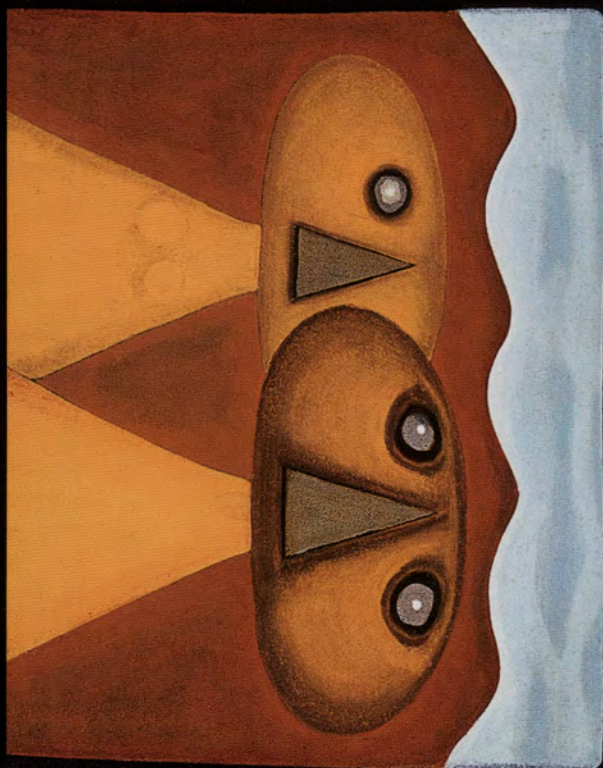
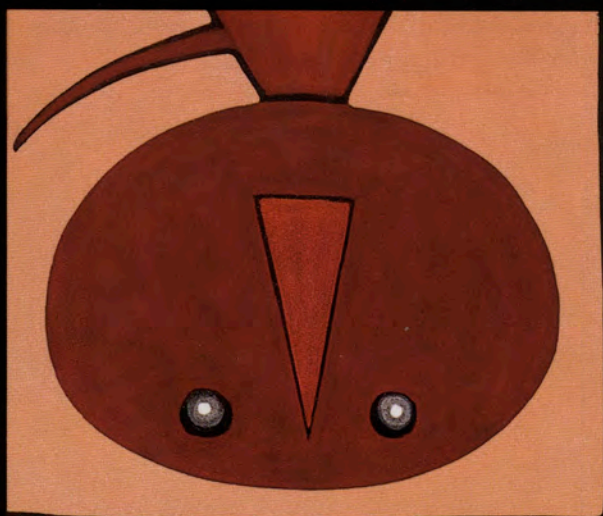
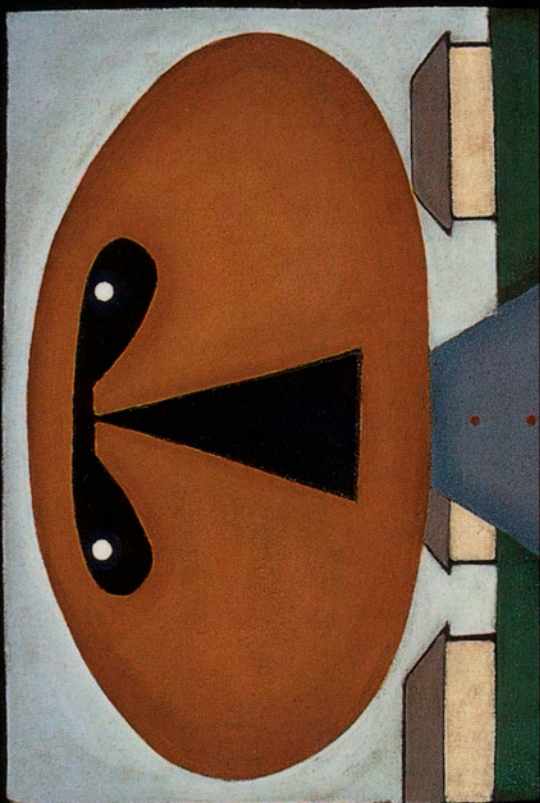
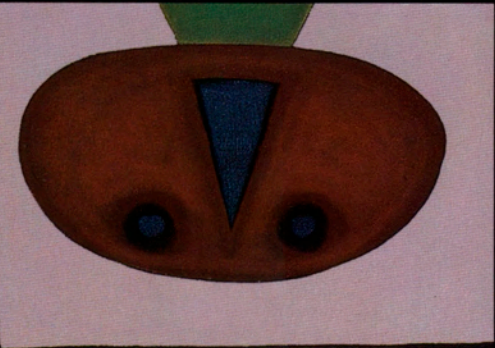




a tourist in paradise lost

THE ART OF MICHAEL ILLINGWORTH





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**a tourist
in paradise lost**
THE ART OF MICHAEL ILLINGWORTH

Kevin Ireland,
Aaron Lister
& Damian Skinner

City Gallery Wellington

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Preface

In his biography of William Blake, Peter Ackroyd recounts a poignant moment in *Europe* when Blake asks a Spirit, 'Then tell me, what is the material world, and is it dead?'. The poet is promptly shown another world or, rather, as Ackroyd puts it, 'a true image of this one in which dwells "each eternal flower" and where "every particle of dust breathes forth its joy" and each "particle" is also "Human formd".'

Tony Fomison portrayed Blake in one painting as a 'Pakeha Prophet' and he is certainly a relevant figure to keep in mind when considering the art of New Zealand's other great contemporary painter of myths, Michael Illingworth. The sense of wonder in Illingworth's paintings places him in a line of Neo-Romantic visionaries that leads back to Blake via figures like Paul Klee, Cecil Collins, Mervyn Peake and Jean Dubuffet.

Just as Fomison was this country's great mythologiser of darkness and the primordial past, Illingworth is the mythologiser of daylight and the modern world. Like Jung and Freud, Fomison and Illingworth both delve into the conscious and subconscious mind, but in the end it is the dramatic differences between the two artists that is remarkable. The bright-eyed optimism and the beguiling innocence of Illingworth's work is unique in the art history of this country. Illingworth is a painter of euphoric reveries, of the marvellous as it might be experienced by a child or by William Blake at the time he was writing his 'Songs of Innocence'. Yet, paradoxically, these timeless reflections on human life and relationships with the natural world are also very much of their time.

