhabit partitioned-off areas within certain works, creating diverse compositional weights and an ambiguous space which is neither three-dimensional nor flat.

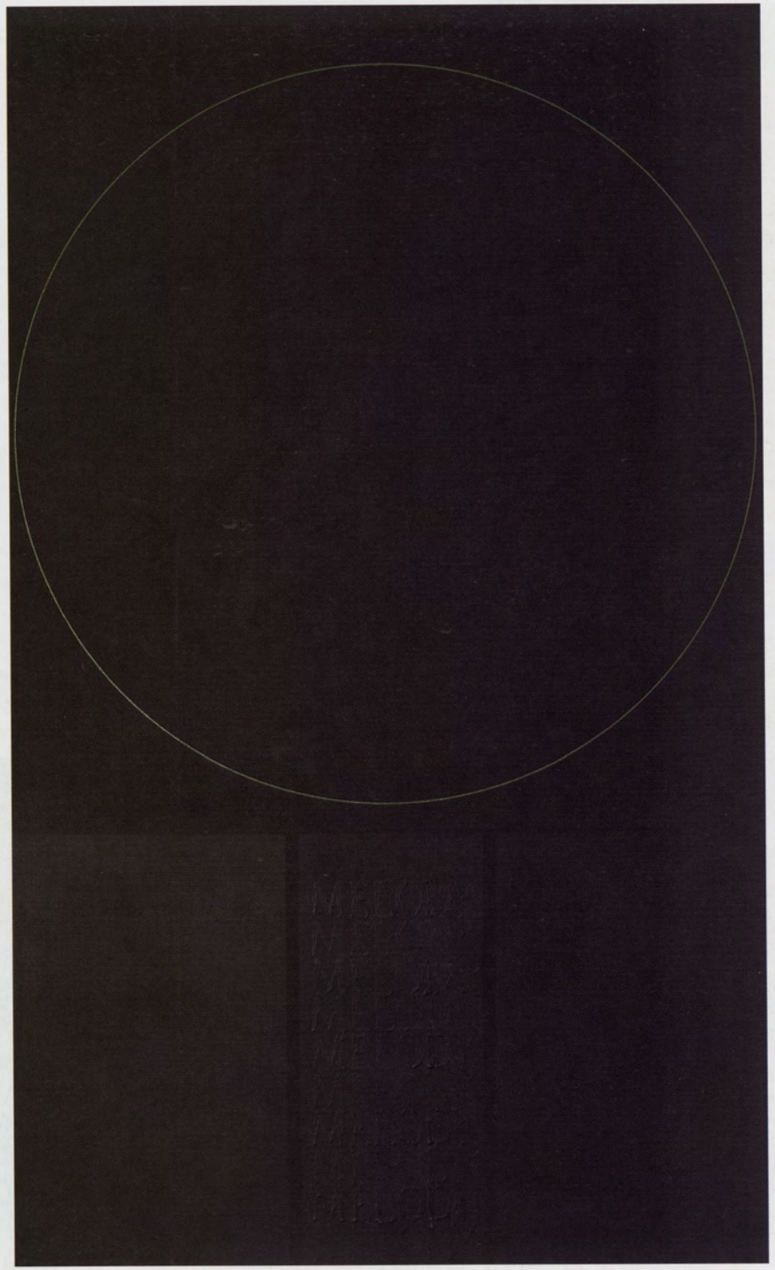
In terms of international art, one of the most compelling recent instances of an abstract painter who has used lyric poetry as a starting point is Robert Motherwell. His *Elegy for the*

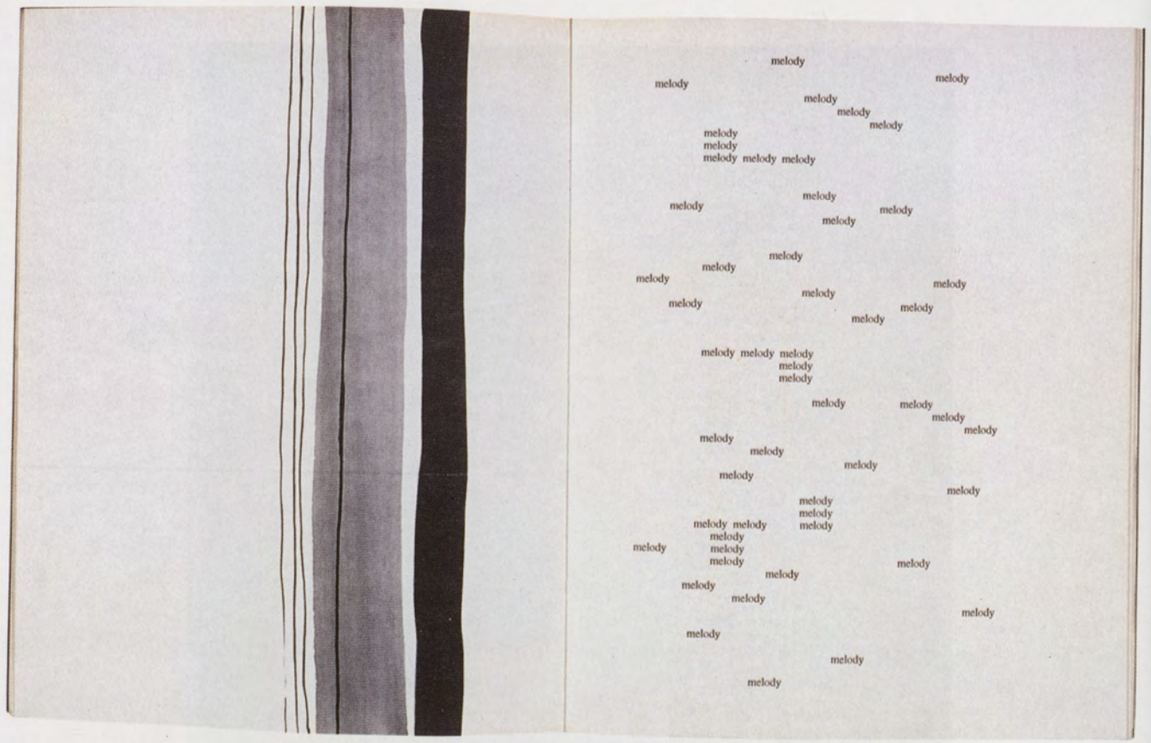
Malady*, *1970
Acrylic on canvas, 1116 x 912mm
Collection of J. Gibbs, Auckland

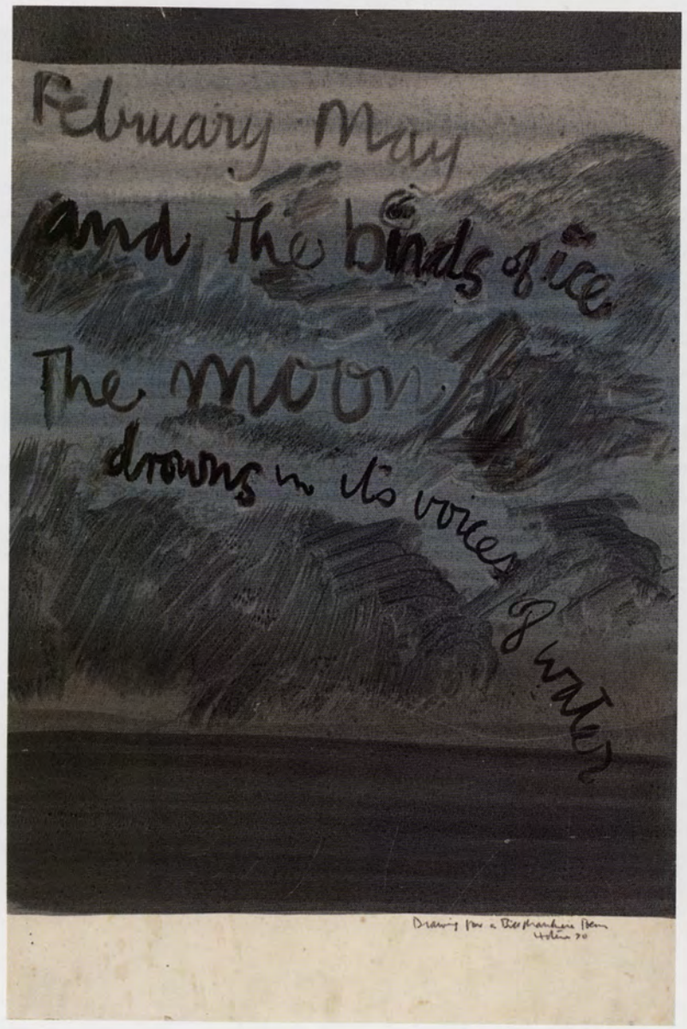
Working drawing for Malady*, *1970
Pencil on paper, 260 x 205mm
Hocken Library Collection



Two panels from ***Malady***, 1971
Acrylic on seven panels, each 1780 x 1060mm
Collection of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery




melody
melody
melody



Voicing the landscape

Hotere & Colin McCahon

RALPH HOTERE's work is characterised by an obsessive attachment to art and its materials as well as a detachment, a necessary distancing between himself and the 'statement' he is producing. These polarities — this closeness and distance — provide something of a motor for the artist, enabling and/or forcing him to constantly shift and reappraise his position. An important work on paper from 1970, *Drawing for a Bill Manhire poem (The birds of ice)*, is a visual as well as a verbal haiku — a spartan meditation on nature. Like a Japanese poem, it uses objective images to encompass and convey a subjective emotion or position. *Drawing for a Bill Manhire poem* is also a useful gauge of both Hotere's debt to McCahon and his insistence on not being confined by the presence of the elder artist. The poem, in full, reads:

February, May and the birds of ice
the moon drowns in its voices of water.

Although the tone of the work and the stark horizon above which scuffed clouds gather are reminiscent of McCahon, the text strikes a different note. It is like a riddle or a spell. It could be the utterance of a sage or a child. Unlike the majority of McCahon's texts, the words are neither biblical nor specifically New Zealand-orientated in their imagery. Also, the way the last line of the poem dives into the water introduces a levity that McCahon would seldom allow himself.

Hotere's priorities as a word-painter in the early 1970s can perhaps be seen to reflect a shift in the national temper — away from the gloomy, Puritan hillscapes of 'a landscape with too few lovers'[1] to a freer, more diverse state. His paintings, generally, reflect a less oppressive ideology or spirituality than that embodied by McCahon's work. This shift might well reflect Hotere's move away from the Catholicism of his upbringing (without, it must be said, ever renouncing the faith) in contrast to McCahon's striving towards that religion.

Specific meaning and morality always play second fiddle in Hotere's art to the primacy of

Drawing for a poem by Bill Manhire, 1970
INK AND WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER, 500 X 350MM
PRIVATE COLLECTION



experience and the presence of the natural world. He *presents*, rather than preaches, leaving viewers to reach their own conclusions; hence the paintings tend to offer a broader, more accommodating view than McCahon's. Bill Manhire offers insight into the equally intense involvement and detachment of Hotere's art:

> *There's some connection between Ralph's work and the fact that he's a trained pilot — there's a great photo I have a very fuzzy photocopy of which shows him sitting in the cockpit of an aeroplane. I'm not sure when he got his pilot's licence, whether he was a trainee after the war… but you can look at his paintings sometimes and think they've lifted way up above the territory they're dealing with. They're not remote from it, they're certainly not ignoring it, but they've managed to bring a whole territory into view which hadn't been entirely visible before. And there's a kind of contemplative wisdom about what's going on. It might be spiritual or emotional or political, but there's usually that kind of lift off and looking back. He's hovering above the forest, not clomping around at ground level.*[2]

While words can easily overwhelm a painting or introduce an authoritarian tone, Manhire's texts are sufficiently unstable and open to tremors of meaning and resonance to render authorial posturing, on the part of either poet or painter, impossible. Their tone is a far cry from that which predominated in Colin McCahon's expressively brushed and voiced word paintings, and this distance — this difference — was essential to the viability of word-painting for Hotere as an artist aware of and greatly impressed by McCahon. The younger artist's choice of specifically lyric poetry allowed him to work a different set of priorities, proffering, as Janet Paul observes, 'a lighter concordance for McCahon's grave Hebraic messages.'[3]

Ultimately, whatever the similarities between McCahon and Hotere, their sensibilities have always been fundamentally different. While the elder painter was driven to play out the Modernist role of the voice in the wilderness, the pathfinder, Hotere's predisposition has been more akin to that of the postmodern recycler of texts and materials. Hotere's painted texts aren't beamed down to him from on high, they are picked up from the world around him, stumbled upon, overheard or remembered from years earlier. It is worth noting, however, that while there is sometimes a levity in Hotere's work it is never the levity of a detached postmodernist. Since the *Polaris* paintings with their anti-nuclear impetus and the *Algérie* works protesting at French opposition to Algerian independence, Hotere has been an advocate of *involvement* — political, environmental, social and personal.

February, May and the Birds of Ice, 1969/70
Acrylic on hardboard, 770 x 610mm
Collection of Robert May, Perth





Given that both McCahon and Hotere collaborated with New Zealand poets, it's interesting that they were drawn to writers with quite different agendas. McCahon, as well as using biblical texts, used words by Dunedin poet John Caselberg (notably in his series of word-paintings *The Wake* and the *Van Gogh* works) and Peter Hooper, whose words were incorporated into a number of scrolls exhibited at the Barry Lett Gallery in 1969. (There were also strong affinities between McCahon and James K. Baxter, as curator Peter Simpson's 1996 exhibition *Candles in a Dark Room* made clear.)[4]

The poems by Caselberg and Hooper that McCahon used in his work were based on more traditional assumptions about poetry and the role of the poet than the texts provided by Hotere's major collaborators, who, by and large, have made much greater use of the demotic voice and presented a more fragmentary rendering of reality — witness, in particular, McQueen's idiosyncratic mixture of physics and lyrically rendered details from daily life and Manhire's use of serio-comic personae.[5]

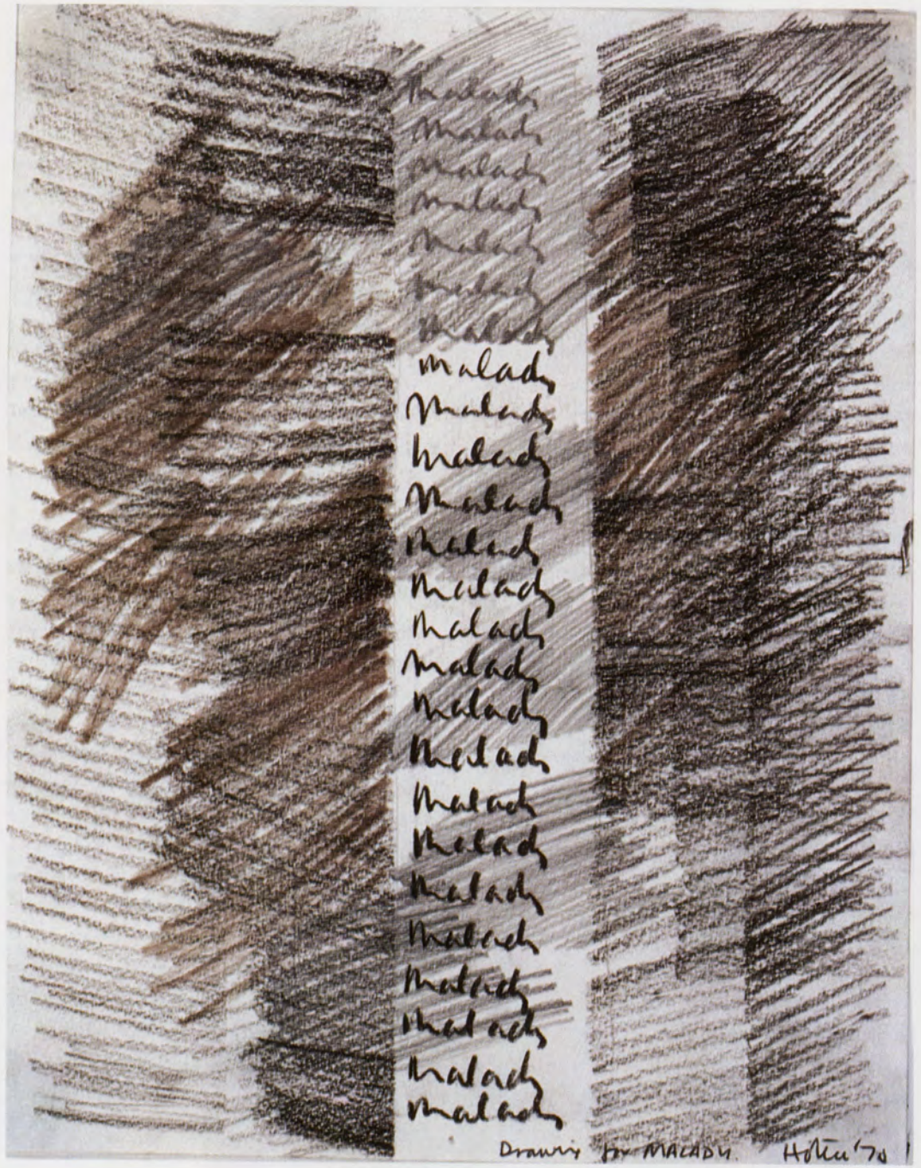
That said, there is considerable common ground between Hotere and McCahon in their use of Maori language and elements of Catholic iconography and in their willingness to, when necessary, colonise the pictorial surface with political anger or fervour (for instance, McCahon's environmentalist *Necessary Protection* works and Hotere's similarly inclined Aramoana-related paintings). Both artists were influenced by sign-writing and graffiti. Beyond that, they share an intense, nonconformist humanism, using the Roman Catholic religion and Maori culture as recurrent but not restrictive reference points.

The point at which Hotere gets closest to McCahon is when he incorporates Old Testament texts within his paintings. In works like the 1976 *Aramoana Koputai* screen, with its inscription, 'And ye shall dwell in the land I gave to your fathers and ye shall be my people and I will be your God. Ezekiel 36.28', the words carry such a strong echo of McCahon that they ask to be read as a homage to the older artist. It is almost as if Hotere is quoting McCahon and not the Bible. As well as invoking McCahon, such painted texts, usually taken from Old Testament prophetic books such as Ezekiel and Isaiah, carry strong associations with Maori millenarian movements — they are important statements of the relationship between the land and its inhabitants.

While McCahon's word paintings generally eschew the lyrical in their choice of text, one of his most lyrical later paintings is *The Song of the Shining Cuckoo* (1974), the text of which was provided by Ralph Hotere's father, Tangirau, by way of his son. Here the subtle nuance of the birdsong flickers across the light and dark panels of the artwork. The series of canvases marked the introduction of a new formal and emotional element in McCahon's art. While McCahon was

Aramoana Koputai, 1976 (back view)
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS SCREEN, 1546 X 1260MM
PRIVATE COLLECTION, WELLINGTON

Aramoana Koputai, 1976 (front view)



a major influence on Hotere, it is likely that influence flowed the other way as well.[6]

Interestingly, McCahon never used the kind of geometrical word patterning that Hotere introduced as early as the *Sangro* works and, to an even greater extent, in the *Malady* series and the 1985 *Dawn/Water Poem* works. (These techniques, as we have already seen, have their origins in both Hotere's time in England and in the 'concrete' poetry of his friend Bill Manhire.)[7]

Whereas McCahon's work speaks, for the most part, with one clearly articulated voice, Hotere's has a more unsettled, variable nature. Manhire points to the potentiality of the kind of lyric poem Hotere uses to 'move beyond the control of a single homogenizing voice ... [and] offer several voices in the course of a single utterance.'[8] Hotere further complicates or multiplies the way his paintings are 'read' by repetition of words (or segments of text) and the aforementioned geometrical arrangements, with the result that quite often his texts — unlike McCahon's — cannot be read from beginning to end. Hence, there are many possible readings; no obvious place to start, no place to stop.

1 Words inscribed on *The Northland Panels* (1958) by Colin McCahon

2 Gregory O'Brien,'Some Paintings', p26.

3 Janet Paul, *Art New Zealand* 29 (Summer 1983), pp22–23.

4 Peter Simpson, *Candles in a Dark Room: James K. Baxter and Colin McCahon*, exhibition catalogue published by the Auckland Art Gallery, 1996.

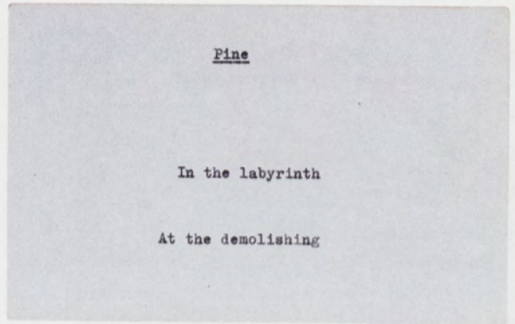
5 Occasionally Hotere has used texts by John Caselberg: a 1991 *Pathway to the Sea* drawing is inscribed: 'There is a rock to guard every sacred harbour in New Zealand. It but waits its hour — Caselberg 1980.' Also the 1972 *Te Whiti* works include texts from Caselberg's *The Voice of the Maori*. Hotere appears in Caselberg's poem 'Matins at Tui Wakening': 'Light / Illuming the Otakou nights / Of Hotere's / And Middleton's / Breakers-worn boulders...' (1990/91).

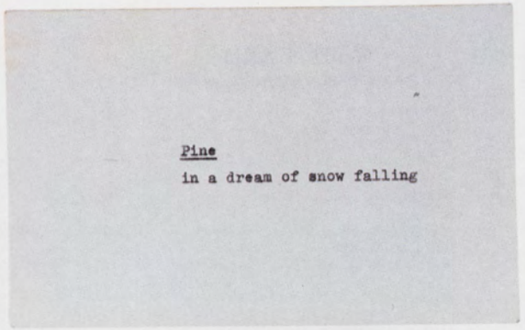
6 Hotere's 1991 sequence of works on paper *Song of Solomon* includes the biblical line 'the time of the singing birds is come', echoing the text of *The Song of the Shining Cuckoo* and providing an unsettling coda to McCahon's work (see chapter 12). In Hotere's work (which comments on the Gulf War) birdsong is replaced by air raid sirens, whistling bombs and the technological language of modern warfare. Formally, *Song of Solomon* echoes McCahon's *Shining Cuckoo* in its use of shifting horizons and planes of land and sky, as well as the Roman numerals, I–XIV.