As Damian Skinner and Aaron Lister point out in their major catalogue essay, the first significant piece of contemporary scholarship into Michael Illingworth's work, Illingworth's canvases are a product of the 1960s and '70s—they embody changing attitudes to the environment, gender relations and morality, and were painted at a key moment in the development of the professional arts in New Zealand. His paintings are often unashamedly sexual and they were certainly shocking to some members of the public when

FIGURE 1
Stephen A. Rumsey
The Eye of the Artist
1963
black & white photograph
Courtesy of the photographer

they were first exhibited. Casting a disapproving eye on both suburbia and bureaucracy, Illingworth—like his friend James K. Baxter—used his art to vent his disenchantment and rage.

From behind these jewel-like canvases, a complex and fascinating figure emerges, who is described with warmth and humour in Kevin Ireland's recollection of high times together in the late 1950s. Illingworth was at once a lively, feisty and urbane character, but also a man who moved to the rural fastness of the Coromandel to claim some clear breathing space. An admirer of the art of children, he was also a painstaking, thoroughly trained craftsman. He was a farmer, a practical man, who was given to flights of fancy, an Englishman who empathised with the New Zealand Māori, an immigrant who was very much of this place.

A Tourist in Paradise Lost—The Art of Michael Illingworth offers viewers a chance to appreciate the scope, energy, humour and pathos of Illingworth's art. In recent decades Illingworth's art has been featured in numerous group shows and exhibitions of public collections, but has never been seen *en masse*. This important exhibition and publication project allows an unprecedented overview of a remarkable figure in the cultural life of our country.

We warmly welcome the involvement of City Gallery Wellington Foundation's Principal Corporate Benefactor, Ernst and Young, as principal sponsor of the exhibition, whose generous support has made this ambitious project possible. We also acknowledge the support of Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa for exhibition research and publication development. Following the Wellington showing, *A Tourist in Paradise Lost—The Art of Michael Illingworth* will tour the country, introducing Illingworth's practice to a wide new public audience and reacquainting his much-loved works with some old friends.

Paula Savage
Director, City Gallery Wellington

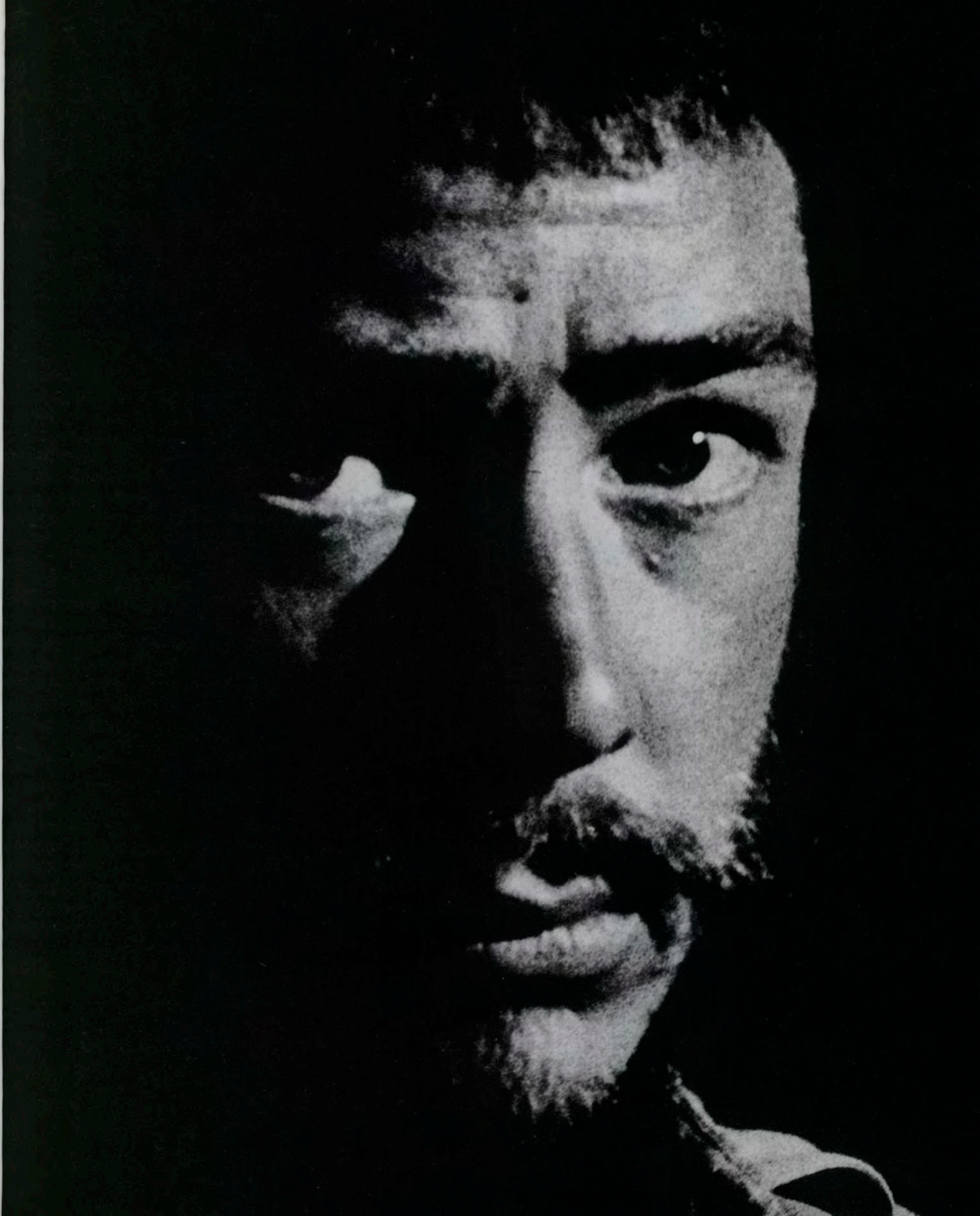




FIGURE 2
Self Portrait (detail)
c.1960
oil on canvas
615 x 460mm
Collection of Kevin Ireland, Auckland

Michael Illingworth— Out of a Window and into a Garden

The notion of artistic insights and abilities being visited on a composer or writer or painter with all the force of divine revelation is a mostly harmless and sometimes risible Bohemian myth. Most artists develop their skills and discriminations patiently and resolutely as they attempt to give expression to their gifts and aspirations. Yet occasionally we can be tempted to believe in some sort of 'Damascus Road' experience to account for what seems to be an almost magical leap forwards in insight and technique.