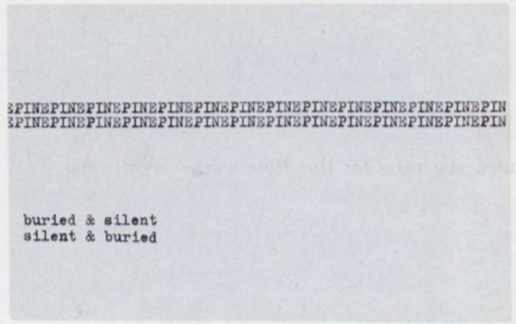
7 Another marked difference is in the way Hotere and McCahon use line. While the heavier, roughly-hewn line of McCahon echoes Georges Rouault and Paul Cézanne, Hotere's line is more akin to Henri Matisse or Paul Klee.

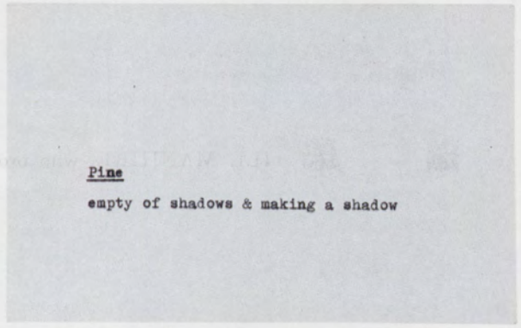
8 Bill Manhire, 'Dirty Silence: Impure Sounds in New Zealand Poetry', included in *Dirty Silence: Aspects of Language and Literature in New Zealand* (Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1991), p149.

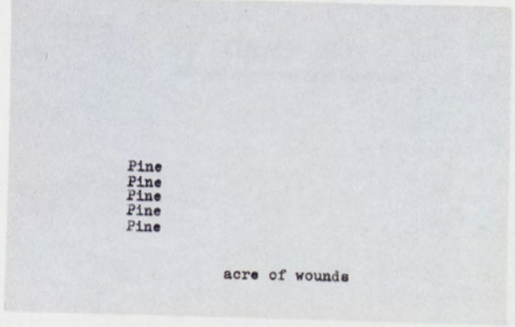
Working drawing for Malady, 1970
LEAD, CARBON AND COLOURED PENCILS ON PAPER, 260 X 205MM
HOCKEN LIBRARY COLLECTION

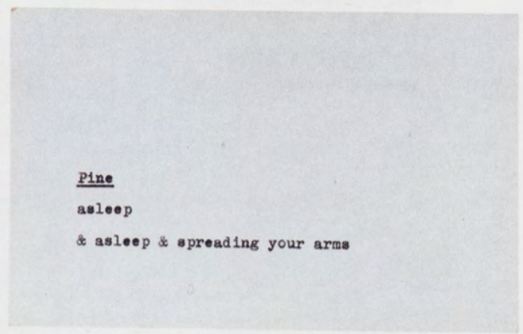


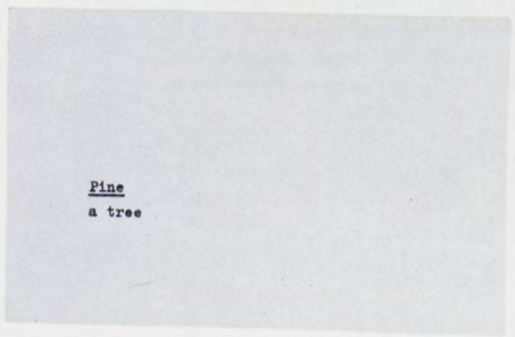


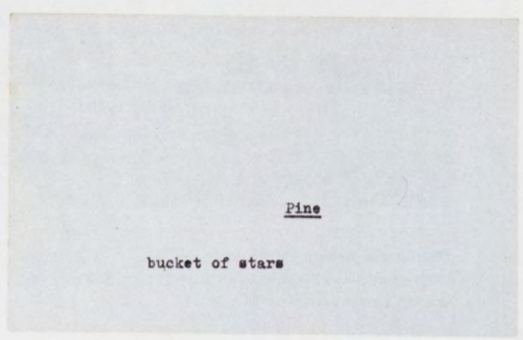












'Empty of shadows and making a shadow'

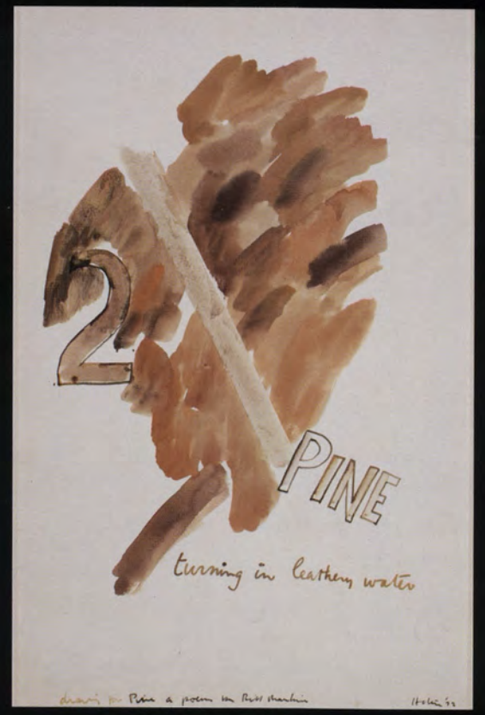
BILL MANHIRE, who provided the texts for the *Pine* works, recalls the genesis of that particular collaboration:

> *At one stage, while I was living in London in the early 70s, I sent Ralph a piece of poetry each week. Every so often I would put in the mail a postcard with the word PINE on it — plus a line [of poetry]... Ralph did a series of works — mostly stuff on paper — using bits of that text. I've always found pine forests really scary and interesting in the way that Janet Frame did. There was always a plantation near where we were living when I was a child. In the forest the sound quality changed — it was scary and safe all at once — cathedral, underwater stuff. That was what was in my mind when I wrote the words, but I don't imagine they would have meant that to Ralph — it must have been strange for him to receive a weekly line about a European tree.*[1]

The *Pine* works on paper divide into two series, the first a group of 1972 watercolours which are amongst Hotere's most lyrical works. They are imbued with a weightlessness he seldom allows his painted forms: transparent washes evoke vegetation and clouds; a calligraphic rendering of elemental shapes is juxtaposed with the trunk of a tree which is a fissure of blank paper. The word PINE surfaces in each image, as well as an assortment of lines from Manhire and a series of numbers, I–XIV, which give the works a ritualistic feeling.

A more robust-looking sequence of *Pine* images, from a year or two later, used woodblock-printed letters as structural elements in a manner more akin to McCahon although, again, the layering of word on top of word made for a more patterned effect. These banner-like configurations of words, which the artist printed on the Royal Columbian hand-press at the Bibliography Room at the University of Otago, also echo the artist's early Pop Art and Op Art influences, the handwritten words offsetting the weighty printed letters with hazy graffiti. Some of the printed

Copies of **Pine** *postcards sent to Ralph Hotere from Bill Manhire in London,* c.1972









letters are damaged, smudged, or they look as if they've been eroded by chemicals or the elements. As always, Hotere's interest in textures and imperfections in finish is integral to the complexity and allusiveness he requires of his often minimal visual elements.

Hotere exploits the multiple meanings of 'pine', letting the word commute between the natural world and the world of human emotions and expression. Ian Wedde wrote in the *Evening Post* in 1990: 'Hotere has run whole series of puns off titles, and whole series and re-series of works off puns. Because of the silence in the ground of his work, the gestures (the speech) that play upon that silence can do much with very little . . .'[2]

The serious aspect of word play is a given of twentieth century literature with such pioneering figures as James Joyce, Gertrude Stein and e. e. cummings fracturing both the sound and sense of words and phrases to realise new, unpredictable forms. Hotere recognises the potentiality of even the simplest of puns — witness the *Pine* series and, just as spectacularly, the earlier *Malady* paintings. His works attest to the capacity of language to subvert our expectations, to alter the way we perceive reality.

A notable, ongoing instance of word play in Hotere's art is the way he has utilised the word 'black' in the titles of his works. A decade after his first series of *Black Paintings* came the *Black Windows* and then the *Black Rainbow* works to commemorate the sinking of the Greenpeace vessel *Rainbow Warrior* in 1985 (the words 'window' and 'rainbow' echoing each other phonetically). Then, in 1987, Hotere produced his installation *Black Phoenix* — the phoenix of that title an inversion of the white peace-dove that featured in many of the *Black Rainbow* works. During the 1980s he also produced the *Black Union Jack* works and began using Spanish titles such as *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro*, again drawing attention to the colour.

Hotere has always paid painstaking attention to his titles — so we find *Fault* (1994), an installation he and Bill Culbert designed for the façade of the City Gallery, Wellington, alluding to the positioning of that city on the seismic fault-line as well as the way the two building-length configurations of fluorescent tubes look like cracks or faults in the construction.[3] The 1983 *Baby Iron* works revel in the irony (for want of a better word) of their paradoxical designation. A corrugated iron work from around the same time, *Aurora*, has the words IRON CURTAIN stencilled across it — a verbal pun, but also a visual one regarding the traditional use of undulating drapery in Western art. (The 'curtain' also neatly refers to the 'windows' Hotere constructs elsewhere.)

Hotere is always alert and listening to the sounds of words as well as to their meanings — so 'Baby Iron' contains 'Babylon'; 'Black Window' is itself a dark echo of 'Black Widow' and, beyond

'turning in leathery water'
drawing for Pine a poem by Bill Manhire, 1972

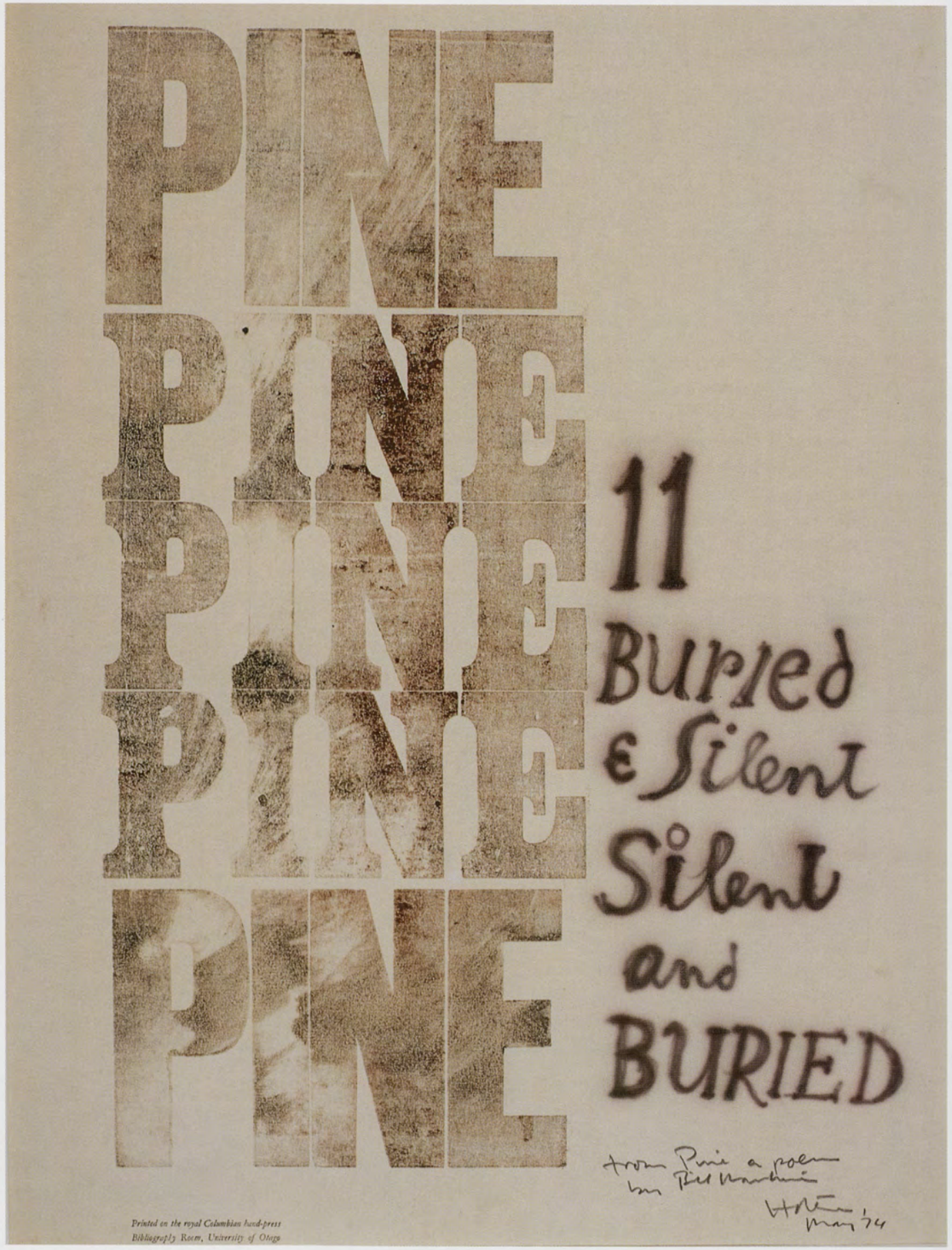
'Pine; a tree'
drawing for Pine a poem by Bill Manhire, 1972

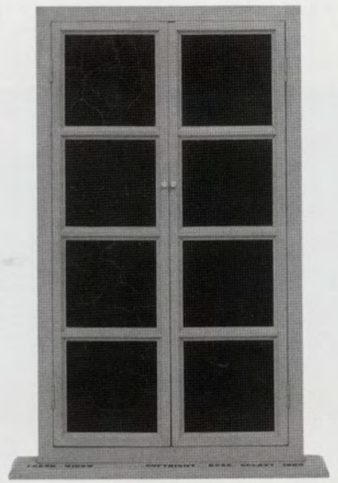
Both WATERCOLOUR AND INK ON PAPER, 565 X 425MM
COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST

'bucket of stars'
drawing for Pine a poem by Bill Manhire, 1972

'discovered in hell'
drawing for Pine a poem by Bill Manhire, 1972

Both WATERCOLOUR AND INK ON PAPER, 565 X 425MM
COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST





that, refers to Marcel Duchamp's *Fresh Widow* (a 1920 window frame enclosing eight panes of black leather). This insistent *listening* goes as far back as the first *Sangro* works — the harsh, beautiful place name Sangro carrying within it a suggestion of blood, of anger, of sainthood... all of these echoes and others contained, as Bill Manhire observes, within 'this dark word with a catch of lamentation at the end'.[4] Hotere rarely uses titles to *clarify* a work — they tend to add further layers or, like all the language he incorporates, function as a veil through which the image must be glimpsed.

1 Gregory O'Brien, 'Some Paintings', p24.

2 Ian Wedde, *Evening Post*, 5 April 1990.

3 An inspired investigation by Bill Manhire into the word 'fault' and its relevance to the City Gallery, Wellington, was included in *Fault*, an artists' book published by the Wellington City Council in 1994.

4 Gregory O'Brien, 'Some Paintings', p23.

'Buried and silent, silent and buried',
from Pine a poem by Bill Manhire, 1974
WOODBLOCK PRINT AND INK ON PAPER, 565 X 425MM
COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST

Marcel Duchamp, ***Fresh Widow***, 1920
PAINTED WOODEN FRAME AND EIGHT PANES OF LEATHER-COVERED GLASS, 770 X 445MM



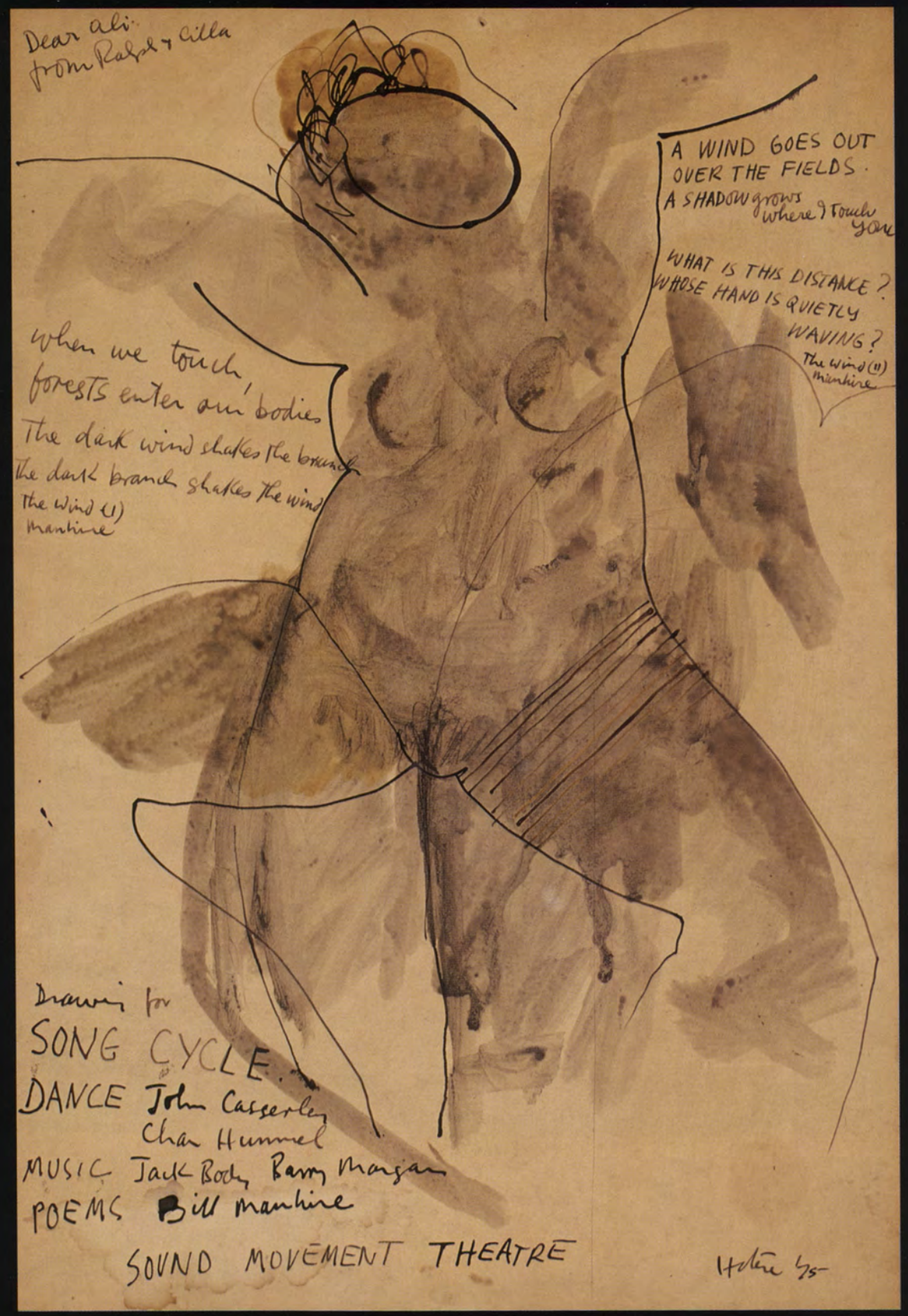
'Empty of shadows and making a shadow',
from Pine, a poem by Bill Manhire, 1984
Acrylic on unstretched canvas, 1830 x 1800mm
Collection of Sam Neill, Los Angeles

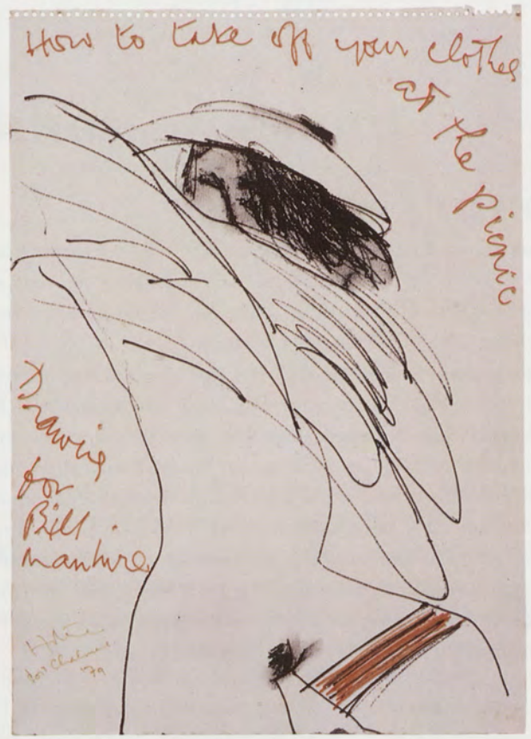
A collaborative process
Hotere & other artists

THE APPOINTMENT each year of musical, literary and visual arts Fellows at the University of Otago has had an impact on the creative life of Dunedin by providing links between artists working in these different spheres. Bill Manhire notes that there seems to be a tradition that the Fellows become friends, go to the same parties, maybe even work together.[1] During his tenure as 1969 Hodgkins Fellow, Hotere formed strong associations with the theatrical, literary and musical communities of Dunedin, and since then he has collaborated with writers, musicians and dancers from within the city and beyond. For example, the composers Jack Body, Barry Margan and Anthony Watson were to become a strong presence in his work of the mid-1970s. More recently, Hotere's collaborative work has tended to involve visual artists, including Andrew Drummond, John Reynolds and Bill Culbert.

Bill Manhire considers the term *collaborator* too fixed and deliberate in relation to Hotere's working relationships: 'I don't think Ralph works as a collaborator. He has friendships and people he works with; he brings things to life in the gaps and spaces and accidents that other people — and circumstance — make available.'[2] Hotere will rarely work in the same place, at the same time as his literary collaborators (McQueen, who was married to the artist for 12 years, being an exception). He needs to be able to move away — the words have to linger a while.

Tellingly, Hotere often inscribes the names of his collaborators into the works themselves. For instance, the *Song Cycle* banners — some of which were done years after the performance they relate to — often include the names of the two musicians, the dancers and Bill Manhire. In many of the working drawings, Hotere includes a similar roll-call, acknowledging the input of those people as part of the content of every picture. Beyond being a gesture to the people concerned, these inscriptions say something about Hotere's creative project as a whole — it is pluralist (it has many voices), it is constantly referring to other art forms and there is always a relation to the human figure (in this case, the imagined presence of the dancers sharing a 'stage' with the banners).[3]





Just as the tone and content of Hotere's work is complicated by the enlisting of collaborators of different kinds, so his work brings together different modes and methods, which elaborate upon as well as place stresses on each other. In this respect also, the work enacts the erosion of the artist as solo performer and unassailable individual with one 'signature' style, and the notion of the painting as a straightforward, resolved, homogenous entity. Hotere's great achievement is his ability to produce images that are open to outside influences but are not compromised by them.