Michael Illingworth appears to have had one of these sudden and crucial moments of epiphany in London, between 1959 and 1960, but I think that he had been drifting towards his 'conversion' into becoming a full-time artist with a steadily developing sense of direction for some time. His London experiences seem to me to have provided a profound jolt to his ambitions, but the real work of developing a personal iconography had already started and would continue to occupy him for most of the next three decades.

I first met Mike in 1957, in Auckland, when he was a busy and talented photographer, earning a living as an expert photo-engraver. It is essential, I feel, to understand that Mike was first of all a trained realist observer and a skilled artisan. He found his way to becoming a lustrous, satiric and visionary artist from a foundation of accurate scrutiny and detailed, persistent application. Two excellent examples of his work as an engraver are the blocks he made of pen works by Anthony Stones and Theo Schoon for the first issue of the little literary magazine *mate*, published in 1958.

Mike came from one of the great mill-owning families of Yorkshire (the Illingworth-Morris firm was one of the largest woollen mills in England), though the money had almost gone by Mike's time. Several members of the family achieved fame in other fields: a relative was a well-known conservative political cartoonist, and another became captain of cricket for England. Mike also revealed promise as a sportsman. He was a fine racing cyclist, and won one spectacular road race in France as a junior, before his family emigrated to Tauranga in the early 1950s.

After his arrival here, Mike soon dropped cycling for the pleasures of owning a 'Baby' Austin Seven. I once went with him in this ancient vehicle to his parents' place in Tauranga. The trip took us all day, with long stops to cool the radiator whenever it boiled over. Eventually, he acquired (or perhaps borrowed) a faster car, though the extra speed could easily have cost him his life. He demolished a power pole with the car when travelling at eighty miles an hour up a badly cambered road in Grey Lynn. On impact, Mike sailed through the windscreen without a single scratch and landed in a flowerbed. In a way, it provides a useful metaphor for his life.

Mike and I used to meet frequently in the Vulcan Lane pubs, the Occidental and the Queen's Ferry, which were the watering holes for many of the young writers, painters, actors and academics around town, as well as the 12B radio staff and the *Auckland Star* reporters. Without thinking too much about it, he and I decided one day to go tobacco picking in Motueka. In those days the Tourist Department used to provide rail and ferry tickets for this poorly-paid and fairly demanding outdoors work, so we found ourselves thrown together in country isolation for a whole summer—consoled by piles of books, sketch pads, great Motueka beer, good food, friendly apple pickers and endless chat. When we finished our stint we hitchhiked around the South Island and crossed the Haast Pass just before the road went through.

I left for Sydney, then London, early in 1959, and within hours of my arrival in Soho, my friend John Kasmin had set me up with a unique job at Victor Musgrave's tiny Gallery One, in D'Arblay Street. It was a chance arrangement that, soon afterwards, was going to have a decisive effect on the course of Mike's life and art.

The work at Gallery One was casual and occasionally intriguing. Opening the door at ten o'clock was the first duty, after which I would take a new ten-shilling note (Victor hated handling used ones), then wander through Soho, buying food from the barrows and delicatessens to cook lunch. By mid-afternoon it would be time to look after the gallery, talk to casual viewers and artists, and wait till closing time, when Victor would return from a visit to one of the prostitutes to whom he was utterly devoted and whose careers he was researching for a never-to-be-written masterpiece.

10 Mike arrived from New Zealand in August 1959, just as I imagined I was off on a fortnight's holiday to the Continent

with Maurice Shadbolt. I thought it was a piece of luck for me to manage to talk a fairly reluctant Victor into allowing Mike to stand in for me at the gallery while I was away, but as it turned out, the real luck was Mike's. I got married along the way and didn't get back to London for another ten months. In the meantime, Mike settled in at Gallery One, began to sketch seriously every day, and made wonderful use of the opportunity to pick up everything that was 'in the air'. It was precisely the time when *Time* magazine advised its readers that London was 'swinging', and when it was fairly commonly and more soberly agreed that it was probably the most buzzing big city in the world.

When I got back to London it was to find a 'new' Mike. He now understood where he had been heading since he had first been attracted to attend an art school briefly (and fairly disastrously) in Bradford, after leaving secondary school. For years he had allowed himself to become sidetracked, but now there would be no more photography and engraving. He was going to paint again—and he had a pretty rough, though well-directed, idea of what his work was going to look like and be about.

It is important to realise the impact that total immersion in the London art world had on Mike at the time. He worked, talked, ate, slept and breathed in its atmosphere—and there was absolutely nothing else in his life (except the occasional girlfriend and booze-up, though both nearly always had some art connection).

More than this, Mike had crucial intersections and friendships with several of the Gallery One artists. None provided a more lasting personal influence than John Cristoforou, an intense, well-spoken, ex-RAF airman of Greek origins. At the time, Cristoforou's large gloomy landscapes and his brooding paintings of heads, with their vaguely religious overtones, didn't sell well, though I believe he has since had considerable success, especially in Scandinavia. He and Mike would sometimes take a stroll around Soho's bars and clubs, and especially the dingy basement of the Caves de France, where a generation of London artists and writers (presided over by the double act of the Scottish painters, Colquhoun and MacBryde) ended up when the pubs tipped them out on the streets at three each afternoon. It was Cristoforou's passionate and uncompromising harangues about art on these afternoons that fortified Mike in his decision to become a painter. Cristoforou was decisive in convincing him that there could be no half measures. To become an artist meant

that he would have to risk everything and be willing to lay his existence on the line.

Although Cristoforou set Mike a heady and compelling personal example, his painting did not influence him directly. The key inspiration for Mike's work came from another Gallery One painter, the Milanese artist Enrico Baj. With a fellow-Italian called Sergio d'Angela, Baj had started a minor art movement that gloried under the *Nuclearismo* label ('nuclear art'), but early Illingworth paintings were little affected by d'Angela's and Baj's theories. What really stunned Mike was the sheer impact of Baj's work, plus the cheerful and sophisticated assurance of his personality. Everything about Baj and his paintings seemed to confirm Mike's growing self-confidence and his stumbling progress towards heightened colouring, playfulness, fantasy and a simplified design sense based on triangles and circles. Baj provided Mike with the vocabulary to achieve a breakthrough, and though Mike's early attempts at acquiring Baj's idioms were derivative, they soon transcended imitation, for Mike picked out the features that were useful to his own vision and translated them into the New Zealand terms that he knew he was going to call on to illuminate and define his work.

In the year he spent at Gallery One, Mike was also influenced by the personality and prestige of the French painter Yves Klein, and by the example of Francis Souza, a Catholic painter from Goa. Souza was an articulate and incisive writer and speaker, and he was always eager to share his forthright views on the exalted status of artists and the arts in general. His works sold well and for a while his paintings of harshly coloured Goanese buildings (especially churches), without perspective, or his stark and jumbled landscapes, beneath bleached skies or against indefinable, grey-green backgrounds—with every feature heavily outlined in black—tempted Mike into similar experiments. In the end, however, Mike found that Souza's 'kitchen sink' approach (which owed a great deal to the popular London literary movement of the 1950s) not at all to his taste. In order to bring out the inner lustre he sought from his canvases, Mike gradually began to realise that he was going to have to work and rework his surfaces until they glowed.

As Anthony Stones once remarked perceptively to me, 'Mike is a jeweller'—by which he meant that he painted and repainted each work for days and weeks at a time until he brought out its hidden depths, just as a jeweller, by working again and again at a stone's

surfaces, manages almost magically to bring out a glowing and intense colour from its core. Mike worked by illumination from within. His best paintings, in every sense, have a mysterious inner life. He learnt this from no one. It is his personal mark.

Finally, it can be said that although Mike owed so much to a chance trip and a chance job, it is equally true that he was in the right place at the right time when he needed to be, in terms of his own temperament, ambitions and artistic needs. This is a circular observation, yet it entices me to add that the process did not stop there. He also had enormous luck to be able to pack away a host of vital, concentrated and exhilarating experiences from Gallery One and carry them back to Auckland, then to Coroglen, where they would sustain him in his life's work. And I also believe that there was another decisive, yet secret, item in the luggage he brought with him: his scorn for authority. Musgrave, Cristoforou, Souza, Baj, Klein and the others had given him a profound and unrelenting education in contempt. At its worst this was to lead Mike into several needless and unproductive confrontations. But at its most useful it equipped him with a developed and engagingly subversive wit, and with a dazzling sense of satire. The glittering edges of those jewelled paintings can sometimes still threaten to draw blood.

Kevin Ireland

Kevin Ireland's third novel, *The Craymore Affair*, was published in 2000. His memoir, *Under the Bridge & Over the Moon*, appeared in 1998 and won the Montana prize for History and Biography. His fourteenth book of poems, *Fourteen Reasons for Writing*, has just been published, and his second memoir, *Forwards to Backwards*, will appear in 2002.

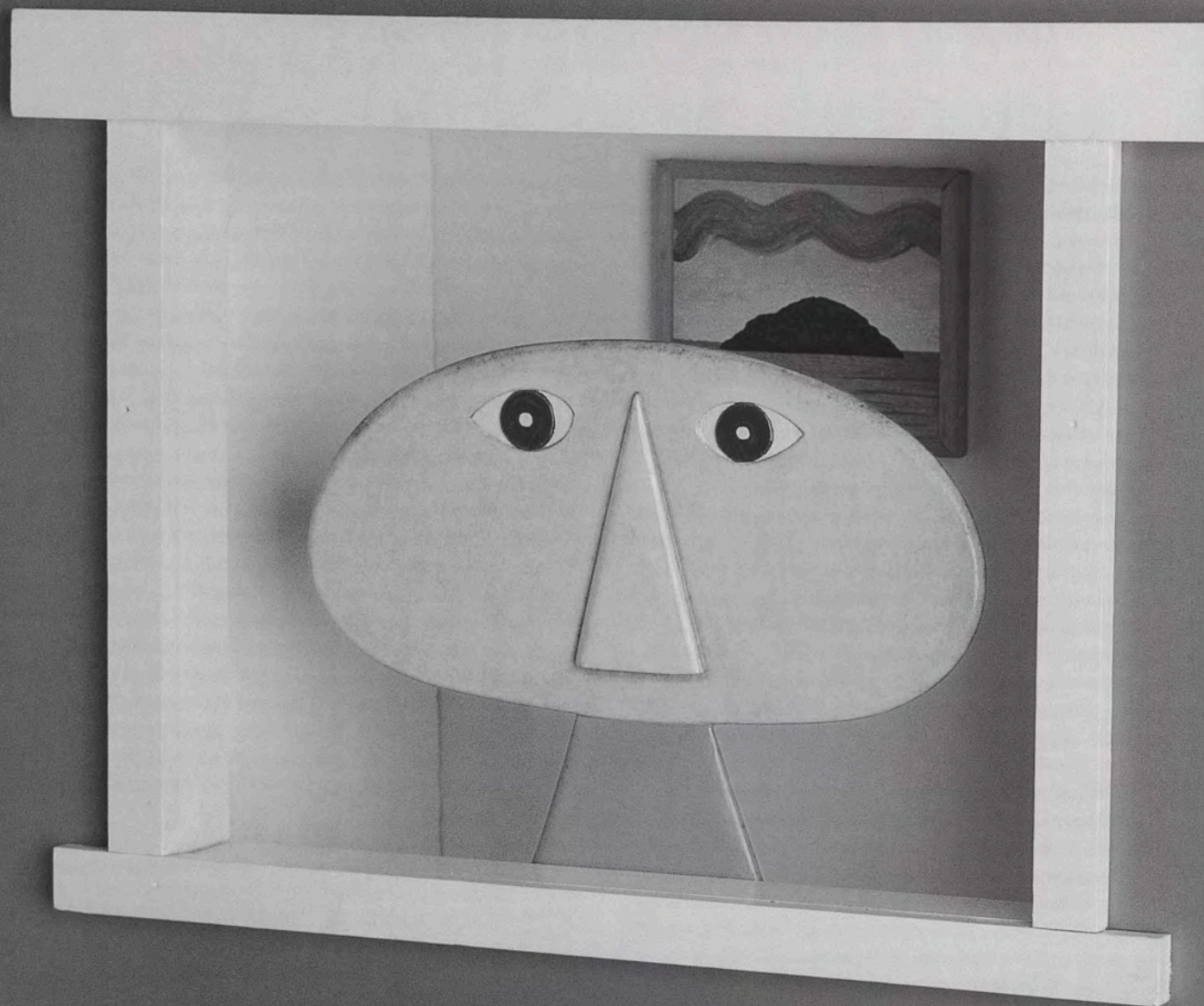


FIGURE 3
Tawera (detail)
 1971
 oil on board
 540 x 475 x 265mm
 Courtesy of the Illingworth Family