Needless to say, Hotere has in turn had an influence over the practice of the poets whose words he has used. He and Hone Tuwhare have been passing the orb/sun motif between them for over thirty years now. Ian Wedde has taken on the artist's penchant for demolition materials and the fragmentary notation of human voices within a landscape. Cilla McQueen went on to make her own 'concrete poetry' using xeroxes and graphic elements, also exhibiting artist's books, landscape drawings and musical scores in the 1980s. She writes: 'My visual work was certainly greatly influenced by Ralph. He got me into landscape drawing, and I became interested in the visual/aural effects of lettering, graphics, layout.'[4] McQueen adds that Hotere's belief that art is 'an attitude of pleasurable exploration that goes on 24 hours a day' also influenced her. Bill Manhire's poetry in the 1970s was driven towards a dark elementalism which, while

OPPOSITE: ***Drawing for Song Cycle***, 1975
INK AND WASH ON PAPER, 410 X 280MM
COLLECTION OF TREVOR MOFFITT, CHRISTCHURCH

How to take off your clothes at the picnic, 1979
INK ON PAPER, 412 X 296MM
PRIVATE COLLECTION

having echoes in overseas poetry from Lorca to Robert Bly, was extraordinarily close in tone and intention to Hotere's visual art. As we have seen, Manhire's *Pine* texts were generated specifically for Hotere, who was the 'recipient' of them and whose presence is felt within the poems, just as it is in the texts used on the *Song Cycle* banners.

In the early 1970s, the paintings and poems of Hotere and Manhire, respectively, seemed to be constantly risking, and even coming close to achieving, their own abnegation. Both negotiated paths through or around darkness and silence, shaped by an aesthetic so uncompromising that it ran the risk of extinguishing its very productions. An unstated anguish — be it a historical anxiety or a personal one — reduces the work of Hotere and Manhire from around that time to the barest of utterances. You only need to consider the dark intonation of Manhire's 'Pine' (with, as he says, the word's associations of homesickness, melancholy and also torture)[5] or the sensory deprivation of Hotere's recurrent black paintings. In both word and form, the onlooker is presented with a mere gesture, a shadow, an almost-nothingness or, as Samuel Beckett would have described it, 'a murmur, something gone wrong with the silence'.[6]

1 Bill Manhire in conversation with G. O'Brien, September 1996.

2 Gregory O'Brien 'Some Paintings', p22.

3 While the figurative presence in his work is confined chiefly to works on paper (he has produced a vast oeuvre of figure studies, nudes and portraits), his paintings have evolved in constant relationship to the size of the human figure and his use of reflective surfaces has often introduced the figure of the viewer inadvertently into the artwork.

4 Letter from Gillian McQueen to G. O'Brien, December 1996.

5 Gregory O'Brien 'Some Paintings', p25.

6 Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, in *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett* (John Calder, London, 1959) p88.

'Darkness goes out with its voices'

A SONG CYCLE is a sequence of songs which relate to each other in both their content and musical style. The earliest known cycle in Western music is thought to be 'Cantigas de Amigo' by the thirteenth century Spanish troubadour Martim Codax. That cycle is set against a backdrop of the sea — which, in medieval times, denoted mystery — before which a woman stands by a church on a hill, waiting and pining for her lover who never returns. Lyric poetry is often imbued with such a sense of memory and longing — a 'pining', to use Manhire's verb/noun — the natural world washing backwards and forwards over the trappings of human life and the emotions of the individual. Bill Manhire's lyrics, upon which Hotere's *Song Cycle* banners were based, are full of a comparable dark sensuality:

VIDYAPATI'S SONG

My lover's limbs are placed
as ornaments.
My lover's ornaments are eyes.

House darkened by lanterns
Moon darkened by hair
Darkness goes out with its voices

My lover's breasts are marked
with nails. Ah see,
her single garment is the rain.

House darkened by arrows
Moon darkened by song
Darkness goes out with its voices

The banners themselves are Hotere's most explicit statement about the relationship between art forms — in this case visual art, poetry, music and dance. Hotere spelled out, with gratitude, the nature of the works: 'These banners were begun early in 1975 when I was working on the stage design for SOUND MOVEMENT THEATRE's production of "Song Cycle". I owe thanks to Jack Body & Barry Margan (music), John Casserley & Char Hummel (dance) and especially to Bill Manhire on whose poems the dance "Song Cycle" & the paintings were based.'[1]

The banners were not completed in time to be used as part of the *Song Cycle* performance, but Hotere provided slides which were projected on to a backdrop during the performance. He also designed the programme which incorporated a number of handwritten poems (most of them by Manhire) and it was these texts that would reappear on his canvases for some years after the performances.

Like much of his work of the 1970s, Hotere's *Song Cycle* banners can be seen as a reaction against the perfectionist tendency in his *Black Paintings* of the late 1960s. After working with such refined materials as hardboard, perspex and fine quality canvas, the banners were painted on lengths of coarse canvas. The materials were left out in the open air to give them further texture. Bill Manhire has pointed to the 'elemental processes' involved:

> *The* Song Cycle *paintings have words on them but also lots of accidental stuff. There are metal eyelets in the edges, and this is because they were nailed flat and lived for long periods of time out in the weather on the hill at Port Chalmers. So the paintings are sort of made up of wind and sun and rain and grit, as well as paint. They've got the days and the nights and the weather in them. That strikes me as very characteristic of his work — that what they are is partly what has* happened *to them — they're not totally deliberate effects of a controlling mind. There's a lot of accident and chance…*[2]

It follows that the lyricism of Hotere's art is to be found as much in the process as in the end result. Rather than painting rain falling, he will have paint *enact* what rain does, forming a rhythmical patter across the entire exposed surface of the canvas — an elemental pointillism.

The *Song Cycle* banners were first exhibited at the Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, in 1976, some of them hanging from the ceiling and away from the walls so people could walk around them.[3] When a further selection of the works was shown in Wellington, Neil Rowe observed: 'The iridescence achieved is not unlike petrol on a wet road and the eroded surface has a tapestry-like effect. Thus, rain and night, themes suggested by colour and words and by impeccably executed fine stripes, become an actual physical element in the painting.'[4] He went on to write of Hotere's technique: '[He] has built up his blacks by applying layer upon layer of colour. The result of this technique is that the final black has colour very subtly breaking through it.'

In their exploration of the ways in which paint and dye can be brushed on, rubbed off, poured, sprayed, spilt and splattered, the banners exemplify Hotere's continual movement away from stasis and certainty in his working methods towards indeterminacy and inquiry. This ongoing experimentation would subsequently lead the artist from canvas to wood to corrugated iron and stainless steel. For a time, in the 1980s, he did away with paint altogether, burning and scratching marks on to steel and iron. Hotere's work, as a whole, is full of such departures and disjunctures as well as connections.



***Drawing of Bill Manhire**, 1972*
Ink on paper, 350 x 290mm
Private collection

On following pages: *Five* ***Song Cycle*** *banners*
Acrylic and dyes on unstretched canvas, c. 3000 x 900mm
The Voyage, Hocken Library collection
Love Poem, Collection of David and Betty Purdue
Wulf I and Wulf II, Collection of Cilla McQueen
The Wind, Collection of J. Gibbs, Auckland

THE VOYAGE

1
All night water laps
the hedges. I hold you in the middle
of the air.

2
Don't sleep
all night. It is pitch

black, but since
there is a vista, let

your throat be
the lantern.

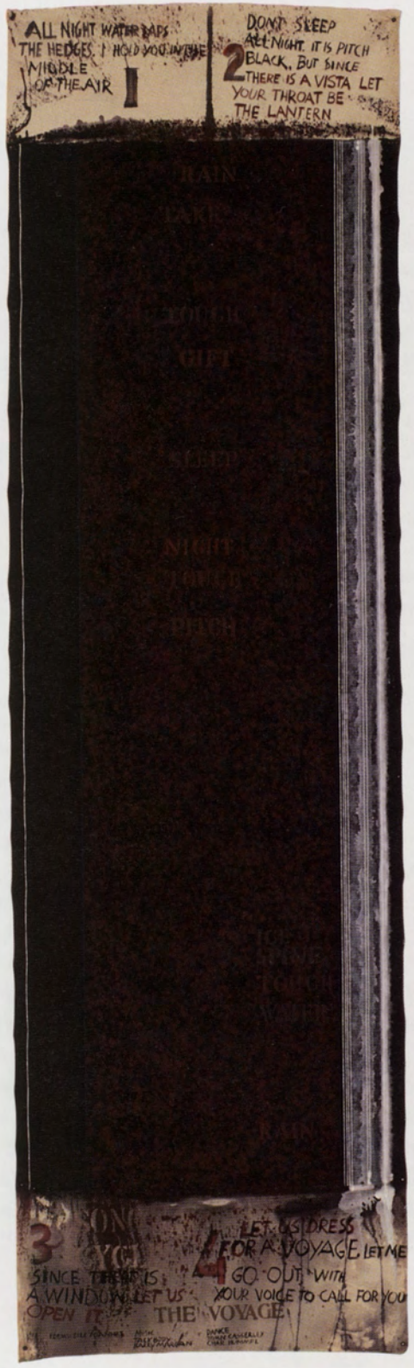
3
Since there is
a window, let us

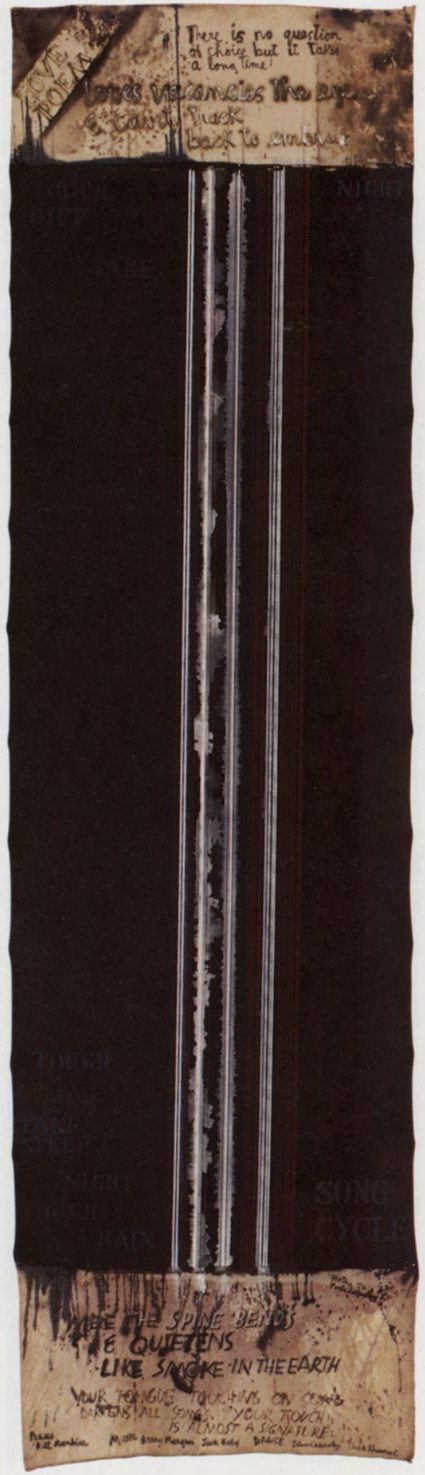
open it.

4
Let us dress
for a voyage. Let me

go out, with
your voice, to call for you.

Bill Manhire





LOVE POEM

There is no question
of choice, but it takes
a long time.

Love's vacancies, the eye
& cavity, track
back to embraces

where the spine bends
& quietens
like smoke in the earth.

Your tongue, touching on song,
darkens all songs. Your touch
is almost a signature.

Bill Manhire



WULF

1
They take it from me:
in the manner
of a gift

if danger moves in the earth
is the life given
is it love between us

2
Wulf: on that island
— *I on this other*

shut into fens, a bone
in the neck of a savage

if danger moves upon water
is the life given
is it love between us

3
In my mind we joined together:

as it rained, as
I was sad in the rain, as
he laid me with his arms

into his shoulder
a joy given into me like sorrow

4
Wulf, Wulf,
it is not
at all hunger shaking my limbs
but that you do not journey

absent & yet
you fill me

5
They take it from me:
in the manner
of a gift

the spine of a feather, a cloud in the body

ai, it is
easily broken, what

was never at one:

you & I, *Wulf*, the one
with the other

& singing

Bill Manhire

THE WIND (1)

When we touch,
forests enter our bodies.

The dark wind shakes the branch.
The dark branch shakes the wind.

THE WIND (2)

A wind goes out over the fields.
A shadow grows where I touch you.
What is this distance?
Whose hand is quietly waving?

Bill Manhire



IN 1978 BILL MANHIRE and artist Andrew Drummond created *Dawn/Water*, a book published by Alan Loney's Hawk Press. Around the time of that publication, Manhire produced concrete poems with the same title, using different words but incorporating a similar horizon line and refracted configuration of words. It was another 'Dawn/Water Poem' which Hotere would return to in his paintings of that title during the mid-1980s, one that comprised a single word: SUNRISE. The poet had arranged the word across a number of pages to visually suggest a sun rising above an ocean. Two versions of the original poem, similar to those which Manhire gave Hotere in 1975, looked like this:

sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise

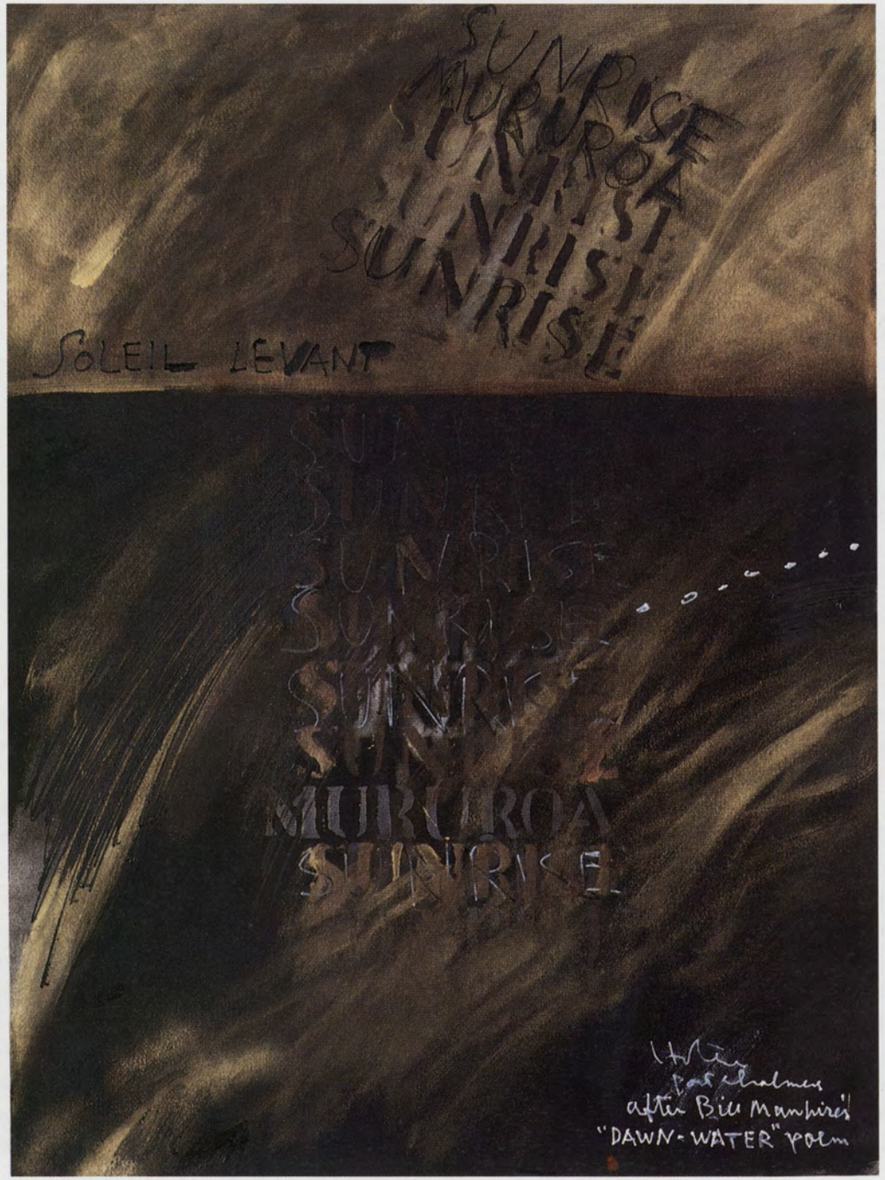
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise
sunrise

Interestingly, Hotere adapted the formal arrangement of Manhire's text rather than, strictly speaking, its linguistic base for his 1985 painting *Dawn/Water Poem*, to which he added another word, MURUROA, hence politicising Manhire's 'neutral' reflection on the natural world. The *Dawn* (in the title) becomes that of the atomic age, the *Water* the lagoon and ocean surrounding Mururoa where the French military were testing at the time. The *Poem* becomes a flag or canvas waved in protest, with a large letter X dominating the composition. In terms of nautical language, the X means 'keep away'. And, of course, it also means 'wrong'.

The 'Dawn/Water' text reiterates the repetitive structure of some of the earlier *Malady* paintings — like minimalism in music, there is an incessant patterning of verbal textures. However, unlike the *Malady* series, the calm of the poem's original typewritten lettering on a white page is, in this case, replaced with a roughly brushed script which descends through a maelstrom of



Dawn/Water Poem, 1986
Acrylic on canvas, 2400 x 1805mm
Collection of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch
Purchased with assistance from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, 1986



Dawn/Water Poem, 1986
Mixed media on paper, 750 x 560mm
Collection of David and Betty Purdue, Christchurch

intense, almost fluorescent colour.

Hotere's *Dawn/Water Poem* inadvertently links Manhire's text with Hone Tuwhare's poem 'No Ordinary Sun', with its depiction of the sun as both the source of life and its destroyer. *Dawn/Water Poem* is at once a celebration of life — in the vitality of its colouring and execution — and a banner raised in urgent protest. Other works in the series are even more explicit in their statement; a similarly titled painting in the Auckland Art Gallery Collection is dominated by the searing fireball of a nuclear explosion. At times a peace dove further underlines the sentiment.

Ian Wedde described the works, when they were exhibited at the Janne Land Gallery in 1985, as:

> *flagrantly, aggressively beautiful. Lyricism is pushed to the margins by this apocalyptic beauty. Fearful and compelling… [it's] also a critique of the idea of beauty, a refusal to admit anything so banal as the belief that beauty has nothing to do with terror . . . The style signatures run from a McCahonesque use of gate-structures, calligraphic words and numerals through tachiste applications featuring Hotere's inimitable and vivid trails and drools of white…*[5]

Alongside the canvases, Hotere produced a number of smaller *Dawn/Water Poem* works on paper, some of them using a darker palette to achieve a mournful, solemn effect. Whereas the large works are urgent protests, these read as elegies for Mururoa Atoll and for all of nature that has been brutalised or destroyed by the nuclear arms race.

SINCE THE EARLY 1960s, Ralph Hotere's use of language in his paintings has been constantly evolving — even when specific texts have resurfaced, their context has invariably altered. Rather than arriving at a complacent formula, the artist has insisted that language, like all the other materials of his art, must keep on renewing its tenure, repositioning itself within the painterly process. An interesting — but not immediately answerable — question is to what extent the words have led the paintings or, alternatively, to what extent have the paintings, more or less fully formed, adopted the words?

An apposite example of the artist's recycling impulse is his use and reuse of Bill Manhire's poem, 'Pine'. As we noted earlier, the *Pine* series began in 1972 with a series of watercolour and ink and wash sketches which was followed by a sequence of woodblock prints (with handwritten matter added). Later in the 1970s words from the 'Pine' text were appearing on large canvases



and banners. The word 'PINES' runs vertically up the centre of one such canvas in an unbroken repetition, the letters forming a visual spine as well as spelling a number of possible words: PINES, SPINE, SPINES, PINE, SPIN, PIN, IN, PI and I. Through the 1980s, phrases from 'Pine' appeared on a number of large canvases, works on paper and on stainless steel works, the latter providing Hotere with an opportunity to exploit the tensions between steel and the arboreal origins of the 'Pine' text.

Hotere's growing interest in lithography since the mid-1980s has provided opportunities for him to recast lines from 'Pine' in a looser, more impulsive manner. His prints often shuffle the 'Pine' texts to arrive at new verbal and visual combinations — for example, a 1985 lithograph combines 'empty of shadows / and making a shadow' and 'in a dream of snow falling'. Another print from that year, *In a dream of snow falling*, uses the heart motif Hotere sources back to the Basque culture of Southern France and Northern Spain (and which also echoes the iconography

In a dream of snow falling, 1985
LITHOGRAPH, 524 X 372MM
COLLECTION OF DAVID AND BETTY PURDUE, CHRISTCHURCH



of Maori millenarian Christianity). By way of contrast, a 1996 lithograph of the same title is covered in an almost metallic texture with four Antoni Tapies-like cross shapes, one in each corner. There is hardly a trace of snow — of the softness or lightness of snow — in any of these works (although the speckled surface of the lithograph might almost resemble a blizzard at night). The question remains then: what exactly is the line of poetry doing there?

While, in such works, the artist appears to have left behind the literal meanings of the poetry, the lines remain as spells or invocations, eluding rational sense — an impression reinforced by the fact they are sometimes written back to front or in a combination of right and wrong way around. A recurring line — like 'in a dream of snow falling' — becomes a kind of signature for the artist. It is his signal. Over the course of twenty-five years of use, 'in a dream of snow falling' has grown beyond its referents. It has become, to use a phrase of Manhire's, the artist's 'lyrical foliage' — a signature and a disguise, both what it refers to and what it does not.[6] Such opacity is in keeping with the reticence and elusive quality of Hotere's oeuvre. These lines are now so deeply embedded they have become part of the artist's thought processes — he doesn't look them up before he paints them; they have merged with his vocabulary of images and painterly effects.

Just as Hotere keeps returning to certain poems, his earlier paintings continue to influence his recent work. The crosses in the four corners of the 1996 *In a dream of snow falling* lithograph refer back to his shaped *Black Paintings* of the 1960s, as well as to Malevich and McCahon. The past held on to is both a point of departure and a motor propelling him towards the potentialities of the future.