A Tourist in Paradise Lost— The Art of Michael Illingworth

one

My ancestors apparently first landed in England from Normandy with the 1066 mob and the first of the line landed in New Zealand in 1951. Looking through family records I find four gentlemen whom I consider had remarkable qualities. There was Sir Richard, Baron of the Exchequer during the reigns of both Henry IV and Edward VI (an office that stood the family in good stead for many a year thereafter). There was a Robert, who lost his head for political reasons, then a James, who was a tutor at Emmanuel [sic] College, Cambridge. The only other Michael down the years was the Reverend Michael, vicar of some undecipherable parish in the early sixteen hundreds. The first names [sic] was apparently a remarkably clever gentleman; the second remarkably stupid; the third a remarkable intellectual; and the fourth surely remarkably pious. The rest of my ancestors seem to have grazed the safe pastures of middle-class respectability without a single recorded deviation. I myself have reached the age of thirty-three without being activated by money, political, academic, religious or plain middle-class motivations. It has not been easy, yet over the years I have managed to paint a body of work sufficient now to start looming over me, and when this happens one begins to realise one's own size.¹

Michael Illingworth had an unerring sense of how to create and maintain his artistic identity. Arriving in Auckland in 1961, after two years in Europe and extensive experience working at Gallery One in London, Illingworth noisily declared himself a dedicated modern artist and railed against what he considered to be a lifeless bourgeois society and an amateurish art world which did not respect or allow for such a calling. As his 1965 artist statement reveals, Illingworth's adopted role was as an outsider, an individual sloughing off the demands of middle-class society in the pursuit of 'the good, the true and the beautiful.'² Ultimately, Illingworth's stance was underpinned by a belief in the power of art and the role of the artist to act upon or even transform these conditions.

Not surprisingly, Illingworth's outspoken views and bohemian appearance endeared him to the media, which he manipulated 13

expertly in the construction of a public artistic persona. While newspaper editors and reporters presumably responded to Illingworth’s capacity to titillate their reading public, Illingworth’s outsider identity was also manifested in his critical practice and reputation. In a 1965 interview with Barry Lett, Illingworth stated:

‘I am painting a little world of my own... In the paintings I am building a façade for my own world, against the establishment façade, the façade of hypocritical suburbia.

‘The little faces in my paintings with no mouths and with hands waving signify two things; the feeling of a “lost quality”—what am I doing here? where do I belong—and the feeling of possibility, purity, an ideal that perhaps might become something but is certainly nothing at the moment. This is a gay, naive, idealistic façade that I build as a defence against the ugly, dirty façade that I see around me. Many people seem to be phony. They don’t even exist on a basic human level. They are machine made.’³

Lett wrote in his preface to Illingworth’s statement, ‘As I talked with Michael Illingworth I became more and more aware of the impossibility, in fact the absurdity, of considering his painting and his way of life as being separate... His life and painting are equals, and in each he creates his own idyllic world. One without the other is impossible.’ Illingworth’s artistic practice and relationship to society has been interpreted in terms of his social critique, and his antagonistic stance has become, along with the words of this interview, one of the most frequently used methods for explaining his artistic intentions. In order to critique or comment on social issues, Illingworth has been presented, and presented himself, as standing outside society.

Yet an irony is evident here. Illingworth espoused his outsider philosophy in a newsletter sent to collectors and patrons by what was, in the eyes of many, the most prominent dealer gallery in the country. Auckland in the 1960s experienced an unparalleled rise in the status of art, and a corresponding development of institutions that fostered artistic practice. Supported nationally by the establishment of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council in 1964, and by fellowships such as the Frances Hodgkins in Dunedin (of which Illingworth was the first recipient in 1966), Auckland saw the steady emergence of dealer galleries, and the continued strength of the Auckland City Art Gallery, at this time the major institution for modernist art in the country.

Illingworth was tightly implicated in all this activity. He held his first exhibition at the New Vision Art Centre in Auckland in 1961. Featuring twelve paintings, some of which were completed overseas, the show was a modest debut, marked by critical commentary that seemed baffled about Illingworth’s sources. New Vision Art Centre had been established by Kees and Tina Hos, recent immigrants from the Netherlands who brought with them a European sensibility and aesthetic unusual for the time in New Zealand. The graphic identity, Bauhaus modernist in its styling, the shop with its hessian walls painted grey, its timber and metal shelving, and elegant displays of New Zealand craft, meant that the New Vision Art Centre came much closer to the model of European galleries than anything else of the time.⁴

In 1963, Illingworth had an exhibition at the Ikon Gallery, which had opened its doors as The Gallery in 1960. Accompanied by an illustrated catalogue with an artist’s biography that firmly established his international influences and context (born biologically and artistically overseas, his work in collections in Europe and America), Illingworth established himself as, and subsequently became, one of the key artists in the Ikon Gallery stable. The Ikon Gallery was run by Don Wood and Frank Lowe, both architecture students at the Auckland University. When Barry Lett Galleries opened in 1965, their stable incorporated the young artists from Lett’s previous Uptown Gallery, and the more established artists from Ikon Gallery, both of which had recently closed. Illingworth was now considered to be one of the gallery’s major artists, mentioned alongside painters such as Colin McCahon, Don Binney and Pat Hanly. He also shared exhibition space with these painters, and the other prominent artists of the time, in the Auckland City Art Gallery’s annual shows of contemporary painting throughout the 1960s. Illingworth’s status was validated nationally when he became the inaugural recipient of the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship in 1966.

The changing nature of the 1960s art world had significant ramifications for how artists lived, worked and defined themselves—and were defined by others. Illingworth’s media coverage maps out some of these transformations. The early critical bafflement in the face of Illingworth’s clearly modernist and European artistic production was joined by another theme—that of the artist as a struggling individual at the mercy of his creative urges. The *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* from 1963 quoted Illingworth as saying:

‘I must paint,’ he says. ‘I would like to put my paintings in the street and tell people to take what they want. But I must eat, I must paint and I need security... If I don’t sell my paintings, I’ll go to the bush and build a house of punga and paint in charcoal on the walls. Even painting on the sand is fun.’⁵

By 1965 this discourse changed, and was replaced by the idea of artists as successful professionals, actually making money from their art. Illingworth became a kind of poster boy for this shift. Under the heading ‘A Living Can Now be Made’, Hamish Keith announced:

Earning a living as a full time painter is rapidly becoming possible. It is still an enormous struggle, but painters like Michael Illingworth, whose one-man show opened this week at the Barry Lett Galleries, are proving that it can be done. Since 1962, he has devoted his entire energies to painting.⁶

As *New Zealand Vogue* made clear, the shift was a product of an emerging number of collectors and critics dedicated to contemporary New Zealand art.

People are talking about... the sudden and long overdue interest that art patrons and collectors are taking in the painting of Michael Illingworth. Since his return from Europe in 1961, Illingworth had sold virtually nothing in New Zealand until this year: now collectors are re-evaluating his work and critics pronouncing him a major figure on the local art scene.⁷

The 1960s was the decade dedicated to establishing professionalism in the arts, a phenomenon encouraged by the new context in which artistic production took place, fostered by the flow of money and professional services (criticism, dealers, arts bureaucracy) available to the artist. Professionalism was a notion very close to Illingworth’s heart, and something that he constantly referred to in his public statements. In 1970 he proposed:

‘I would like to see the community treat an artist as, say a junior lecturer in a university, pay him a subsistence salary, and use his paintings in exhibitions, taking them through the country. I don’t think the artist has a special place, but he’s part of the community and it should use him. This ‘ivory tower’ out here isn’t entirely the way I want to live, but my limited means make it impossible for me to mix—we can’t go to town, can’t see a film, have a beer with a friend if we want to.’⁸

Illingworth wasn’t alone in being concerned with such questions. Pat Hanly, an artist who, like Illingworth, returned to New Zealand

from London in the early 1960s, found a context in which the visual arts were not treated on any sort of professional basis. Russell Haley notes, ‘There was an expectation, Pat felt, that artists should not push themselves, should not talk money, and ought to earn a living in “proper jobs” like teaching. The precious amateur attitude still prevailed.’⁹ Robert Ellis, an artist who emigrated from Britain in the late 1950s, recalls that artists who produced no more than four or five paintings a year would consider themselves to be professionals. There was no sense in which painting was a full-time occupation.¹⁰

Illingworth and Hanly shared an awareness of the power of self-presentation as a tool to promote these transformations in the role of the artist. As Haley suggests of Hanly:

He once said that what he learnt from people like Hockney and Kitaj had less to do with painting than with how you presented yourself as an artist. It was important to be taken seriously and as long as painters fell for the bohemian cliché—beards, booze and paint-splattered jeans—they would only do themselves a disservice... Pat dressed neatly and in the first months of his return he managed to generate a great deal of press comment.¹¹

Illingworth was different to Hanly in his dress and approach. Yet many stories, like Hamish Keith’s recollection of Illingworth entering the Auckland Art Gallery, folding up a half-eaten banana and announcing that he was saving the rest for dinner, while discussing the plight of the creative individual, suggests he had an eye and a definite preference for the theatrical gesture which gets constantly rehearsed in his media profile.¹² Keith’s later appointment as chairperson of the Arts Council, the funding agency Illingworth constantly battled, was pointedly addressed by the artist when he requested a relief parcel of Keith’s old clothing. He stated in a newspaper profile that:

‘I realized that with status and appearances to keep up, Hamish would have lots of shirts and breeches that he couldn’t use, so I wrote to him asking for them... I’m still wearing them; in fact the ones I’ve got on today are Hamish Keith ones.’¹³

Yet Illingworth was by no means a believer in the Romantic notion that suffering is the soil from which the masterpiece springs. Illingworth, needless to say, would not play the role of genius starving in the garret—he demanded to be well-fed, working 15

in a spacious, well-appointed studio with an assistant, so he could make the work he desired. Arguing bitterly that 'Any suggestion that it is good for an intellectual to live the life of hardship and struggle is false propaganda', Illingworth concluded: 'I'm a person and I like to eat well and dress warmly just like anyone else.'¹⁴

While institutional support may have seemed like a means to achieve professionalism in the arts, Illingworth often articulated these support structures as a hindrance. His report to the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship Committee, for example, was a litany of complaints about the conditions under which he was expected to work, all of which were underpinned by a total inability to accept that the artist's needs should, under any circumstances, be treated with such disregard. Illingworth concluded: 'As I now feel my career is in jeopardy, I must ask that I be repatriated to a working environment of my own choosing—and that I be given some extension of this fellowship year as compensation for time wasted.'¹⁵

The same kind of issues are true for Illingworth's battles with the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council. When Illingworth did not receive sufficient funds to create large-scale paintings in 1972, he refused to accept the grant if the money had to be used for that purpose, since the sum in question was insufficient to allow him to work fulltime as an artist. At stake, Illingworth argued, is the integrity of the artist: 'I say the artist needs to be free and his own man at all times and to play a part that ingratiates one with an academy deliberately is, on contemplation, overstepping the bounds of reason.'¹⁶

According to Gordon H. Brown, the mid-1960s was the point that marked the end of the outsider modern artist in New Zealand. He suggests that all artists who were working in modern styles until about the mid-1960s were outsiders, but then the powers changed, a gallery system and market developed, and artists could no longer legitimately claim outsider status.¹⁷ This tension can be read into the circumstances surrounding Illingworth's 1967 show at the Barry Lett Galleries, in which a single collector purchased almost all the paintings during the opening, making it a sell-out exhibition. Barry Lett recalls the hushed silence that surrounded him as he triumphantly placed red sale stickers on all the work.¹⁸ It was immediately announced that this exhibition had made history in New Zealand art. Illingworth's response toward his ground-breaking exhibition reveals the dilemma of pursuing an outsider stance