BILL MANHIRE's poetry has been an abiding influence over Ralph Hotere's language-based work. Manhire's poems from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s struck a personal as well as an artistic note so close to Hotere that they have remained touchstones and inspirations for him since that time. Also, Manhire's poetry of that period held beneath its calm, often remote, surface an undercurrent of inexpressible pain — the pain of separation and loss, perhaps. In its reticence, its clouding of such emotion, the poetry provided Hotere with a means to introduce certain overwhelming and problematic presences into his own work. And there are such presences in the work — there is anguish and loss of faith, and a very real darkness.

Another overriding influence, as we will see in the next chapter, was Ralph Hotere's father, Tangirau, who instilled a sense of the incantatory capabilities of language in his son from an early age; also a sense of the closeness of human endeavour to the processes of nature, which is a given of the Maori poetic tradition. The sense of loss and separation in Hotere's art can also be sourced

In a dream of snow falling, 1996
LITHOGRAPH, 760 X 565MM
PRIVATE COLLECTION

to the words his father passed on to him. As Margaret Orbell observes:

> *. . . much Maori poetry is concerned with separation and defeat. The final separation, of course, was that of death, and it was in the presence of death, most of all, that they were defenceless and passive. Their long, ambitious laments, like the elaborate ceremonial and ritual mourning of the funeral ceremony itself, were a means of unburdening their hearts, and so of asserting themselves, in the face of Aitua, Fate. In coming to terms with grief and loss, such poems explore the nature of ultimate reality and at the same time affirm and celebrate human will, and capacity, to survive adversity.*[7]

The paintings acknowledge both individual anguish and the communal suffering of history — in particular, Hotere calls to mind humanity's violence against itself, addressing the conflicts of the past, Maori against Maori, Maori against Pakeha, and Pakeha against Pakeha (the *Sangro* works witness to the loss of a Maori life in a European against European conflict). Hotere's paintings carry in their depths the horror and confusion of history's calamity, but this anxiety is subsumed into the formal qualities of an art which, like music, is capable of transcending its own circumstances and referents.

1 Ralph Hotere, exhibition notes, Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, 1976.

2 Gregory O'Brien, 'Some Paintings', p31.

3 The original plan for the performance was to have the banners hanging above the stage in this manner so the dancers could move between and around them.

4 Neil Rowe, 'A subtle use of black', *Evening Post*, 16 April 1977.

5 Ian Wedde, *Evening Post*, 26 August 1985.

6 Bill Manhire's poem 'On Originality' (reprinted in *Sheet Music*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1996, p55) concludes with the lines:

> It is a difficult world.
> Each word is another bruise.
>
> This is my nest of weapons.
> This is my lyrical foliage.

7 Margaret Orbell, *Maori Poetry: An Introductory Anthology* (Heinemann Educational Books, 1978), p9.

Necessary distances
Hotere & Maori language

WHILE VISITING Ralph Hotere at Carey's Bay in September 1996, I showed him a photo of a work on paper incorporating a xerox of an early watercolour of Port Chalmers which he had drawn over with red ink. This impromptu piece of protest art from 1989 related to the proposed land alterations on Observation Point, where Hotere had a studio at the time. Beneath the artist's signature in the lower right hand corner floated a solitary figure in a canoe. Hotere agreed that this figure might be as close as he gets to doing a self-portrait. I suggested that perhaps the vessel he was in was a Maori fishing canoe, to which he replied very definitely it was not. In fact it was



From a George O'Brien painting, 1989
PHOTOCOPY WITH INK, 297 X 420MM
PRIVATE COLLECTION, WELLINGTON

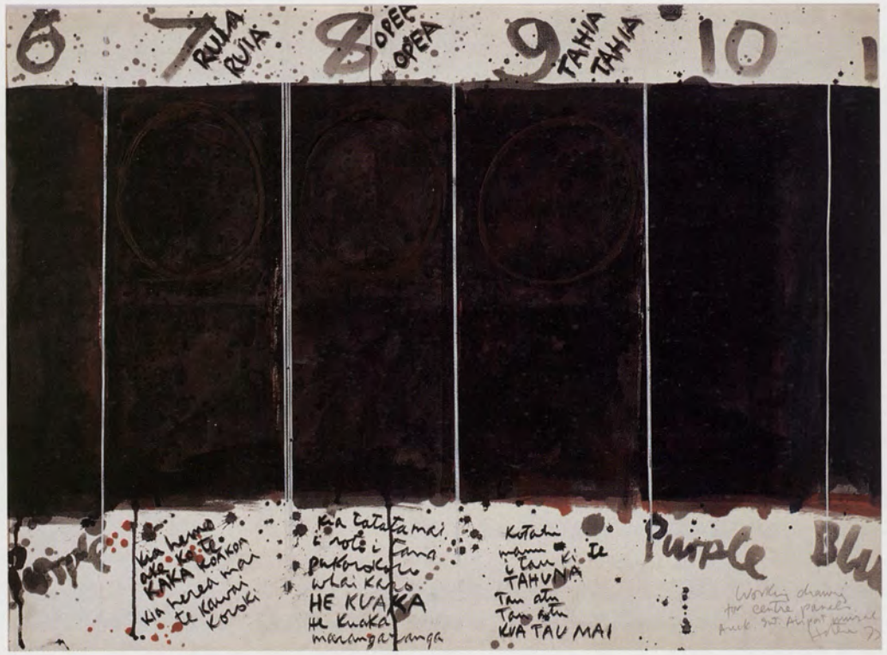
a double-ended Newfoundland fishing dinghy — the one he keeps down at Carey's Bay.

The drawing of the lone figure in the double-ended Canadian dinghy might be a useful way of thinking about Ralph Hotere and his Maori identity — an identity which doesn't tie him to any single set of cultural coordinates or to movement in one constant direction. Hotere feels a deep affinity with a number of countries (or regions therein) and, in that respect, he seems closer to the notion of the Maori as voyagers rather than as a people rooted to one place. He has produced substantial bodies of work in Spain, Italy, the South of France and Mungo, in the Australian outback. If he has incorporated Maori language in his art, it also has to be noted that he has used words in Spanish, Latin, French, Italian, King James Bible English, modern English and, in recent years, Arabic.

Hotere's relationship to traditional and contemporary Maori culture has, of recent years, proved problematic — not problematic from his point of view but from that of various commentators, curators and other artists who have attempted to place him within that context. From time to time he has refused to be involved in contemporary Maori art exhibitions, not wanting to be co-opted into an argument he feels isn't necessarily at the core of his work.[1]

Hotere said in a 1973 interview, 'I am Maori by birth and upbringing. As far as my works are concerned this is coincidental.' That oft-quoted statement was at the time — and still is — a strategic one, enabling him to maintain a distance from what he sees as limiting and compromised readings of his art. Hotere has never been interested in the purely regionalist or tribal statement, and being labelled 'Maori artist' is, he feels, constrictive. Like Colin McCahon, he has dealt with that problematic beast, the 'universal' statement. He wants the borders to come down, the categories to dissolve, and if he has shied away from being part of a perceived Maori art movement, he is just being true to his project and the principles on which it is based.[2]

Hotere has never belittled or downplayed his cultural origins (and he would posit the early influence of a devout Catholic upbringing in that category); he just believes the work should not be read purely as autobiography or evidence for some anthropological thesis. To align, for instance, Hotere's *Black Paintings* with a solely Maori viewpoint is to contradict his intention of mining the darkness common to all of humankind. While formal elements in his work could be seen as referring to Maori carving and tukutuku panelling, the range of influence is far broader than that, with references that are just as specific to pivotal Modernist artists including the Russian Malevich, American Ad Reinhardt, McCahon and, more recently, the Catalan painter Tapies. And while Maori mythology — particularly pertaining to creation myths — can easily be read into Hotere's work, the artist would prefer to see the works as essaying a *universal* myth —



a priority he would have assimilated in England in the early 1960s when he became interested in Ad Reinhardt and the art that grew out of that myth-obsessed movement, Abstract Expressionism, with its emphasis on 'world culture and its reincarnation in modern guise'.[3]

POETRY IN MAORI has surfaced in a number of Ralph Hotere's most important works, including the Auckland International Airport mural (1977) which was recently retitled *Godwit/Kuaka*, the series of ten *Aramoana* panels (1983) and the *Black Phoenix* sculptural installation (1987). In their layering of language on to elemental forms, these works are imbued with the spirit of the traditional Maori verse Hotere heard as a youth, lines his father inherited from an oral tradition in which words and phrases are considered to be an elemental presence in the natural world just like, for instance, wind and rain.

The *Black Phoenix* installation has a Maori proverb carved into the planks that lie on the floor in front of the bow of the burnt-out hull which is the focal point of the work. (The proverb, 'E HINGA ATU ANA HE TETEKURA / ARA MAI ANA HE TETEKURA' translates as 'When one frond dies, another takes its place.') Burnt planks lean against the wall on either side of the bow like the palisades of a Maori pa.

In the centre three panels of *Godwit/Kuaka*, the lines of verse are based on a traditional Maori chant, as transcribed by Tangirau Hotere:

Working drawing for central panels,
Auckland International Airport mural, 1977
OIL, INK WASH AND PROCESS WHITE ON PAPER, 569 X 764MM
HOCKEN LIBRARY COLLECTION

HE KUAKA
HE KUAKA MARANGARANGA
KOTAHI MANU I TAU KI TE TAHUNA
TAU ATU
TAU ATU
KUA TAU MAI

The above excerpt translates as: 'Godwit / a hovering godwit / one bird has landed on the sandbank / it has landed / it has landed / it has come to land.'[4] *Godwit/Kuaka* is one of Hotere's major accomplishments and the central panels, with their circle motifs and floating inscriptions are an eloquent, large-scale melding of word and form.[5]

Another sequence of notable Maori language works made up Hotere's contribution to *Taranaki Saw It All*, an exhibition at the Waikato Art Museum in 1973, comprising works relating to Te Whiti and the Parihaka settlement. While, in hindsight, the artist has reservations about many of the pictures in this series and their at times uneasy resolution of word and image, some of the more austere examples, such as *Te Paepaepapatanga o te Rangi* (The place where the sky hangs down to the horizon), achieve a formal unity and sustained mood. Most of the phrases in the watercolour and ink paintings were unearthed by the artist and Cilla McQueen from books of Maori history by authors including John Caselberg, Dick Scott and John White. As statements of commitment to political and social issues, the works are clearly voiced, with titles such as *Toi te kupu, toi te mana, toi te whenua* (The permanence of language, prestige, and land). *The Parihaka Song* has a quality somewhere between a page torn from an illuminated manuscript and a blackboard covered in teacherly scrawl. Hotere and McQueen extracted the text, in that case, from Dick Scott's book, *The Parihaka Story*. Another work included Hone Tuwhare's poem, 'Not by wind ravaged', with its plaintive cry:

The mana of my house has fled,
the marae is but a paddock of thistle.
I come to you with a bitterness
that only your dull folds can soothe
for I know, I know
my melancholy chants shall be lost
to the wind's shriek about the rotting eaves . . .[6]

Alongside the *Te Whiti* works, which were concerned with the layering of *written* language

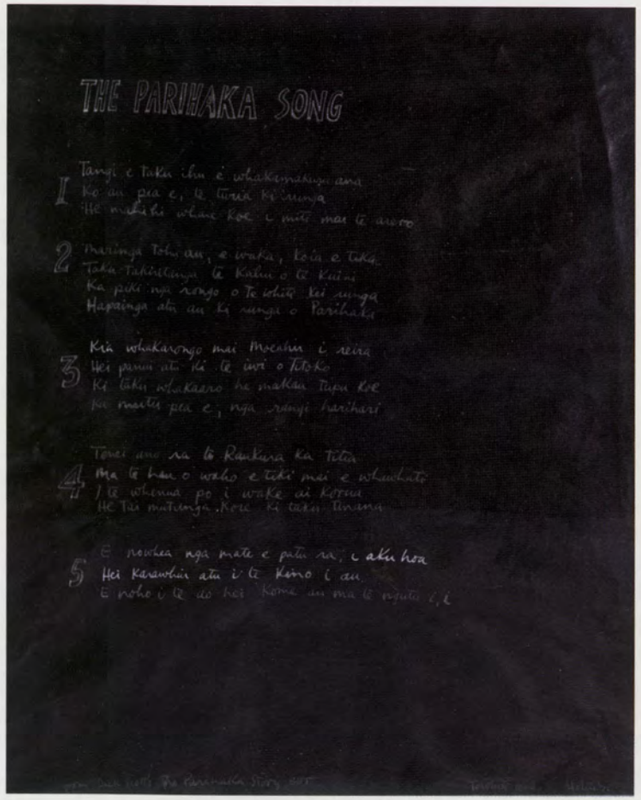


over landforms, evoking the Treaty of Waitangi and the whole history of colonisation, as well as acknowledging McCahon's work, Hotere did a number of drawings of the prophet Te Whiti, including two examples now in the Hocken Library. *Te Whiti falling off a horse* is a whimsical treatment of a figure about whom this kind of playful statement is usually assiduously avoided. *A drawing of Te Whiti as a young man* presents the prophet as a genteel westernised figure. (The figure also resembles, deliberately or not, the artist himself, striking a wry attitude, not quite willing to play the role expected of him.)

A freestanding canvas screen Hotere painted in 1976, in memory of his mother, Ana Maria Hotere (née Daniels) who had died four years earlier, is a continuation of the *Te Whiti* works and incorporates a traditional Maori lament transcribed by the artist's father. Like *Godwit/Kuaka*, the work, titled *Enei Kopu na Tangirau Hotere i homai*, is a consummate example of Hotere's juxtaposition of spartan abstract forms with elegiac text:

KUA TERE KI	*She has drifted to*
TAWHITI NUI	*Tawhiti Nui.*
KUA TERE KI	*She has drifted to*
TAWHITI ROA	*Tawhiti Roa.*
KUA TERE KI	*She has sailed away*
TAWHITI PAMAMAO	*to Tawhiti Pamamao.*
KUA TAKAHI ATU KI TE	*She has stood on the rock*
TOKA I PATUKINA	*at Patukina.*

A drawing of Te Whiti as a young man for James Mack, n.d.
Ink and wash on paper, 583 x 362mm
Hocken Library Collection



According to Dick Scott, 'The Parihaka Song' was composed by Te Whetu in heartfelt appreciation of Te Whiti's teachings. The translation below is from Scott's account of Te Whiti and the Parihaka settlement, *Ask That Mountain* (Reed/Southern Cross, 1975).

My sorrow is ended
Now that I may stand with you
Who are the bargeboard of our house
Miti Mai te Arero

Let me affirm it was right
To cast off the cloak of the Queen;
Raised on high is the message of Te Whiti,
Lifted high over Parihaka.

My tribe hears his tidings,
Titoko's people have listend,
For he is a man beloved
And the days of insult will nd.

Here the white feather is in its place —
Let winds from without come to break it
At the darkest hour his presence remained,
Imprinted like a ceaseless tide on my body.

From where come the deaths that assail us?
We must drive away the evils
That make the downfall of our chiefs
Murmured on the lips of the world.

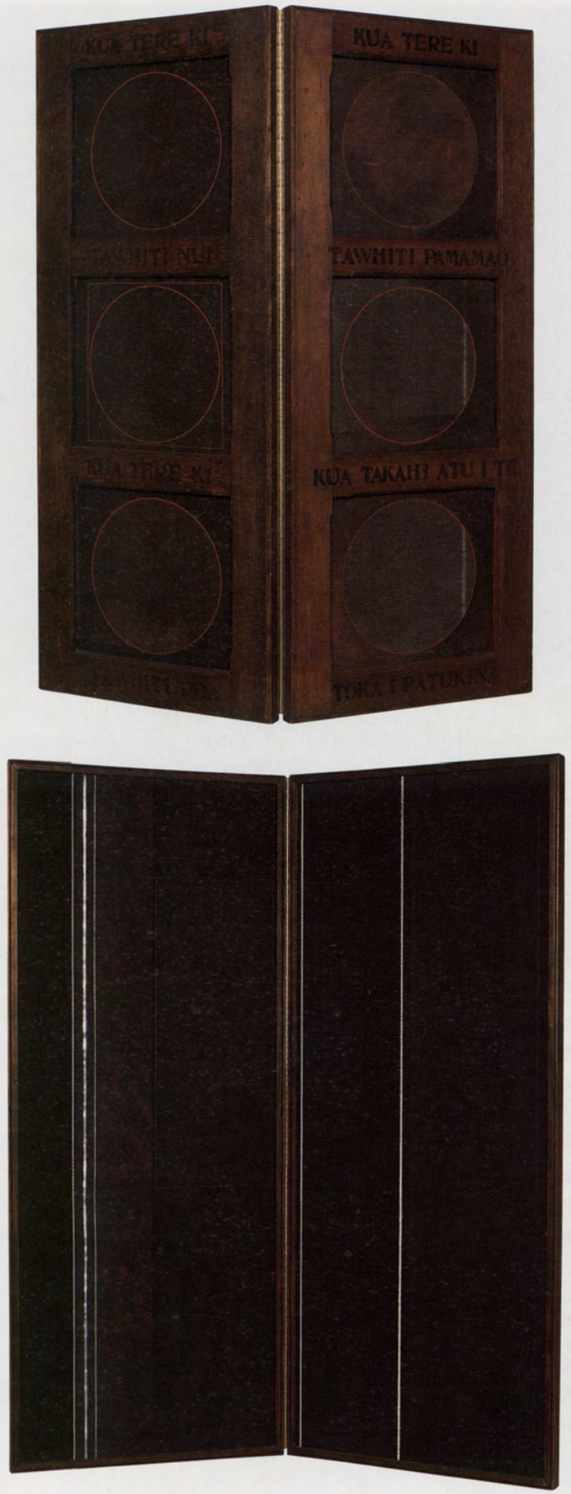
The Parihaka Song, 1972
Ink on paper, 500 x 420mm
Collection of Waikato Museum of Art and History
Te Whare Taonga o Waikato, Hamilton



Hotere has also incorporated traditional Maori laments into his 1974 *Requiem* paintings, *The Pope is Dead* and the *Return to Sangro* series of 1978, and in the many Aramoana works. Lines from the Maori translation of the Bible are included in the 1991 series, *Song of Solomon.*

Another pervasive use of Maori language in Hotere's work is his invocation of place names such as Aramoana and Mitimiti. In the 1982 series *Towards a church window at Mitimiti*, he names locations along the Northland coastline — where the spirits of the dead are said to travel — as well as Tarakeha, the mountain near the Mitimiti marae and the meeting house Tumoana, which is named after one of the artist's ancestors. The 1976 *Aramoana Koputai* screen includes

Te Whiti: The seagulls cry mournfully over Tapu-te-Rangi, 1972
Acrylic paint and black ink on paper, 556 x 376mm
Hocken Library Collection



a litany of Maori place-names, invoking landmarks around the Port Chalmers area including the hills Mihiwaka and Tereweka, Kaumautarua (an island out from Port Chalmers) and the landmark Parewa.[7]

At times Hotere uses repetitive formations of a place name, such as Aramoana, in a manner reminiscent of the earlier *Malady* works. As with the place name Sangro in the early brooding series of that title, he lingers on the sounds of these words, as well as their literal meanings and, beyond that, the landscapes and settlements they call to mind.

1 He has also been critical of the quality of work, on strictly formal and painterly terms, in such exhibitions.

2 When Hotere's work was included in an exhibition of contemporary Maori art at the Auckland Art Gallery, Jonathan Mane-Wheoki wrote: 'Korurangi was one of the few times Hotere has participated in a group exhibition of contemporary Maori art . . . Hotere seems to have been conscripted, willingly or otherwise, as a particular kind of precursor, a Maori individualist' ('Korurangi/Toihoukura, Brown Art in White Spaces', *Art New Zealand 78*, Autumn 1996, pp43–47).

3 Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism*, p339.

4 In his 1978 collection of poems and short stories, *Making a Fist of It*, Hone Tuwhare included a humorous tale which could well be read as a good-natured retort to Hotere's mural. The piece, 'Kuaka' was dedicated to the artist: '. . . Oh I dig it! The ingredients of truth are here. The mussels, the *tuatua* — and the Visitors. See! Yet another scoop of raggle-taggle stragglers homing in on the feeding grounds. Dear godwits. Dear juicy kuaka. Dear bob-bobbing bickering lovelies. Your coming is a flight of thrown knives spinning flick-flick flick-flack; a lariat of curved light looping, changing directions arse-over-wheel, catching the light. Greetings *kuaka*. Ten times three welcome. Yes . . .' pp45-46.

5 After competing with bureaucratic signage and advertising hoardings for some years, the mural panels were taken down in 1996.

6 Hone Tuwhare, *Deep River Talk* (Godwit, Auckland, 1993), p25.

7 A number of Aramoana works include the word 'koputai', meaning 'high tide'. A traditional Maori tale has it that a group of Maoris went to sleep on the beach at Port Chalmers and awoke to find their canoes had drifted away on the tide, at which they exclaimed 'Koputai!'

Enei Kopu na Tangirau Hotere i homai, 1976
(back view)
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS SCREEN, 1546 X 1260MM
COLLECTION OF JEREMY KIRK SMITH

Enei Kopu na Tangirau Hotere i homai, 1976
(front view)

HOTERE

When you offer only three
vertical lines precisely drawn
and set into a dark pool of lacquer
it is a visual kind of starvation:

and even though my eyeballs
roll up and over to peer inside
myself, when I reach the beginning
of your eternity I say instead: hell
let's have another feed of mussels

Like, I have to think about it, man

When you stack horizontal lines
into vertical columns which appear
to advance, recede, shimmer and wave
like exploding packs of cards
I merely grunt and say: well, if it
is not a famine, it's a feast

I have to roll another smoke, man

But when you score a superb orange
circle on a purple thought-base
I shake my head and say: hell, what
is this thing called *aroha*

Like, I'm euchred, man. I'm eclipsed.[2]

Hone Tuwhare

'Small holes in the silence'
Hotere & Hone Tuwhare

RALPH HOTERE first met Hone Tuwhare in the late 1950s, when the painter would drink with Bill Pearson, Allen Curnow and various writers at the Central Hotel in Auckland. He recalls one day Tuwhare, then a boilermaker and recently published poet, joining them. Later, when the artist had moved to London, Tuwhare would send him copies of poems, including 'No Ordinary Sun', prior to their publication in his first collection, which appeared in 1964. Hotere designed the cover for the poet's second book, *Come Rain Hail* (1970), which included Tuwhare's response to the painter's work in his poem 'Hotere', capturing both the spirit of Hotere's work and, in a gleefully irreverent way, the formal properties thereof. Tuwhare's poem also says a lot about the poet's method as well as the painter's. As Bill Manhire has observed:

> *Part of the poem's humour comes from the enormous pleasure it takes in the insufficiency of language: words won't do as a way of replying to what it is that the paintings have to say … In some respects, 'Hotere' is a poem about being made speechless, a genial way of honouring the achievement of the painter, whose individual works are so powerful that words simply fail the poet…*[1]

In 1972 Hotere provided a suite of watercolour and ink works for Tuwhare's volume *Sap-wood & Milk*. These incorporated the vertical lines that would be developed further as a formal device in the *Song Cycle* banners. Rather than illustrate the poems in any literal way, the designs add another layer to the book — a 'voice' very different from Tuwhare's lyrical vernacular, but also paralleling it. Somehow both artists were after a language that was natural to them, that related to their sense of place and artistic origins, Tuwhare marrying the language of Maori/Pakeha working class life to an essentially English poetic, Hotere drawing together a minimalist abstract manner and a feeling for the New Zealand scene, the vertical lines suggesting the forms of trees, raindrops and falling light.