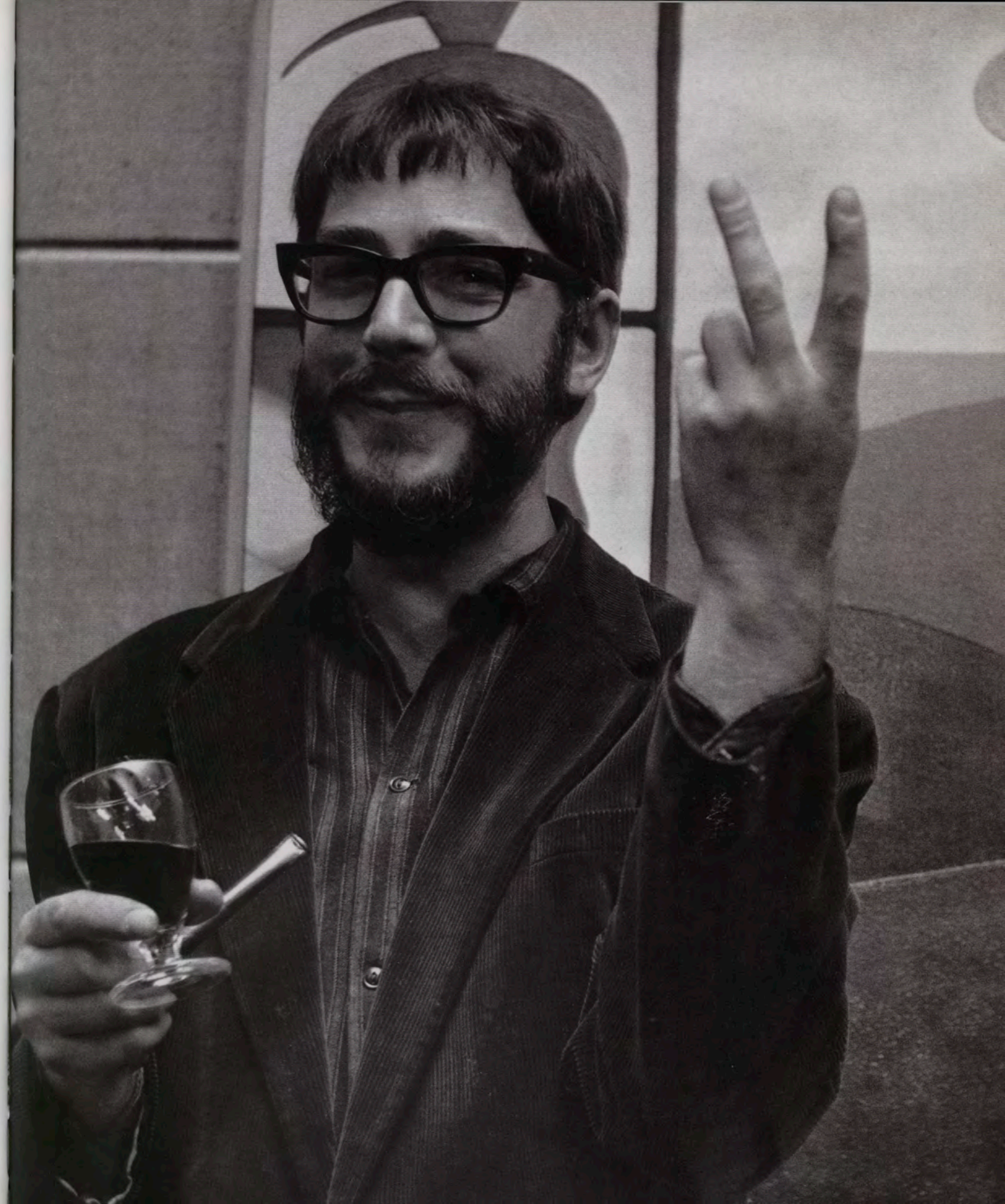
16 from a position within the system. According to Barry Lett:

[Illingworth] did not quite know how to take it. There was some element of being offended by it in his personality. Suddenly he was accepted, he was successful. His whole premise had suddenly collapsed.¹⁹

The photographer for the *New Zealand Herald* who had been called in to record the occasion had to capture a shot when Illingworth was distracted. Each time Illingworth saw the camera directed at him he would, in classic avant-garde fashion, fully aware of the power of the photographic image, defiantly do the fingers.

The events surrounding Illingworth's 1965 exhibition at the Barry Lett Galleries demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between artist, dealer and the wider arts infrastructure. The gallery, faced with a complaint of obscenity over *As Adam and Eve* (1965) [Plate 6], rejected police demands to remove the painting, and eventually the complaint was dismissed by Attorney General Joseph Hanan. The gallery directors took the lead in defending these charges, and the issue was extended well beyond Illingworth's painting. The lawyer acting for the gallery, Mr R. L. Maclaren, proclaimed that 'If any prosecution is made, it will be regarded as a test case and defended to the teeth.'²⁰ A campaign was fought around *As Adam and Eve* regarding censorship in the arts and the rights of the artist in relation to the public which, as Maclaren stated, had yet to be tested in New Zealand. A decade later, after two similar controversies and a reproduction of the same painting in the *New Zealand Listener* sparked a number of angry letters to the editor, Illingworth publicly addressed 'this continuous barrage of bigotry some of my work as a painter is subject to'.²¹ This episode reveals the significant shift of the 1960s—artists, supported by their dealers and the wider network dedicated to contemporary art, were no longer alone in their struggle to assert their rights.

FIGURE 4
Illingworth at the opening of his 1967
sell-out exhibition at the Barry Lett
Galleries, Auckland
Courtesy of New Zealand Herald



two

Illingworth’s claim, made in 1965, that his art acted as ‘a façade for my own world, against the establishment façade, the façade of hypocritical suburbia’ needs to be seen within the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Escaping ‘hypocritical suburbia’ was a key idea expressed by those promoting alternative forms of community. Leo Thompson, a member of the Huia commune (outside Auckland), describes this philosophy:

Aesthetics and sanity decided us on the country. The city was full of ‘well-balanced’ neurotics. In the city, one seemed to need drugs such as alcohol and cigarettes—chemicals to off-set the tensions of a commercial consciousness. You have to have trees and living water; locate yourself in the organic environment... greed has taken over [the city]. They have become the products of fear, uneasiness, queasiness. And they are ugly. Only philosophers and artists should be allowed to plan environments or build permanent objects.²²

These sentiments constantly appear in Illingworth’s own writings, and they began to inform the choices he made about where, and how, he and his family lived. After finishing with the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship in Dunedin—a city he described as ‘formed by man for man to live in with dignity... The streets here are made to live in—for humans to make progress through. It is not like Auckland. Auckland has been manufactured’—Illingworth moved to Puhoi (north of Auckland), where he lived with his growing family until the early 1970s, when he finally moved to a farm in Coroglen on the Coromandel Peninsula.²³ The Coroglen property was initially purchased in a joint venture between the artist, his dealers at Barry Lett Galleries, and Jocelyn Strewe. Before Illingworth bought the other owners out, the farm was intended as a kind of weekend commune which the Auckland partners could visit, with Illingworth acting as a caretaker.