Overleaf: ***2 drawings from Hone Tuwhare's Sap-wood and Milk***, 1972
WATERCOLOUR AND INK ON PAPER, 252 X 202MM
HOCKEN LIBRARY COLLECTION



NO ORDINARY SUN

Tree let your arms fall:
raise them not sharply in supplication
to the bright enhaloed cloud.
Let your arms lack toughness and
resilience for this is no mere axe
to blunt nor fire to smother.

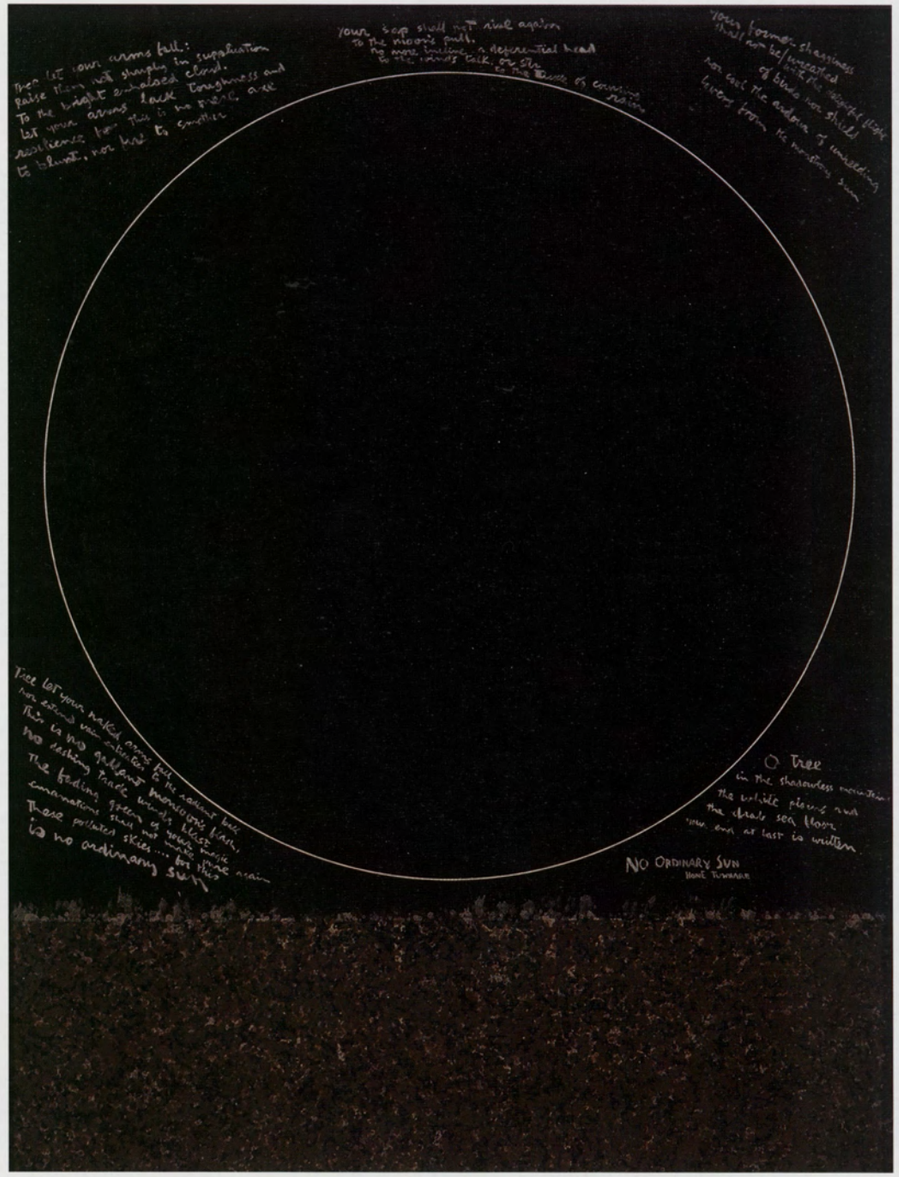
Your sap shall not rise again
to the moon's pull.
No more incline a deferential head
to the wind's talk, or stir
to the tickle of coursing rain.

Your former shagginess shall not be
wreathed with the delightful flight
of birds nor shield
nor cool the ardour of unheeding
lovers from the monstrous sun.

Tree let your naked arms fall
nor extend vain entreaties to the radiant ball.
This is no gallant monsoon's flash,
no dashing trade wind's blast.
The fading green of your magic
emanations shall not make pure again
these polluted skies . . . for this
is no ordinary sun.

O tree
in the shadowless mountains
the white plains and
the drab sea floor
your end at last is written.

Hone Tuwhare



No Ordinary Sun, 1984
ACRYLIC ON BOARD, 1580 X 1200MM
COLLECTION OF J. GIBBS, AUCKLAND

AS IN McCAHON's word-paintings, the texts in Hotere's works are a carefully considered and weighed formal element, providing compositional balance and resolution. For the *Godwit/Kuaka* mural, after struggling to resolve a sequence of 16 abstract panels, Hotere positioned text on the three central panels, transforming the panels on the left and right into a powerful framing device and focusing the work as a whole. In other paintings, words are used as a base line — like a landscape or horizon — above which formal elements float. In the early eighties Hotere used a phrase from the American poet Robert Creeley ('Because we can have no way to declare love except by the act of it') to that end.[2] His enamel painting on board *No Ordinary Sun* (1984) incorporates Tuwhare's poem of that title in its entirety into a spartan, predominantly black image. The dark sun of the nuclear age hovers just above the green of the earth's surface, the text floating outside it in cloud-like clusters, eroding the purist abstract manner of the painting, providing a tension and informality it would otherwise lack.

The elemental circle has a variety of meanings in Hotere's art, be it an emblem of cyclical nature, of mystical wholeness, a globe, a solar eclipse or the dark nuclear sun. Beyond that, it is a large zero, harking back to Hotere's series of that name, and also an exclamation of either suffering or delight: 'O'.

In another of Hotere's major collaborations with Hone Tuwhare, the 1979 series of three large-scale *Rain* banners, the poem runs across the base of all three of the loosely hanging canvases. The work was commissioned by the architects of the Hocken Building, McCoy and Wixon, to hang in the main entrance to the Hocken Library. A number of smaller *Rain*-related works were also produced, including a banner of a similar size and format to those of the *Song Cycle* series. The 1979 *Rain* banner includes, as well as the entire poem handwritten at its base, the stencilled letters:

I CAN HEAR YOU
MAKING SMALL HOLES
IN THE SILENCE

RAIN

These words are stamped on the speckled hyperactivity of the oil and enamel paint as if to impose some tentative meaning or understanding. Some of the words are smudged, as if they are also subject to the elemental forces that pattern and define the canvas as a whole. At the foot of the painting, the poem is scrawled on unprimed canvas, the letters almost swimming in drips and

Rain, 1979
OIL AND ENAMEL ON UNSTRETCHED CANVAS, 2440 X 985MM
COLLECTION OF A. AND J. SMITH, AUCKLAND

RAIN

I can hear you
making small holes
in the silence
rain

If I were deaf
the pores of my skin
would open to you
and shut

And I
should know you
by the lick of you
if I were blind

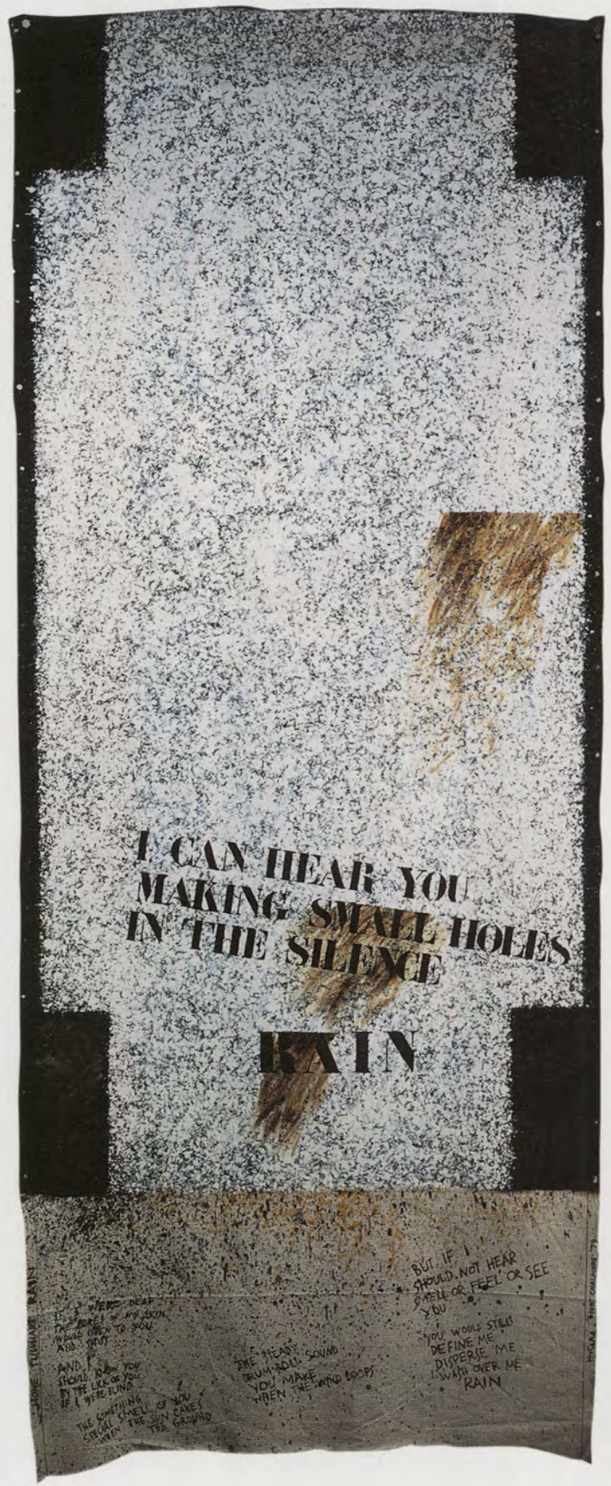
the something
special smell of you
when the sun cakes
the ground

the steady
drum-roll sound
you make
when the wind drops

But if I
should not hear
smell or feel or see
you

you would still
define me
disperse me
wash over me
rain

Hone Tuwhare





O AFRICA

On bloody acts
that make less human
mankind's brighter sun,
let revulsion rise.
Eclipse the moon's
black evil: so that

innocence and the child
shall reign
so that we may dream
good dreams again.

Hone Tuwhare



Rain, 1979
Acrylic on three unstretched canvas banners
4900 x 920mm each banner
Collection of the University of Otago

O Africa, 1981
Acrylic on fabric, 2800 x 1500mm
Collection of Govett-Brewster Art Gallery,
New Plymouth

spatters of paint. For an artist often obsessed with geometry and symmetry, Hotere is capable of some delightfully anarchic surfaces.

The poem 'Rain' first appeared in Tuwhare's 1970 collection, *Come Rain Hail*. In its conjuring of the natural world and its immersion in the relationship between the individual and the elements, it is very much in the Maori poetic tradition we noted earlier. Margaret Orbell writes of the use of such elemental imagery in traditional waiata: 'Many of the images are not metaphors in the usual sense of the word, but indicate a unity between two phenomena which was believed actually to exist; so that light, for example, was associated with life and success, and darkness with death and failure ... Other common images are those which identify stormy water, and strong winds, with human strife...'[3]

Such a primacy of relationship between images and states of being is at the heart of Hotere's project. His continuing investigation of dark and light becomes a concerted meditation on life and mortality.

AS A PROTEST against the Springbok tour of New Zealand in 1981, Hotere incorporated Tuwhare's lament 'O Africa' on to a painted flag. Written with a spray-gun, as well as stencils, the words are an act of vandalism against the South African flag, across which they are scrawled. In the tradition of the graffiti artist, Hotere has on a number of occasions used the techniques and language of vandalism or 'guerilla signage' to get his message across.

Hotere returned to the more lyrical tone of Tuwhare's poems about place and community in 1985, producing a suite of 12 works in gouache and crayon for the Penguin edition of Tuwhare's collected poems, *Mihi*. This eloquent series used symbols and forms from Hotere's work over the previous decade, including the elemental cross (which harks back to the *Black Windows*) and the rainbow and heart shapes which echo the *Black Rainbow* works. In the *Mihi* series, Hotere's typically rhythmical drawing, itself emulating the cadence and rush of natural forces, brings to the fore those inescapable tropes of traditional Maori poetry — as well as of lyric poetry in general — sun, wind and rain.

1 Bill Manhire, 'Dirty Silence', p150.

2 Hotere would have first seen Creeley's lines when they were used as an epigram by Bill Manhire for his poem 'Five Acts to Postulate the Drama', published in the journal *Frontiers* (Vol 1, no 4, February 1969). *En passant*, Hotere met Creeley during the poet's 1976 reading tour of New Zealand. A visit to the Carey's Bay house led to a short poem which appeared in Creeley's collection, *Hello*, published by the Hawk Press later that year.

3 Margaret Orbell, *Maori Poetry: An Introductory Anthology* (Heinemann Educational Books, Auckland, 1978), p7.

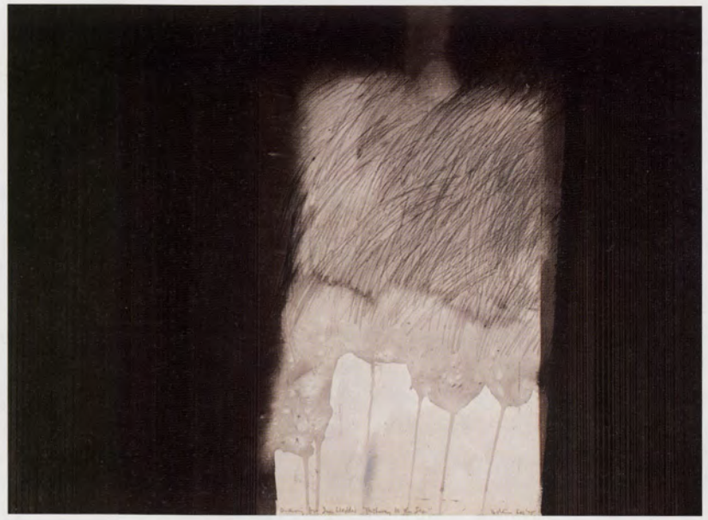
'The black sound of the world...' *Hotere & Ian Wedde*

SINCE THE EARLY 1970s, Ralph Hotere has been based at Carey's Bay, just beyond Port Chalmers, about 12 kilometres from the centre of Dunedin. A little further around the coast is the township of Aramoana which, during the 1970s, became the site of much protest activity when, as part of the National Government's 'Think Big' project, the sandspit which extends from the settlement out into Dunedin Harbour was proposed as the site for an aluminium smelter. The environmental consequences would have been catastrophic, and much of Hotere's energy, for a number of years, went into averting such a development.

Since that time, the Maori place name Aramoana — which translates as 'pathway to the sea' — has been synonymous with environmentalism and the scuttled smelter development; although a mass murder in the township in 1990 has given the placename an even darker resonance. Cilla McQueen writes of the undiminished importance of Aramoana and its environs to both herself and Hotere: 'Apart from the physical nourishment of the cockles and mussels there, we both took spiritual refreshment and working inspiration from the beauty of that place, and the violence that happened there affected us deeply as it did everyone, especially all the artists who had been deeply involved in the "No Smelter" campaign ten years earlier.'[1]

During the 1970s the smelter proposal not surprisingly precipitated a wave of protest art from Dunedin-based writers, painters and sculptors including, as well as Hotere and McQueen, Jacqueline Fraser, Joanna Margaret Paul, Jeffrey Harris, Andrew Drummond, composer Chris Cree Brown and poets Brian Turner and John Caselberg.

While the political impetus behind Hotere's Aramoana-related works is, as ever, nestled close to the heart of the project, he manages to produce work that is ardent and committed without closing down other, non-political readings. His concern for the environment is, at once, aesthetically and socially motivated—it is spiritual as well as political, individual as well as communal. 'Hotere's work ... although a style of Modernism, moves beyond the latter's usual retreat from social and worldly affairs,' observed Louise Wilton in 1991, pointing to the nexus in Hotere's work between 'the sensibility for the land, guardianship of it, and modernist abstraction...'[2]



In contrast to Hotere's *Aramoana* corrugated iron panels, which often have a single central shaft of painted light unning down the middle of them, the drawings of the same title are amorphous, less structued improvisations using softly brushed applications of wash and flecks of paint and formations o parallel lines. The drawings predate the paintings and were produced around 1975 when Hotere was commissioned to design a cover for Ian Wedde's book-length poem 'Pathway to the Sea' which was published by Alan Loney's Hawk Press. The finished cover design incorporated an offset printed reproduction of one of Hotere's drawings on which type was superimposed. Wedde recalls discussions with the publisher and artist about the dimensions and proportions of the book, Loney being very deliberate about how he envisaged the short lines of poetry descending the broad white pages like a pathway, a constant trickle of language.[5] This trickle evolved into a shaft of light in Hotere's subsequent *Aramoana* paintings.

The *Pathway to the Sea* drawings are dense and atmospheric, mirroring the tone and texture of Wedde's poem — there are echoes of fog, vegetation, the murky surface of a pond. There is delicacy and brusqueness, fragility and harshness, the ruled pencil lines forming a reflective surface against the matt watercolour-covered paper so that, in some lights, the black lines become iridescent. The parallel lines running down like rain hark back to Hotere's paintings of the early 1970s and the Founders Theatre mural in Hamilton, but the images are also very much informed by Wedde's poem, which looks quite specifically at the structures and natural forms of a cultivated and domesticated landscape.[6] The vein of light running down the centre of *Aramoana — Pathway to the Sea* also represents the hand-dug ditch which is a central metaphor in Wedde's poem — a human-made line laid on, or dug into, the landscape. The tone of both the painter's and the poet's reveries is at once deeply personal, celebratory, sceptical and unapologetically political. The dedication in the Hawk Press edition of *Pathway to the Sea* reads:

***Pathway to the Sea*, 1975**
INK, WATERCOLOUR AND GRAPHITE PENCIL ON PAPER, 559 X 760MM
AUCKLAND ART GALLERY TOI O TAMAKI, ON LOAN FROM A PRIVATE COLLECTION

this poem is dedicated
by all concerned with the present
production of it to the belief that
Aramoana should be left to the birds
fish sand-hoppers & other denizens
who at present possess it only so
long as their ambiguous productivity
is tolerated by men ambitious for
quick solutions & profits

Like Hotere's paintings, Wedde's poem is a meditation on the natural elements and their relationship to human society and language. Wedde's description of digging a drain (and the conclusions reached from that vantage point) are very much aligned with Hotere's approach to his art.

After the publication of *Pathway to the Sea*, Wedde revisited the theme of viable, responsible survival in his poem sequence 'Off/Of', which was thematically a reprise to 'Pathway to the Sea', although with a broader sweep and a larger cast of both allies and environmental enemies. 'Off/Of' also became a limited edition book although, in deliberate contrast to the exquisite hand-printed *Pathway* book, it was photocopied and stapled together with a roughly drawn cover by Hotere. The poem was dedicated to Hotere and has all the informality and ease of a conversation between like-minded citizens:

And the pale musician
reassembles his instrument
from the four corners
of the empty stage as the applause
curls back over him in one frozen wave of silence
Silence and the black sound
of the world on the other side of the light

As well as matching the tone of Hotere's *Aramoana* works — at once wistful and tragic, close to the ground but still capable of soaring — 'Off/Of' is imbued with Wedde's characteristic righteous indignation and an angry comic sense.

It's worth noting that Hotere's incorporation of Wedde's texts within his art has been

from PATHWAY TO THE SEA

. . . . yeah, I heard
they wanted to build an
ALUMINIUM
SMELTER
at
Aramoana, the sea-gate, & someone's bound to direct
more effort that
way soon: listen, there's
birds out there, we're
back with those lovers, the buoyancy
& updraught of some kind of

mutual understanding of what
service is, of the fact that
a thing being easy doesn't
make it available or passive:
listen, effort's got to be right
directed, that's
all, the catering's amazing, everything
proceeds, citizen, sometimes
it's hard work, but you're

engaged, you want
to keep practical & ideal
together, you're
for life, you know that happiness
has to do with yes
drains & that nature
like a pear tree
must be served before
it'll serve you, you



don't want your children's
children paying
your blood-
money, citizen, you're
for a different sort
of continuity, you want
to live the way
you want
to, you want to keep

your structures up, you
want elevation,
you're ready to do
your share, you'll dig your field-
drain & you'll
keep your shit out
of the water supply :
you want to
serve & to be left alone
to serve & be served,
understanding tough
materials, marl & old timber,
the rich claggy rind
of the world where
dinosaurs once
were kings : well they're gone now though
they survived longer
than we have

yet, but then *we* know, don't we,
citizen, that there's nowhere
to defect to, & that
living in the
universe doesn't
leave you
any place to chuck
stuff off
of.

Ian Wedde

Aramoana — Pathway to the Sea, 1980
Mixed media on corrugated iron, 2465 x 1002mm
Rotorua Museum of Art and History, Te Whare Taonga o te Arawa

from OFF/OF

Look out for the shellfish family licking its way
across the fourth lane of tarseal
They never learned to walk before when there were still birds
they were too scared
Uh oh

Now Hugh'll have to get his newclear-powered rollerskates
cleaned

Well I suppose it's a price you pay
for moving at that kind of speed

It'll make a good story

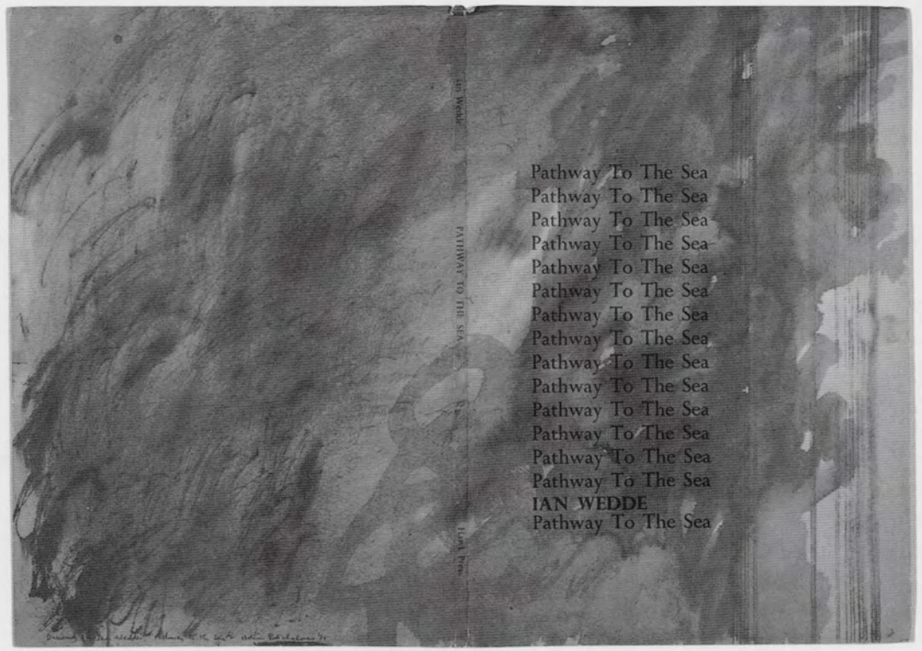
"You should've seen the looks on their faces"

"Shellfish don't have faces"

"*Those* ones certainly don't"
"Ha ha"
Just as good in its way
as that beauty the retired President of the National Unity Party tells
about subdividing sand-dunes
"Oh that's a beauty"
"You remember that one"
"Of course I remember"

(FADE
BRING UP THEME MUSIC
FREEZE FRAME ON THE LAST BIT OF OLD ROOFING
IRON IN PARADISE
CUT

Ian Wedde



restricted to titles — perhaps the expansiveness of the verse doesn't allow for its use within a painting the way, for instance, Manhire's self-contained short lyrics do.

The corroded surface of *Aramoana — Pathway to the Sea* (1980) conveys a sense of the natural cycles of progress and regression, growth and decay, construction and destruction. The splattered paint and staccato surfaces are reminiscent of moss, algae and mould as well as corroding metal. In Hotere's iron works the corrugations form 'pathways' for rainwater to run down (on its way to the sea). The beauty of such 'vernacular' materials as old iron, busted-up wood and lead-head nails inadvertently states the argument against the pristine operational machinery of progress and capitalism.

During the height of the smelter protests, Hotere nailed corrugated iron works to power poles on the road out to the smelter site which were, in due course, removed by the police. Eventually the smelter plans were abandoned, a slump in the international aluminium market and the withdrawal of a French consortium delivering the *coup de grâce*, after some years of the project being stalled by protest activity.

In the way they keep returning to and reaffirming the everyday reality of the 'small settlement' which is 'earthly & difficult & full of doubt', Hotere's paintings, particularly since the *Song Cycle* series, have been reminiscent of Ian Wedde's sequence of poems, 'Earthly'.[5] There's a temperamental affinity between Wedde and Hotere — a gritty, sometimes celebratory *realism* (for want of a better word) which coexists alongside a certain Utopian tendency, although this is

***Cover of** Pathway to the Sea*
HAWK PRESS, 1975

tempered with a deep, occasionally pessimistic scepticism. In 1990 Wedde wrote: 'Hotere knows about paradise, certainly, but very much from the point-of-view of what threatens it: war (the *Sangro* paintings), French nuclear policy, the proposed aluminium smelter at Aramoana, deeper issues of privilege and history, which are constantly present like a fiercely reticent ground upon which "beauty" (the possibility of paradise) appears always at risk.'[6]

While Hotere's works have an idealistic temper, their primary concern is with identifying and challenging impediments to paradise — not that a paradisical state is likely or even possible, but without a certain movement or effort in that direction then humankind slips further away from it. Wedde continues: 'Unlike many seekers after paradise, Hotere is not filled with sentimental fervour, though his indignation is clear. And his "flags" are as much in the company of Jasper Johns as of Te Kooti's pennant Te Wepu, or the 1833 flag of the United Tribes.'[7] So, while the works link up with the past in their invocation of place names and the various histories these encapsulate, they also — like the paintings of Jasper Johns and, for that matter, the poems of Ian Wedde — are self-consciously made out of the materials of the moment; they are married to the social and political present.

1 Letter from Cilla McQueen to G. O'Brien, December 1996.

2 Louise Wilton, *Art New Zealand* 60, Spring 1991, p52.

3 Conversation with Ian Wedde, October 1996.

4 The configuration of vertical lines in the *Pathway to the Sea* drawings reappears on the cover of Ian Wedde's 1976 novel *Dick Seddon's Great Dive*, only in that case the lines have cleared a path through the dark mass. The white of the bookcover becomes the clearing, the pathway to the ocean. It is also the descent of the diver in the novel's title.

5 Ian Wedde, *Earthly: Sonnets for Carlos*, Amphedesma Press, Akaroa, 1976. (Sonnet 20, unpaginated).

6 Ian Wedde, *Evening Post*, 5 April 1990.

7 Ian Wedde, bid.

From *Avignon* to *Baby Iron*

RALPH HOTERE met Cilla McQueen through a mutual friend and early collector of the artist's work, Robert May, in 1970. The couple were married for twelve years, from 1974 until 1986, during which time their creative lives constantly overlapped. At the time of their meeting, McQueen was completing a Master of Arts degree at the University of Otago, studying modern French literature and French drama, focusing particularly on the Theatre of the Absurd and such playwrights as Ionesco and Samuel Beckett.

In 1978 Hotere, McQueen and their daughter Andrea lived for some months in Avignon, in the south of France. McQueen kept a diary during that time, of which the entry for 21 June follows:

from AVIGNON, SUMMER 1978

In our little villa there are three main rooms. And a garden. Outside the kitchen door there is a long terrace shaded by a vine and roses, which make a green leafy roof. There is a long table covered with a cream and red oilcloth, four folding chairs, a hose, rubbish in the corner, boxes and plastic bags, and a little carved stone flower trough representing the Nativity. On the outside edge of the terrace grows an old fig tree whose branches stretch out to reach those of an apricot tree at the front of the garden, which has at present a likely harvest of a dozen small apricots. Something has been eating its leaves. Andrea's tent is pitched beneath it; sagging blue and orange, a bright red and white sun umbrella in front of it — Slavia, La Grande Bière d'Alsace. The part of the lawn between the terrace and the apricot tree is dry grass and woodshavings, the odd molehill. Beyond Andrea's tent, on the far side of the apricot tree, is Ralph's domain. He has an old door supported on a plank against the tree where his canvas is spread out on a piece of hardboard, pots of paint, brushes and a cardboard box, bits of wood. A long flex with a naked bulb leads from the house and hangs in the branches. At night the effect is theatrical: Ralph painting under the illuminated apricot. A gravel drive bisects the section. As you enter through the spiked iron gates between their



tall concrete posts the house is to your left at the back; the fig tree, the apricot tree, Ralph's working place and Andrea's tent all in front of the house. To the right of the driveway at the back between two big trees a washing-line is strung. The ground is covered with ivy in that corner. In front of the washing-line, a line of old irises, then dry grass, a small pear tree, clumps of thyme, rosemary and fennel. Bordering the garden on the right hand side and along the back standing high behind the house are big trees, birch and acacia and cypress. They are always moving and whispering above us.

McQueen's detailing of life's gorgeous particulars evokes the backdrop for what proved to be an extraordinarily productive time in Hotere's creative life. The sensual quality of air and light playing on the forms of nature was also captured in Hotere's Avignon watercolours and canvases. Working, as the poet describes above, outdoors, Hotere produced a number of large unstretched canvases, including the elegiac *The Pope is Dead* series. While Hotere was in Avignon (a town which, incidentally, was once a papal retreat) Pope Paul VI died and then, while the artist and his family were staying in Majorca, his successor Pope John Paul I also died. The related works used texts based on headlines Hotere and McQueen read in European newspapers — 'Le Pape Est Mort', 'El Papa Ha Muerto', 'E Morto Il Papa', 'The Pope is Dead' — alongside other texts including a Maori lament, liturgical extracts and place names.

McQueen recalls that the cross shape which dominated these works, whatever its symbolic weight, also had a lot to do with Hotere's working methods.[1] Painting *en plein air*, Hotere had to place hefty objects including piles of books around the edges of the canvases to stop them blowing away — hence, the unpainted rectangles in the corners and occasional square patches on the body of the canvases. The arrival of the Mistral, a seasonal wind in that part of France, made such measures even more necessary.

Drawing of Cilla McQueen, 1971
Ink on paper, 250 x 230mm
Collection of the artist

MISTRAL SONG, FOR RALPH

The Mistral blows
The Mistral blows
The first day of the Mistral
My true love said to me
Jesus Christ this wind is strong
See those poplars sweeping?
The second day of the Mistral
My true love said to me
Jesus Christ this wind is strong
See those poplars sweeping
Hear the bamboo whistling
Let's go and look at ancient monuments
But the Mistral followed
The third day of the Mistral
We clenched our eyes and shut our teeth
The branches knocked against the roof
The bamboo whistled
The poplars shrieked
The cypresses rent their branches
We tore our hair out
We let our legs and arms go
And threw our clothes out the windows
We opened the roof and let
the branches take over
The Mistral blows
The Mistral blows
And when we had quite surrendered
It left, nonchalantly,
Whistling vaguely among the grasses.

Cilla McQueen

During their time in Europe, Hotere and McQueen travelled to the Sangro River War Cemetery, which led to a second series of *Sangro* paintings, fifteen years after Hotere's first visit to the site of his brother's grave. These works revisited elements from the first *Sangro* series, including the stencilled numerals denoting the ages of the dead soldiers and the haunting word Sangro. Utilising a similar cross motif to the *Rain* and *The Pope Is Dead* banners, the *Return to Sangro* works include lines extracted either from Cilla McQueen's account of the visit, 'Sangro River Cemetery', or from a traditional Maori poem Hotere had used in his Auckland Airport mural the previous year.

Once again the paintings are dealing with grief and the futility of war, but they are remarkable in their reticence, their prayerful solemnity. Similarly, the anger and sadness underlying McQueen's poem is transformed into an image of regenerative nature, 'a rosary of olive trees against the hillside'. Critic Leonard Bell noted at the time: 'The 1978 pictures represent an opening out, a loosening up, an invitation to travel beyond the immediate paint surface into territory rich and diverse in emotional and social associations . . .'[2]

For many of the *Return to Sangro* paintings, Hotere extracted a haiku-like sequence of details from McQueen's poem—an approach he would use again with her 1982 poem 'Tangi at Mitimiti', an elegy written after the funeral of Tangirau Hotere on the family marae. (By incorporating lines from Ralph Hotere's Auckland International Airport mural, McQueen's 'Tangi at Mitimiti' pays homage to Tangirau Hotere and his work as a transcriber and translator of Maori poetry.) In memory of his father, Hotere painted a series of 'designs' for an envisaged church-window at Mitimiti soon after the tangi. These were exhibited at RKS ART, Auckland, later in 1982.[3] As well as using lines by McQueen, the works on paper incorporated poetry in Maori passed on to the artist by his father. Within that series of images, the laments that Tangirau Hotere transcribed and translated so lovingly during his life now, fittingly, became his own lament.

In *From Tangi at Mitimiti*, the landforms around the settlement are conveyed by the roughly drawn lines which tussle behind the central cross motif. The lines could also be breaking surf or the anthropomorphic imagining of a hillside. The series of works poignantly echo Hone Tuwhare's poem 'A fallof rain at Mitimiti: Hokianga', which was written after the tangi of Ralph Hotere's mother a decade earlier:

> *Drifting on the vind, and through*
> *the broken windsw of the long house*
> *where you lie, invantatory chant*
> *of surf breaking,and the Mass*
> *and the mountain talking . . .*[4]



The line of dots at the top of the composition is reminiscent of a similar configuration in Colin McCahon's *Song of the Shining Cuckoo* — they might also denote distant flying birds or points on a map. The whiteness of their ground makes the *Towards a church window at Mitimiti* drawings almost a negative image of the concurrent *Black Window* paintings which they imitate compositionally.

In other drawings from the series, Tangirau Hotere's 'kuaka' text ('He kuaka he kuaka marangaranga . . .') hovers above the finely drawn cross which represents his religious faith and the curve of the 'hione' or hill where he is laid to rest. As is usually the case with Hotere's art, the expression of grief involves the inscription of words, an articulation and acceptance of that loss.

A Return to Sangro, 1978
Acrylic on loose canvas, 1460 x 900mm
Collection of Waikato Museum of Art and History
Te Whare Taonga o Waikato
Photograph by Stephanie Leeves

SANGRO RIVER CEMETERY

(*Private J. Hotere, N.Z. Infantry,*
23rd December 1943, Age 22)

I blare up at the sun
from under my white stone
clean as a tooth.

SANGRO

Even now it's still
the same river, many-pathed,
spreading to the sea's tongue,

SANGRO, SANGRO

The same cryptography of
birds: illogical messages
of loss. I am bones,
alone

Clear as death &
close on the hill

SANGRO
RIVER

Where only some thin
memories wave & keen
still, like olive leaves.

RIVER
ROSARY

of olive trees against
the hillside:
Landscape of windsvept manuka.

Cilla McQueen



A Return to Sangro, 1978
Acrylic on canvas, 1230 x 630mm
Hocken Library collection

THE GULF WAR in early 1991 provided the impetus for *Song of Solomon*, a composition in fourteen parts with Roman numerals denoting fourteen 'Stations'. The text by Cilla McQueen uses fragments of technological language and news-media speak which are offset with extracts from the Song of Solomon — 'found materials' which are reconstituted to form a harsh critique of war in general and the media manipulation of that particular conflict.[5] Lines from that most lyrical of Old Testament books, the Song of Solomon — '... arise my fair one and come away ...', '... the flowers appear on the earth ...' — are juxtaposed with non-syntactical 'samples' of language:

> *bloodshed artillery moth damage advance gas choke point escalate*
> *paralyze spread disable backlash cloud blitz vapour cudgel annihilate*

The disparity between the 1990s 'newspeak' which is laser-printed on to the fourteen sheets of paper and Hotere's characteristic handwriting, which conveys the biblical lines, creates an appropriately tense linguistic as well as visual framework. The oily black inks evoke the oil slicks that resulted from the Middle Eastern conflict, and also the plumes of smoke from burning refineries. Trails of dots, reminiscent of *Tangi at Mitimiti* and Hotere's *Mungo* paintings, in this case become tracer fire in the night sky or bomb craters in a desolate landscape. The horizontal panels of white and black denote the desert horizon. Shades and tones of other colours struggle to make themselves visible amid the harsh polarities of the work.

Hotere and McQueen have, since the 1970s, shared a strong sense of political and social justice. Cilla McQueen writes: 'Regarding the anti-aluminium smelter campaign in the early 80s — Ralph and I worked closely on that, producing graffiti, drawings, poetry — I coined the words ALUMINPOLITIK and CYANIDEFECTS which Ralph used in some black window paintings.'[6] As well as being a collaborator and participant in Hotere's word-related works, McQueen has been an acute onlooker. To coincide with a 1983 exhibition at the Bosshard Galleries, she produced a characteristically perceptive prose-poem inspired by the *Baby Iron* works (see page 114).

1 Cilla McQueen in conversation with G. O'Brien, October 1996.

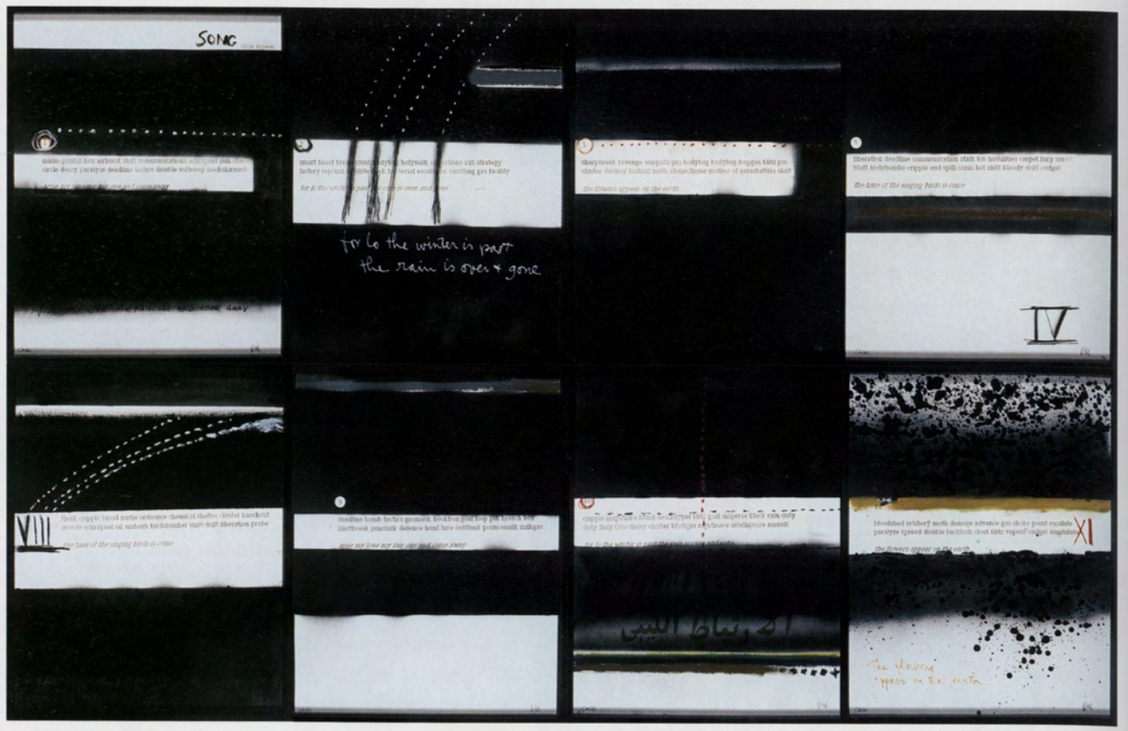
2 *NZ Listener*, 28 July, 1979.

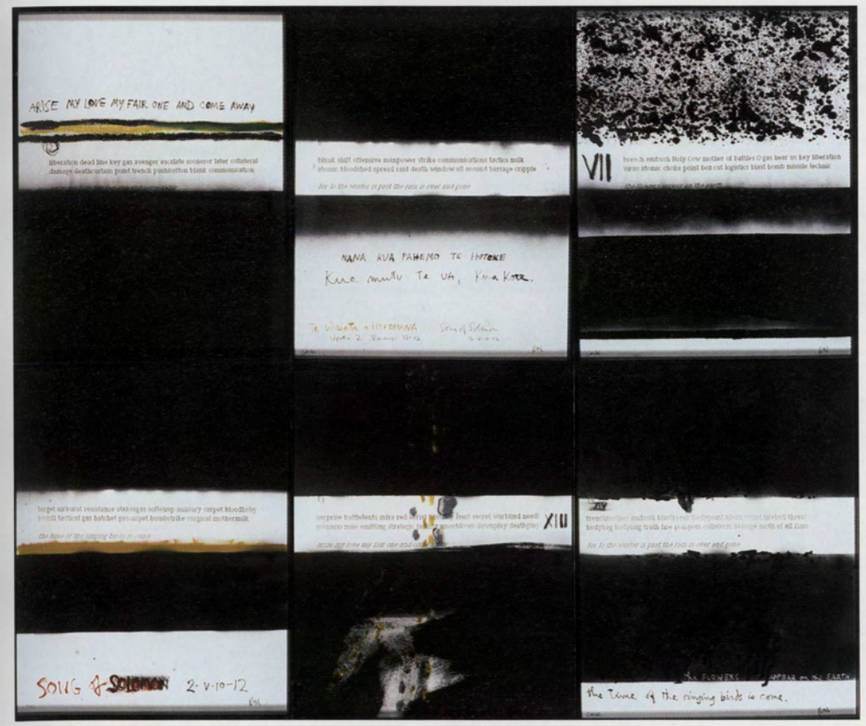
3 The church window itself has yet to be constructed and installed.

4 Hone Tuwhare, *Deep River Talk* (Godwit, Auckland, 1993), p102.

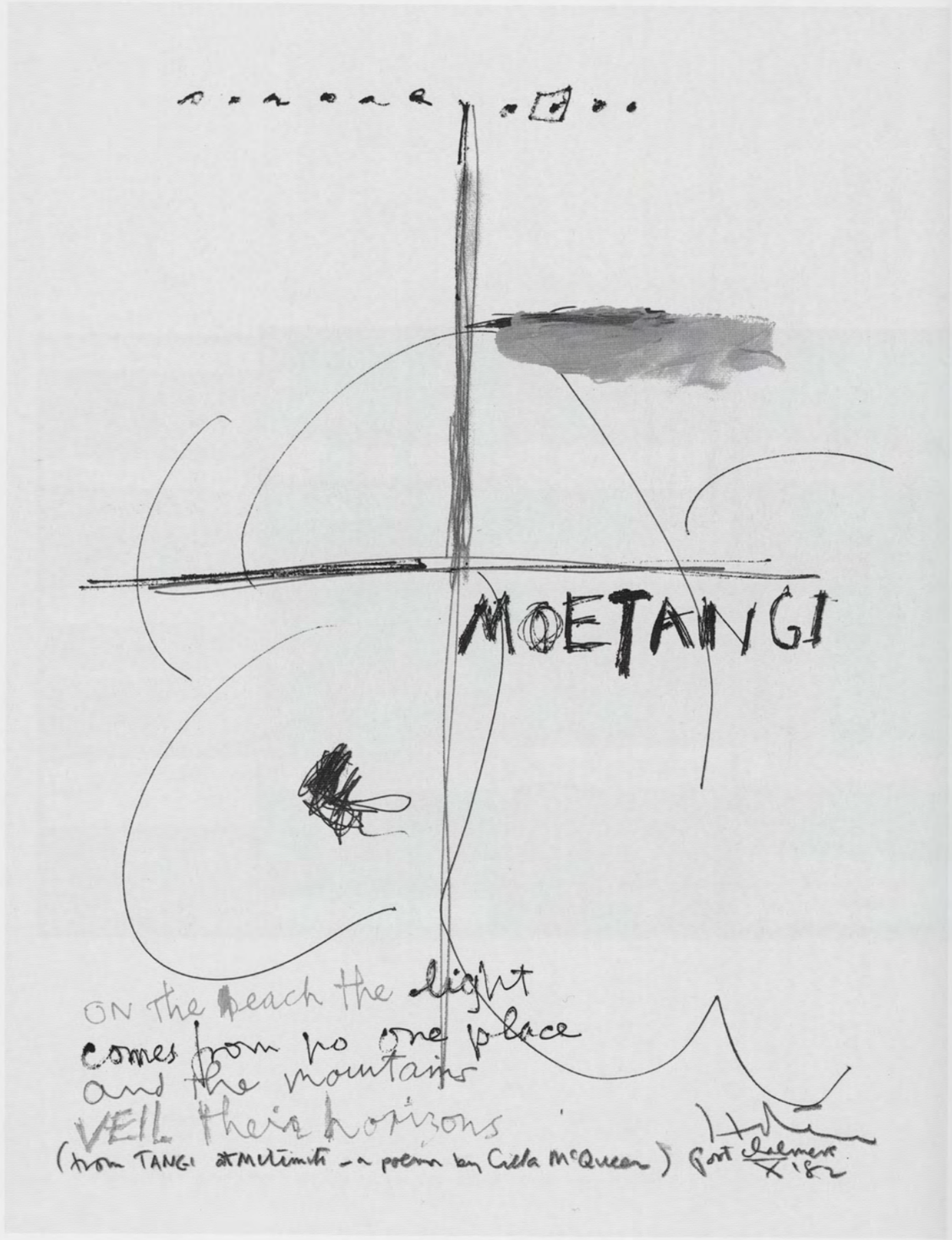
5 The work was first shown in the Dunedin Public Art Gallery's *Telling Pictures* exhibition of writer/artist collaborations in 1991 — see Riemke Ensing's review in *Art New Zealand* 60, pp58–62.

6 Letter from Cilla McQueen to G. O'Brien, December 1996.





Song of Solomon, 1991
MIXED MEDIA ON FOURTEEN SHEETS OF PAPER, OVERALL SIZE
1324 x 3675MM
PRIVATE COLLECTION, AUCKLAND



TANGI AT MITIMITI

trembling
tangi
growing
like a marigold

Moetangi
a stream

toheroa
and mullet
silver and gold

he kuaka
he kuaka marangaranga
a godwit
a godwit hovering

*
the less
the greater

feet of the mangrove trees
bathed in salt water
dried by the wind

between sea and land
bronze kaumatua
lace knotted hands
in decisions of roots
hold the sea in their fingers

*
in poverty, at the
edge of the shore

humble between powers
and simple

as a bowl
a candle
coals of a hearth

a celebration of fish
a house of mourning
singing

*
Within
Tumoana,
manuhiri entering
downcast and gentle

harshness is foreign
at Mitimiti

on the beach the light
comes from no one place
and the mountains
veil their horizons

wind-thumbed manuka

the tangi
anchored in mist
a lonely boat
a cable of voices

*
of course

the cold rain

i runga o Hione
hei tangi

*
how tightly their roots
tangle
burnished and solemn
how meek they are

*
sleep in your lonely canoe
the paddles are broken

takoto mai i roto o to waka
kua whati nga hoe

*
how to love,
how to speak plainly.

Cilla McQueen

From Tangi at Mitimiti — a poem by Cilla McQueen, 1982
Mixed media on paper, 720 x 550mm
Collection of the artist

BABY IRON

flat stainless steel scribed with assembled vertical lines goes back to the Requiem paintings & early black windows with highly polished surfaces & patterns of soft buffing. The voice is the same though the medium changes. He's taken the hardest stuff he can find & forced steel into silky disappearing light held in by weathered velvet wood jewelled with nails.

15 years ago you were looking into lacquered black & looking out from highly polished swirling light patterns between you and your image. the window dissolves & you go through, track inwards to yourself & change. now you inhabit the steel, not so pretty, fatty & skinny in a hall of mirrors changing you, keep still, you can't. harsher ground but the patterns are the same, light permanently ground into the steel with a sanding disc. the steel softens, you go through into weird focal depths, the buffing hangs like mist & lines are musical strings on the surface, thin steely edges hugged by Roger's tough frames of weathered farm gate timber.

then corrugate it, fuck it up, iron it, ripple it, the corrugated iron Aramoana pieces drip & splatter water & sky on intricate surfaces old tin rust & birdshit. big iron. eight foot hung on a wooden beam, a tau. & the baby iron is the same but elegant & cleanly, he treats it all ways saying the same in any medium, he's consistent. oh the iron is a conservator's nightmare, so what, so is our roof. everybody's roof is. all subject to such change as the rain & the rust so let them in, live with rust in the heart, how queerly beautiful.

so then, baby steel. on the baby steel he writes a text from Ezekiel with a blowtorch to trap the light, held in its ancient wooden arms softly. & more windows are old double hung frames studded with leadhead nails, some brushwork, some gold & red ochre, some burned steel purple orange gold & all the reflected colours, rich as ikons. a strip of steel peels easy as a butter scrape. whatever it is, however harsh, he handles till it sings & bends softly, gentle steel, baby iron, something to do with refusing to be afraid.

Cilla McQueen



The Wind I** and **The Wind II, 1987
STAINLESS STEEL WITH CEDAR FRAME, 1570 X 1440MM
PRIVATE COLLECTION, AUCKLAND



‘Through the black window’ *an afterword*

After great pain, a formal feeling comes.
EMILY DICKINSON

THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER, Hotere has painted requiems, producing elegies for individuals, tribes, for humanity as a whole and for the environment. In fulfilling this function, the paintings partake of, rather than simply describe, a darkness that is common to all humanity. As Gilles Neret wrote of Fernand Leger’s late work, Hotere’s creative project is one in which ‘... the lights are extinguished, the hierarchies and inexplicable mysteries are re-established and we once again find respect for the great natural forces...’[1]

If there is a redemptive note within the darkness that has dominated much of Hotere’s art, it is a belief that beyond the pain and uncertainty of life we meet with the certainty and equilibrium of death. The paintings, at the point of this realisation, are both tragic and triumphant — as William Bronk wrote of Bach’s cello suites, they enable us to ‘learn the way despair, deepest sadness, can and must be phrased as praise, thanksgiving.’[2]

The theme of the requiem began with Hotere’s first series of *Sangro* paintings, and the *Black Paintings* in the late sixties established the solemnity and elegiac potential of his creative project. While the paintings address and to some extent embody a sense of suffering and loss, they offer no simple answers to either artist or viewer, both of whom must struggle *towards* meaning and reconciliation (the incidence of the word *towards* in Hotere’s titles is, in itself, worth pondering).

Since the 1970s many of Hotere’s paintings have been warnings about impending losses as well as elegies for what has already been lost or destroyed. Besides being a requiem for the already damaged environment of Mururoa Atoll, the *Dawn/Water Poem* paintings of the mid-1980s are a plea for such destruction to stop. Other works by Hotere have functioned as requiems for the victims of colonialism (the *Algérie* series), racism (*Black Union Jack*), war (*The Song of Solomon*) and environmental desolation (*Aramoana, Port Chalmers*). Hotere has also painted requiems for individuals including the composer Anthony Watson (to whom the 1973 *Requiem* paintings were dedicated), Te Whiti, Martin Luther King, Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul I, and to his brother, father and mother.

Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro, 1992
ACRYLIC AND GOLD LEAF ON GLASS, C. 920 X 900MM
PRIVATE COLLECTION, WELLINGTON

II

Shortly before his death in August 1996, I collected Rodney Kirk Smith from his home in Westmere and we drove to the closed-up premises of RKS Art to look at some paintings by Ralph Hotere. The last show at the gallery just prior to Rodney's illness had been a selection of Hotere's watercolours and drawings from the 1970s and a list of these works was still pinned to the wall.

Rodney, who was in the advanced stages of terminal cancer, sat behind his desk in the gallery as I dragged Hotere's paintings across the floor. Tim Walker, from the Museum of New Zealand, turned up later in the morning and became part of this shuffling ritual, moving large steel works across the room, uncovering as we went smaller works that were stacked behind them, and then unwrapping constructions from the 1967 *Zero* series so thickly layered in dust you could hardly make out what colour they were...

Rodney, sitting behind his desk, drifted into and out of consciousness all morning. Although he didn't raise his head often, when I remarked on various paintings he always knew which ones I was talking about. A stack of drawings for Hotere's 1973 *Requiem* series sat before him on the table; a huge *Black Painting* leant against the wall nearby. We noted how the *Black Painting* encapsulated the way Hotere, like Ad Reinhardt, had eliminated the obvious signs of painting — the brushstroke, illusionism, colour interaction — replacing them with obsessively subtle modulations of black.

At times during the morning the paintings seemed overwhelming — 'black intensities / of black on black on black feeding on itself', to borrow a phrase from Hone Tuwhare. For the first time, I *felt* the darkness at the core of Hotere's work — somehow being in the gallery with Rodney brought home to me the enormous weight of emotion the paintings carried. Beneath the pristine geometries of the *Black Painting*, the flickering colours and claustrophobic murmurings of the *Pine* sketches, and even in the remote, seemingly detached manner of the *Requiem* drawings there was something deeply troubling, but also awe-inspiring.

III

Returning to Wellington, I visited Janne Land's gallery in Upper Cuba Street where she showed me two Hotere works from 1992. Perhaps it was because of the Spanish title, but the work entitled *Lo Negro Sobre Lo Oro* — a black window featuring four gold squares — immediately made me think of St John of the Cross's 'dark night of the soul' and the notion of a mystical darkness, a darkness so complete it radiates, it is 'resplendent with light'. While I don't think Hotere would ever allow the baroque excesses of mysticism or Spanish romanticism to exist in his work in any pure form, it is a tradition he feels an affinity with and has painted his way around in works such as the *Window in Spain* series. St John of the Cross's notion of inner darkness, the 'deep caverns in which the lamps of fire... flash mysteriously in metaphysical shadows' was echoed by these gold squares — or 'lamps' — on their black ground.[3]

Hotere has been investigating blackness throughout his career, exploring the various darknesses — Jungian darkness, Freudian darkness, theological darkness and the darkness of Maori mythology. These abstract notions, however, are in turn balanced by an acute awareness of the natural world and of where he stands as a person, as the title of the second work Janne Land showed me made plain. Formally a very similar work to the first, *Night Window, Carey's Bay*, took its title from a Bill Manhire poem about Ralph Hotere's house (and his *Black Window* paintings). What interested me here was the way the painting was altered and, in a sense, *completed* by its title, which stressed its relationship to both a geographical place — Carey's Bay — and a linguistic place, Bill Manhire's poem.

NIGHT WINDOWS, CAREY'S BAY

You write a long poem
about how you are sorting yourself out at last
and how at last you say
there'll never be another word
about departure. Look
around you how the moon
tattooes the spaces all around you,
it isn't even dark. In the house
of doors, the doors are open.
In the house of glass, the glass lets in the light.

Alongside the mysterious, inexplicable darknesses I noted earlier, both Hotere and Manhire recognise that darkness also happens to be a space in which people live — it is the darkness of night-time, of sleeping and dreaming, or of sitting around a household lamp, talking and drinking in the company of others.

WE, WHO LIVE IN DARKNESS

It had been a long long time of it
wriggling and squirming in the swamp of night.
And what was time, anyway? Black intensities
of black on black on black feeding on itself?
Something immense? Immeasureless?

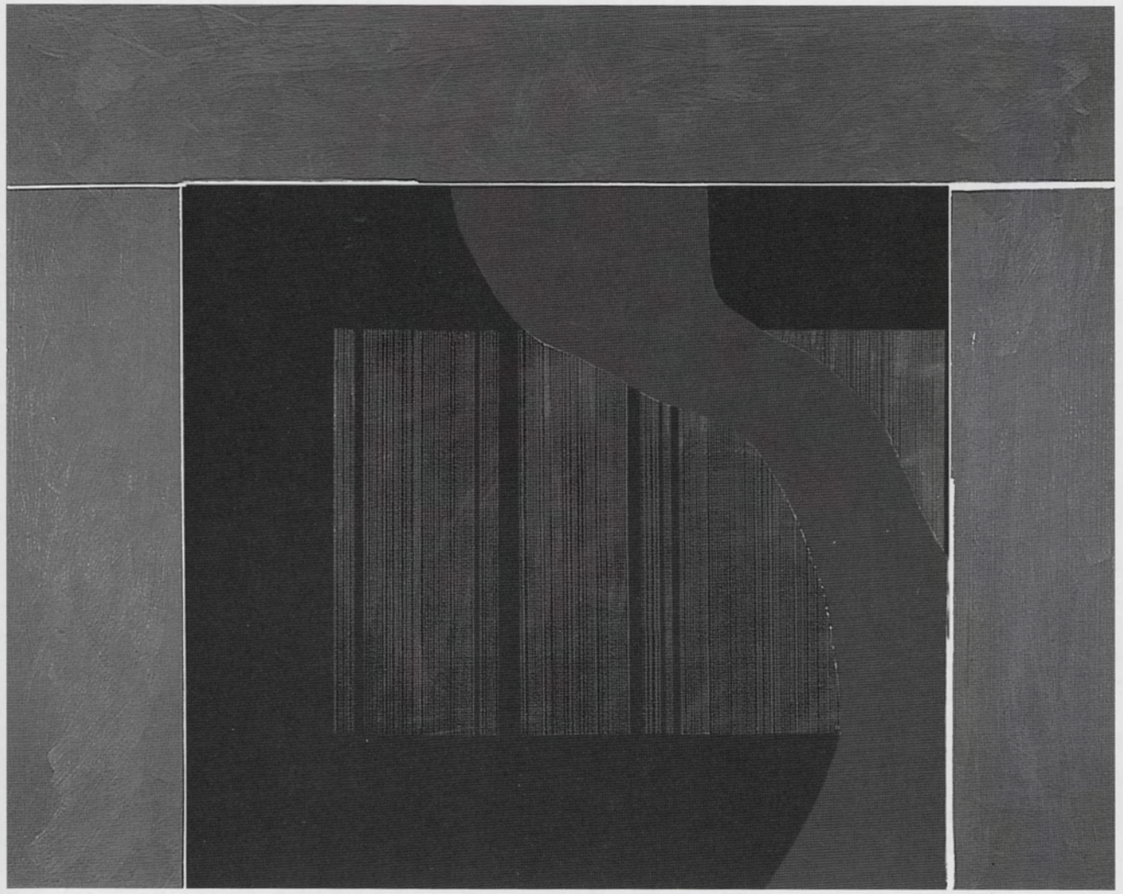
No more.
There just had to be a beginning somehow.
For on reaching the top of a slow rise suddenly
eyes I never knew I possessed were stung by it
forcing me to hide my face in the earth.

It was light, my brothers. Light.
A most beautiful sight infiltered past
the armpit hairs of the father. Why, I could
even see to count all the fingers of my hands
held out to it; see the stain — the clutch of
good earth on them.

But then he moved.
And darkness came down even more oppressively
it seemed and I drew back tense; angry.

Brothers, let us kill him — push him off.

Hone Tuwhare



Requiem, 1973
LACQUER ON BOARD, 1060 X 1340MM
COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST

IV

In a 1973 *Requiem* painting hanging on Ralph Hotere's living room wall, two vertical slivers of light hold up the fine line of the horizon. It is an image of great poise and balance, a swirling mass of almost-black moving through the central block of the composition. How much or how little of the painting can be seen depends on how the light hits it. In faint natural light the image is reduced to blackness with three white lines. With stronger light the difference between varnished and unvarnished sections of the work can be made out and the swirling red/black form emerges. Here we see manifest different kinds of darkness: those which are flat or reflective and those which imply deep, recessional space. Ad Reinhardt aligned this kind of spatial ambiguity with eastern art which, he wrote, 'was based on an awareness of the "immeasureable vastness" and "endlessness of things" out there, and as things get smaller as they get closer, the viewer ends up by losing (finding?) himself in his own mind'. Reinhardt's description of Chinese paintings rings true not only of Hotere's *Requiem* but of much of his oeuvre, the works being, at once, 'organized and organic, atmospheric and airless, immanent and transcendent, ideal, unreal and most real.'[4]

A requiem marks a crossing over from one world to another, from the darkness and light of earthly existence to a spiritual darkness and light. It also represents what is left behind, being the vehicle by which those who remain mark the passage of a loved or honoured person. It is, accordingly, the embodiment of an emptiness, a loss, the darkness of absence. In contrast to the familiar, almost suburban darkness of Manhire's poem, 'Night Windows, Carey's Bay', Hotere's *Requiem* returns us to a mythical, primordial blackness, like that in Hone Tuwhare's great poem, 'We, who live in darkness'.

V

The last time I saw Rodney Kirk Smith was in Saint Joseph's Hospice a few days before he died. Fortuitously, I turned up as, with the help of his son-in-law Juan, he was sorting though a number of large folders containing drawings and prints by Hotere, most of them dating from the 1960s. These were laid out on the bed, resting on Rodney's legs.

Again, I felt confronted with the blackness of Hotere's art, only this time the works seemed to transcend their inherent heaviness. Although they were about death — and I think that was something Rodney felt very acutely — they were also about reconciliation, about being at peace with being and non-being, about making that crossing. Just as the paintings offered a set of coordinates for the living, so they did for the dying.

Similarly, the poems that Hotere, over the last 30 years, has been moved to place within his paintings function both as living, organic entities and as inscriptions on a memorial. Alongside the artist's vocabulary of cross shapes, circles and vertical lines, the words are deeply woven into the fabric of the artwork; the various voices the poets provide are subsumed into a deeply human voice arising from the depths of these strong but at the same time immensely vulnerable paintings. Regardless of the physical materials Hotere uses or the scale he is working on, this voice is the constant in his artwork.

While on one level the poems he has used might be lyrical effusions of the human spirit, on another they are intonations and utterances in the face of the inevitable silence with which life ends. The paintings in which they find themselves are about what comes after pain, the way life like art seeks resolution, and the form that resolution takes is death.

Ideal and dearly beloved voices
of those who are dead, or of those
who are lost to us like the dead.

Sometimes they speak to us in our dreams;
sometimes in thought the mind hears them.

And for a moment with their echo other echoes
return from the first poetry of our lives —
like music that extinguishes the far-off night.

C. P. Cavafy

1 Gilles Neret, *F. Leger* (BDD Illustrated Books, New York, 1993), p238.

2 William Bronk, *Living Instead* (North Point Press, San Francisco, 1991), p15.

3 Thomas Merton, 'St John of the Cross', *Perspectives 4* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1953), p59.

4 'Cycles through the Chinese Landscape', in *Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt* (Viking, New York, 1975), pp213–214.

Chronology

1931

Hone Papita Raukura (Ralph) Hotere is born at Mitimiti, just north of the Hokianga harbour, a member of the Aupouri tribe. One of eleven children, his father is Tangirau Hotere, his mother Ana Maria Daniels.

1946–49

Attends St Peter's Maori College (later renamed Hato Petera) on Auckland's North Shore.

1950–51

Studies at Auckland Teachers' College before specialising in art at Dunedin Teachers' College and King Edward Technical College, Dunedin, where he is taught by Gordon Tovey, William J. Reed and Fred Shewell.

1952

First exhibition (a two-person show with John Kim) at the Dunedin Public Library.

1952–61

Works as school art adviser in Northland and Auckland.

Completes his compulsory military training with the Royal New Zealand Air Force at Taieri and Dunedin, qualifying as an RNZAF pilot in 1953 — also Territorial Air Force supplementary flying at Auckland and Northland aero-clubs.

Meets Colin McCahon at the Auckland City Art Gallery (1953).

1958

Solo exhibition at Northland Art Society, Whangarei (also in 1959 and 1960).

1959

Illustrations by Hotere first appear in *Te Ao Hou*.

c.1960

Meets Hone Tuwhare.

1961

Travels to Europe on a New Zealand Art Societies Fellowship.

Studies painting and graphic design at the Central School of Art, London, where he is taught by Cecil Collins and William Turnbull.

Included in group show, *Contemporary New Zealand Painting*, at the Auckland City Art Gallery.

1962

Receives a residential award to work for a year at the Michael Karolyi Memorial Foundation at Vence, France, where his studio is located a short distance from the Chapel of the Rosary which was decorated by Henri Matisse.

Visits Rome.

Solo exhibition at Galérie Chandos, Tourettes-sur-Loup, France.

1963

Paints in London, exhibiting work at the Redfern Gallery, where two of the *Sangro* paintings are hung in the Summer Exhibition.

Included in *London Group*, RBA (Royal Society of British Artists) Galleries, London.

1964

Major solo exhibition, *Sangro*, *Polaris Series* and *Woman Drawings* at Middlesbrough Art Gallery, England.

Work included in *Young Commonwealth Artists* exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, London.

1965

Returns to Auckland.

Solo exhibition, *Sangro Paintings and Human Rights Series*, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland.

Included in group show, *Contemporary New Zealand Painting*, at the Auckland City Art Gallery.

1965–66

Represented in *New Zealand Graphics*, New Vision Gallery, Auckland.

1966

Solo exhibition, Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

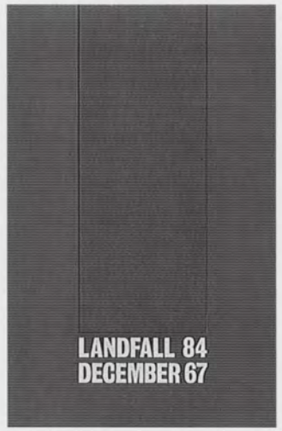
Represented in *Manawatu Prize Exhibition*, a touring exhibition.

Four drawings published in *Landfall* 78, edited by Charles Brasch (Caxton Press, June).

1967

Exhibits first paintings from the *Zero* series at Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland.

Designs cover for *Landfall* 84, edited by Charles Brasch (Caxton Press, December).



1968

Solo exhibition, *Black Paintings*, at Barry Lett Galleries.

Represented in *Ten Years of New Zealand Painting*, Auckland City Art Gallery, and in *The Group*, Canterbury Society of Arts (also included in *The Group* exhibitions between 1969 and 1974).

1969

Awarded Frances Hodgkins Fellowship, University of Otago, and moves permanently to Dunedin. Meets Michael Smither, Bill Manhire and Anthony Watson.

Solo exhibitions, *Frances Hodgkins Fellow Exhibition*, University of Otago, Dunedin, and *New Paintings*, Barry Lett Galleries.

Group exhibitions: *International Biennale*, Tokyo; *International Exhibition of Graphic Art*, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia; *Contemporary Painting in New Zealand: 12 Painters*, Smithsonian Institution, Washington; *Five Guest Artists*, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington, and Canterbury Society of Arts.

Designs cover for the journal *Ascent* 3, edited by Leo

Bensemann and Barbara Brooke (Caxton Press, April), which features a study of Hotere's work by Mark Young.

Drawing reproduced on cover of *Jerusalem Sonnets*, James K. Baxter, Bibliography Room, University of Otago.



1970

Meets Cilla McQueen, whom he will marry in 1974.

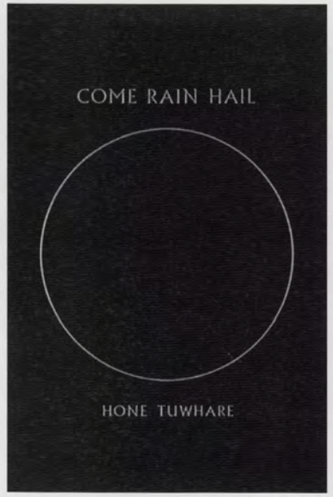
Designs set and costumes for the Globe Theatre production of James K. Baxter's play *The Temptations of Oedipus*.
Meets James K. Baxter.

Receives grant from Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council.

Solo exhibitions: *Malady Serie. 1970*, at Barry Lett Galleries, and *Malady Series 1970*, Dawsons Gallery, Dunedin.

Participates in group exhibition at *Expo '70*, Tokyo, and the *Print Council of New Zealand Second Biennale* exhibition which toured New Zealand, Australia, Japan and USA.

Designs cover for *Blue Footpaths*, Robert [Bob] Orr (Amphedesma Press, London).

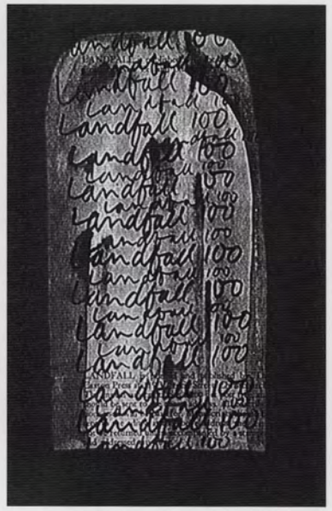


Produces pen, ink and water-colour drawings for *Malady*, Ralph Hotere and Bill Manhire (Amphedesma Press).

1971

Designs cover for *Landfall* 100, edited by Robin Dudding (Caxton Press, December).

Works shown at the *XI Sao Paulo Biennale*, Brazil, and in the Auckland City Art Gallery touring group exhibition *Ten Big Paintings*.



1972

Meets Ian Wedde, who is 1972 Burns Fellow at Otago.

Moves from Dunedin to Carey's Bay.

Death of the artist's mother.

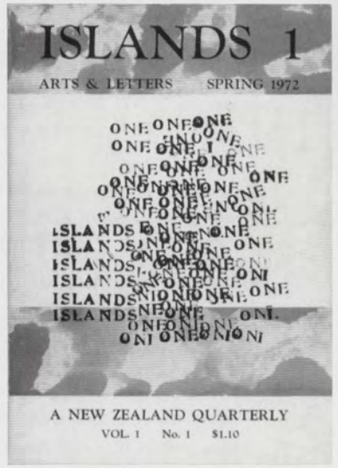
Begins work on the *Te Whiti* series.

Solo exhibitions: *Sangro Panels 1962 and Port Chalmers Paintings 1972*, Dawsons Gallery, Dunedin; *Port Chalmers Paintings*, Barry Lett Galleries; *Port Chalmers Paintings 1972*, Canterbury Society of Arts, Christchurch.

Represented in group shows: *Te Whiti Exhibition: Colin McCahon & Ralph Hotere*, Waikato Art Gallery.

Designs cover for *Islands* 1, edited by Robin Dudding (Islands).

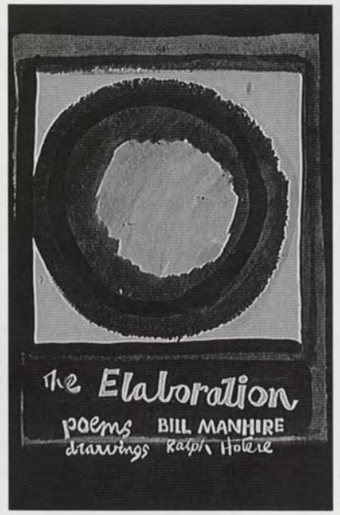
Drawings and cover design for *The Elaboration*, Bill Manhire



(Square and Circle, Dunedin).

Produces series of watercolours and cover design for *Sap-wood & Milk*, Hone Tuwhare (Caveman Press, Dunedin).

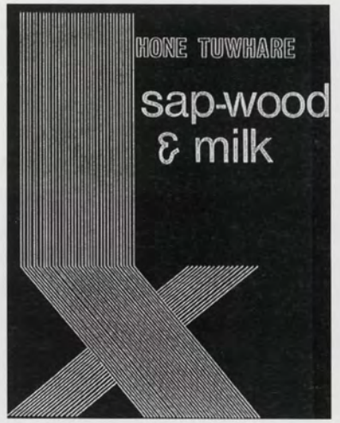
A series of ink drawings and cover design published in *The Loners*, a collection of short stories by O. E. Middleton (Square and Circle, Dunedin).



1973

Paints Founders Theatre mural, Hamilton. Also completes commissions for Rank Xerox, Auckland, and the National Bank, Dunedin.

Following the death of the composer, Anthony Watson, begins work on the *Requiem* series.



Designs set for John Whiting's play *The Devils* at the Globe Theatre.

To coincide with a major exhibition at the Waikato Art Gallery (which is opened by Hone Tuwhare) and the completion of the Founders Theatre mural, a special edition of the *Waikato Art Gallery Bulletin* (with essay by Garth Hall) is devoted to the work of Ralph Hotere.

A 30-minute television documentary about the artist is produced by the New Zealand National Film Unit and directed by Sam Pillsbury.

1974

Major travelling exhibition organised by the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, *Ralph Hotere: A Survey 1963–73* with accompanying catalogue essay by Peter Smith. (Due to inadequate packaging and care, works in the exhibition are so badly damaged that the nationwide tour has to be abandoned in Wellington.)

Solo exhibitions: *Requiem Paintings*, Barry Lett Galleries; *Requiem Paintings 1973–4*, Bosshard Gallery, Akaroa.

Hotere passes on to Colin McCahon a Maori poem transcribed by Tangirau Hotere which McCahon incorporates into his important series of canvases, *The Song of the Shining Cuckoo.*

1975

Designs programme and poster for *Song Cycle — Sound, Movement, Theatre*, a collaborative performance using Manhire's poetry, music by Barry Margan and Jack Body, and dance by John Casserley, Char Hummel, Kuat Suhadji.

Solo exhibitions: *Drawings for Ian Wedde's 'Pathway to the Sea'* at Barry Lett Galleries; *Requiem Series* at Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch.

Designs cover for *Pathway to the Sea*, Ian Wedde (Hawk Press, Taylor's Mistake).

1976

Solo exhibitions: *Song Cycle*, Barry Lett Galleries, and *Song Cycle 1975–76*, Bosshard Galleries.

Included in *Contemporary New Zealand Painting*, Auckland City Art Gallery.

Designs cover for *Dick Seddon's Great Dive*, a novel by Ian Wedde (Islands, Auckland).

1977

Commissioned to paint mural for Auckland International Airport.

Solo exhibitions: *New Paintings and Test Pieces*, Barry Lett Galleries, and *Test Pieces*, Bosshard Galleries.

Produces cover artwork for *Confessions of an Ocelot* and *Not for a Seagull*, O. E. Middleton (John McIndoe, 1978) .

1978

Receives travel grant from Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council.

Paints *The Pope is Dead*, *Return to Sangro*, *Window in Spain* and *Avignon* works while based in Europe.

Represented in *International Exhibition of Drawings*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

1979

Solo exhibitions: *Window in Spain and Avignon Series 1978*, Bosshard Galleries; *Drawings and Paintings 1978*, Barry Lett Galleries; *Ralph Hotere: Recent Paintings and Works on Paper*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

Group exhibition: *New Work from the South*, Brooke/Gifford Gallery.

Avignon watercolours reproduced alongside Cilla McQueen's 'Avignon Summer 1978' in *Islands* 25, April, edited by Robin Dudding.

1980

Song Cycle banners exhibited at the New Zealand Embassy in Washington D. C.

Solo exhibitions: *Aurora, Port Chalmers*, Barry Lett Galleries, *Aurora, Port Chalmers*, Brooke/Gifford Gallery; *Aurora*, Galerie Legard, Wellington.

Group exhibitions: *Aramoana*, Hocken Library Gallery; *Stations of the Cross*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth; *Work for a New Decade, Six Painters*, Brooke/Gifford Gallery.

1980–81

Exhibits *Banners: Hocken Commission*, Hocken Library, Dunedin.

1980–83

Works on an ongoing series of large corrugated iron paintings entitled *Aramoana / Pathway to the Sea.* (Hotere's major statement in this medium, *Aramoana* (1983) is subsequently purchased by the Auckland City Art Gallery.) During this time he is active in the protests against the proposed aluminium smelter at Aramoana.

1981

Paints *Black Union Jack* works in protest against the Springbok rugby tour of New Zealand.

Solo exhibitions: *Ten Windows*, RKS ART, Auckland; *Hotere's Hoteres*, Bosshard Galleries.

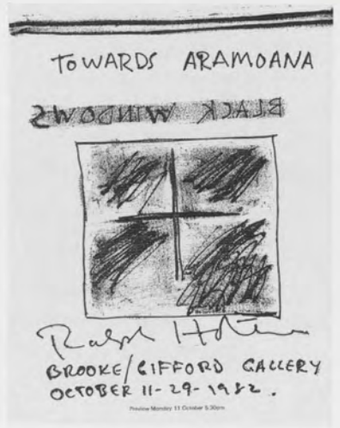
1982

Travels to Australia on a Senior Anzac Fellowship.

Death of the artist's father, Tangirau Hotere.

Solo exhibitions: *Works from the 60s*, RKS ART; *Towards Aramoana, Black Windows*, Brooke/Gifford Gallery; *Recent Paintings 1981–82*, Janne Land Gallery.

Group exhibitions: *New Zealand Drawing Exhibition*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery; *Works on Paper*, a group exhibition, Brooke/Gifford Gallery.



1983–84

Producing *Baby Iron* works using stainless steel.

Solo exhibitions: *Recent Paintings*, Brooke/Gifford Gallery; *Aurora and Stainless Steel Works*, Bosshard Galleries; *Baby Iron*, Janne Land Gallery.

1984

Colin McCahon and Ralph Hotere represent New Zealand at the *Fifth Biennale of Sydney, Private Symbol: Social Metaphor*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

Solo exhibitions: *Hotere's Hoteres*, Hamilton Centre Gallery, Hamilton; *Baby Iron*, RKS ART.

1985

Wins Transfield Award.

Solo exhibitions: *Hotere's Hoteres*, at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, . . . *and death wears the colours of a peacock*, at Janne Land Gallery.

Group exhibitions: *Aramoana 1982*, Auckland City Art Gallery; *Artists in Glass*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery; *Sue Cooke / Ralph Hotere / Marian Maguire*, RKS ART.

1986

Work included in *New Zealand Art Today*, an exhibition at the Marianne Deson Gallery, Chicago, organised by the New Zealand Consulate in New York.

Solo exhibitions: *Black Rainbow*, Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch, and *Black Rainbow*, Janne Land Gallery.

Group exhibitions: *Haongia Te Taonga*, Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton, and *5*, Carnegie Centre, Dunedin.

1987

Included in group exhibitions: *Folding Image*, Fisher Gallery, Auckland, and *Content and Symbol*, Artis Gallery, Auckland.

1988

Black Phoenix exhibited at Shed 11, Wellington, as part of the exhibition *Three Installations* (with Para Matchitt & Selwyn Muru) and subsequently purchased by the National Art Gallery.

Solo exhibition: *Paintings, Prints & Installations*, Janne Land Gallery.

Participates in *Montana Lindauer Art Award Exhibition*, Auckland Society of Arts Gallery.

1989

Produces series of *Observation Point* works, protesting at the Port Chalmers Authority's plans to excavate the promontory where the artist's studio is located. Exhibits a related series of works, *To the Point*, at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

1990

Group exhibition, *Pacific Rim Diaspora*, at the Long Beach Museum, Los Angeles (with Phillipa Blair and Christine Hellyar), organised by Rodney Kirk Smith.

Mural commissioned by the Auckland Regional Council.

Work included in *New Zealand Images of War*, a Manawatu Art Gallery touring exhibition.

1991

Purchases the former Bank of New Zealand building at Port Chalmers for use as a studio.

Exhibits *Pathway to the Sea* (a collaborative installation with Bill Culbert) at the Auckland City Art Gallery, and contributes to a group exhibition of writer and artist collaborations, *Telling Pictures*, at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Drawing of Bill Manhire reproduced on cover of *The Old Man's Example*, Bill Manhire (Wrist and Anchor Press, Wellington).

1991–93

Work included in *Pacific Parallels: Artists and the Landscape in New Zealand*, an exhibition touring North America, organised by the New Zealand – United States Arts Foundation and the San Diego Museum of Art.

1992

PROP, a collaborative work with Bill Culbert, exhibited at RKS ART, Auckland, and subsequently acquired by the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Solo exhibitions: *Ralph Hotere*, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland; *Paintings and Lithographs*, Janne Land Gallery; *No. 8*, RKS ART and the Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton; *Post Black* (with Bill Culbert), Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland.

Represented in the group exhibition, *After Dark*, at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth.

Included in travelling exhibition *Headlands* organised by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.



1994

Awarded an honorary LLD from the University of Otago, Dunedin.

1995

Installation of *Fault*, a collaboration with Bill Culbert, on the façade of the City Gallery, Wellington.

Publication of a book accompanying the installation, *Fault*, with text by Bill Manhire.

Solo exhibition, *Works on Paper*, RKS ART, Auckland.

Included in group exhibitions: *Works from the Past*, RKS ART, and *Korurangi, Contemporary Maori Art*, Auckland Art Gallery.

Exhibits *Winter Chrysanthemums* (1991), a collaborative work with John Reynolds, in touring group exhibition, *Stop Making Sense*.

1996

Travels to Cuba.

Involved in restoration of *Flight of the Godwit*, the Auckland International Airport mural, which is renamed: *Godwit/Kuaka*.

Solo exhibition: *New Work*, at Janne Land Gallery.

Drawings and cover image featured in *Landfall* 191, March, edited by Chris Price.

1997

Solo exhibition, *Painting on a Hot Tin Roof*, at the Harriette Cotton Gallery, Dunedin.

Solo exhibition, *Black Paintings 1968 - 1969*, at Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland.

Exhibition of the restored *Godwit/Kuaka* at the Auckland Art Gallery and City Gallery, Wellington.

Hotere — out the black window, an exhibition of the artist's collaborative work with New Zealand poets, opens at the City Gallery, Wellington, 6 June.

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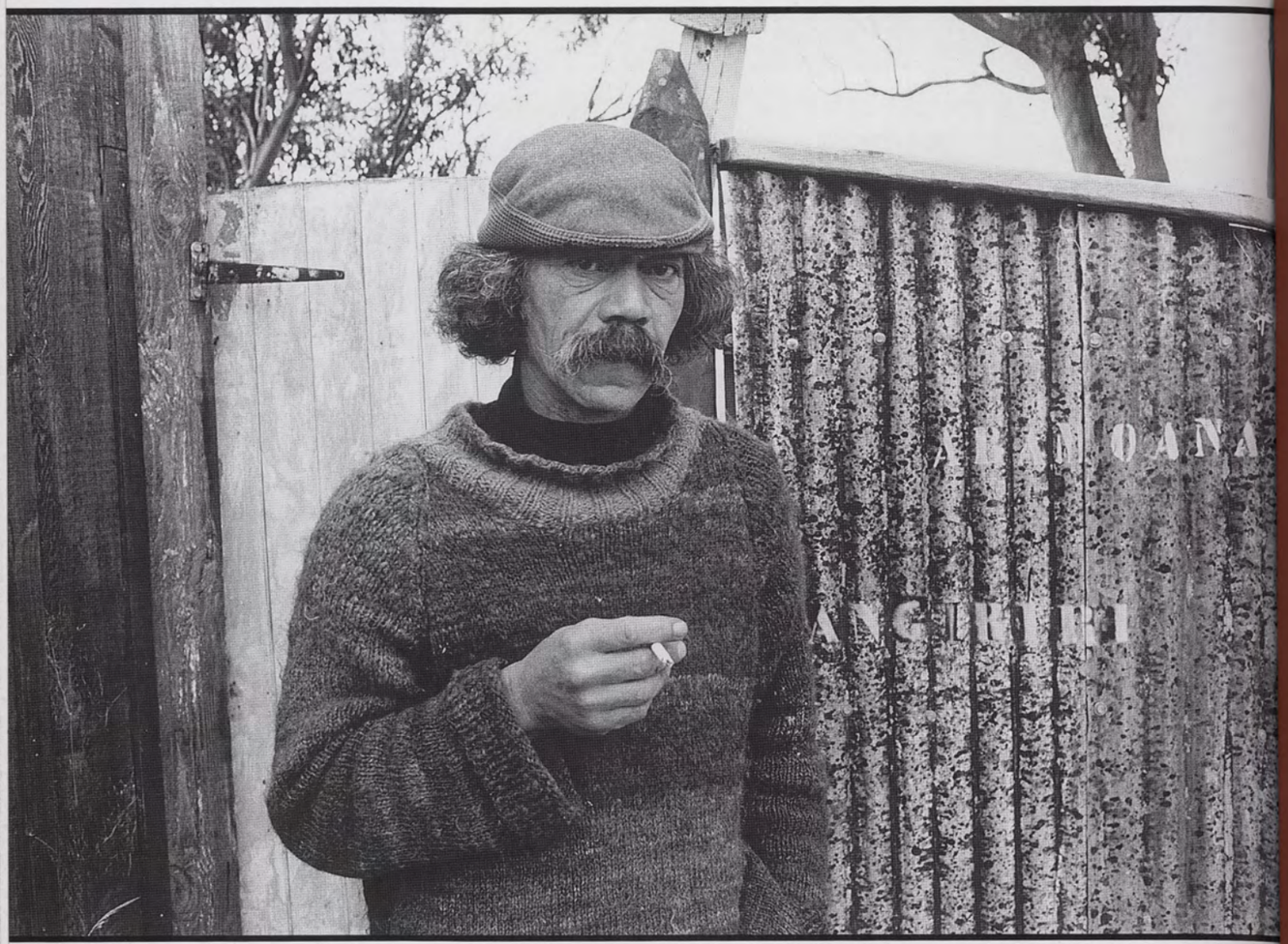
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At one stage I wrote a short story . . . called 'Ralph Hotere at the Intensity Centre' . . . It was a satirical piece about self-therapy and self-advancement. The one thing that was going to end the story and contradict the shallow world the characters had moved through was an image based on a dream I had: Ralph was standing in front of a dartboard in a hotel bar — as well as playing golf, he used to be a member of the Carey's Bay pub darts team. So there he was perfectly poised in this dark smoky bar — hat on his head, cigarette in his mouth, and a beer in one hand and a dart in the other — intent on the board and balanced and throwing the dart and watching it fly towards the board. But in this image the board doesn't have a back to it, somehow there is just infinite depth behind it, like a horizontal well . . . the darts just carry on. The feathers retreat further and further into the distance, lots of them all at different distances.

And that was where the story was going to end. But I couldn't get it properly on the page; this man launching his missiles which kept on going past the obvious and immediate destination.

The other thing is that, of course, this isn't high, remote genius-on-a-cloud stuff. Wherever they're going, the darts are being thrown from a smoky public bar with other people present.

BILL MANHIRE *(in conversation with G. O'Brien, 1995)*



Gregory O'Brien is a Wellington-based poet, writer and painter. His recent publications include *Lands and Deeds: Profiles of Contemporary New Zealand Painters*, *My Heart Goes Swimming: New Zealand Love Poems*, co-edited with Jenny Bornholdt, and *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry (in English)*, co-edited with Jenny Bornholdt and Mark Williams.

Cilla McQueen (b. 1949) has published six collections of poetry. Winner of the New Zealand Book Award for Poetry three times, she currently lives at Bluff.

Bill Manhire (b. 1946) is widely known as a poet, fiction-writer and anthologist. He lives in Wellington where he teaches a highly successful creative writing course at Victoria University.

Hone Tuwhare (b.1922) became the first published Maori poet when *No Ordinary Sun* appeared in 1964. He has now published ten collections of poetry and lives at Kaka Point, Otago.

Ian Wedde (b. 1946) is a celebrated poet, novelist and anthologist. A collection of his art criticism, *How to be nowhere*, appeared in 1995. He lives in Wellington and works at The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Cover image: Wulf I and II (details)
Collection of Cilla McQueen
Cover design by Sarah Maxey

OUT THE BLACK WINDOW

out the black window
into reflections, a rosary

it is clear
night is already in the hedge
& under the rainwater tank

the trees rust, the squeaky birds
sing tootle tootle wick wick wick
& power poles are lighting up
with children's voices

bicycle
wheel
whizz

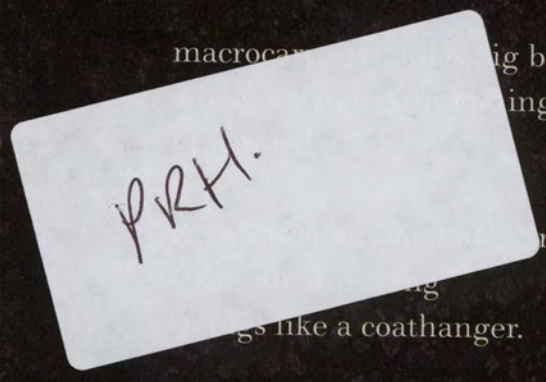
the lonely dog under the tree
barks for his master to come back to
the brick house.

macroca ig black arms
ing around the

rush

gs like a coathanger.

Cilla McQueen



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