Illingworth shared similar social and artistic ideals with James K. Baxter, with whom he had significant periods of contact over approximately twenty years. Illingworth wrote:

My contact with Jim was first made in [19]53 or 4 and it was from the start personal. We were aware of one another at first sight and both had a sense of antagonism that flared into hostile argument during consequent meetings during the 50s. We lost sight of each other for some years

meeting again one Sunday at the start of our fellowships in Otago... These years of friendship have been true... I always gained from Jim’s added years of experience and I like to feel he gained from my more youthful vigour. A mutual stimulation. I the warrior, he the strategist—we helped each other to many a conclusion.²⁴

On another occasion Illingworth wrote in a notebook:

Jim Baxter said you are the warrior of our tribe Mike, and I was not old enough for that responsibility and he embarrassed me. Therefore I knew that one day he would be right.²⁵

Baxter’s views on the social responsibilities of the artist closely match Illingworth’s own attitudes. Baxter, for example, wrote in the 1950s:

I come now to what I feel to be the basic problem of the poet in New Zealand, and no doubt elsewhere—that of social criticism. In what degree should a poet be the entertainer, in what degree the physician of his society? Plainly, a physician who has no bedside manner will get the sack. Again, a poet may feel no necessity to communicate a social philosophy: he may be content to state as adequately as possible his intentions concerning personal relationships and natural events. But I feel that the protest of the socially minded critic is justified. We are (I speak of the human family, not only of western civilisation) in the midst of great calamity, physical and spiritual. The poet or prose writer who turns his eyes from the fact of human suffering is involved in self-betrayal. We have greater need of prophets than we have of mechanics.²⁶

In 1967, the year following Illingworth’s tenure as the Frances Hodgkins Fellow, Baxter’s lectures from the Burns Fellowship were published as *The Man on the Horse*. Since Baxter and Illingworth were in close communication at this point, it offers an interesting framework for the way in which both artists would have thought about their roles.

In another sense, you could call an artist a tribesman cut off from his tribe—perhaps they never existed; perhaps they did exist, when men were aware of a sacred relation between themselves, as a local interdependent group, and the life of nature, that other half of the creation which passively or actively confronted them.²⁷

It is the reference to the artist as tribesman that is significant here, a notion reflected in Illingworth’s own statements about

his connections to the poet. One of the central events in Illingworth’s life, expressed many times in his biographical statements, was his encounter with the Māori community at Matauri Bay, Northland. According to Illingworth, his first visit took place during February 1954.

...I was met by a fine upright standing figure of an old gentleman with tufts of white hair atop his fine old frame, bespectacled and clad in a pink wool singlet, Police and Fireman’s braces and brownish corduroy trousers. ‘Tom Tom’ Tamati Tame fed me a kai. I have never left—in short, I became his boy and would drive him to the Huis and Tangi, in a Ford SM truck we purchased, all over Northland. I would leave him for a few months of work in Auckland or Tauranga during the winter to earn some money, but spent months of each year living with him until June of 57, when my father died, and I decided to return to Europe to find out more of the art of painting.²⁸

In a sense, Illingworth did find a tribe, in the same way that Jerusalem and the Ngā Mokai (the name he gave to those who lived in the community, which means ‘the fatherless’) became Baxter’s, and this contact remained on Illingworth’s mind, usually in contrast with bourgeois Pākehā society. Sometimes the contrast was sharp and nasty, as when Illingworth publicly compared the Māori woman (‘a real lady’) to the ‘arthritic duck’ movements of even the ‘most elegant’ Pākehā woman. The upshot is that ‘Maoris have a great deal more to offer pakehas than pakehas can give them.’²⁹ This real experience took on a kind of mythic, idealised value for Illingworth, both in terms of his artistic identity and within his painting. For other artists too, most notably Tony Fomison, Māori culture served as an originary engagement, a psychic space from which contemporary New Zealand (Pākehā) society might be critiqued.

In *Recent Trends in New Zealand Poetry*, Baxter wrote that ‘One of the functions of artists in a community is to provide a healthy and permanent element of rebellion; not to become a species of civil servant.’ Baxter continued:

A man who is working as a school teacher, a tradesman, or a government official in a society which he knows to be unjust, cannot dare to think clearly on moral issues; for the society is part of his physical and even psychological security. If he breaks with the society and departs into the wilderness in customary Romantic style, then he loses brotherhood with all but similar outcasts. What Justice demands is something more difficult—

that he should remain as a cell of good living in a corrupt society, and in this situation by writing and example attempt to change it.³⁰

There is a certain bitter irony here, in that both Baxter and Illingworth, if for different reasons, ended by being unable to fulfil this dictum. Baxter became ‘trapped by the isolation of the Romantic’ at Jerusalem, unable to maintain his brotherhood with society.³¹ Illingworth, a ‘celebrated artist turned embryo farmer on land at Coromandel’, encountered the same problems of communication and sustainability.³² Not only did he end up living apart from the city, and therefore away from those for whom his critique was intended, but he also found himself without the resources and time to paint. Illingworth seemingly remained ambivalent about the outcome of his decisions, writing:

To retain a generosity of mind after many years of deprivation is a hard task. To remain as a painter through this past 12 years has demanded much discipline and constant restraint of all but the most simple needs. The constant balancing of one sacrifice against another. Does this sharpen or blunt the edge?³³

three

Illingworth was one of the key artists at Barry Lett Galleries, which granted him considerable status in the Auckland art scene of the 1960s. But, while his work was considered to be significant, it was also considered by contemporaries like Hamish Keith to sit somehow outside the typical concerns of the period.³⁴ His clear grasp of painting technique, and the quality of his work demanded attention, yet in the face of the paintings people seemed to have nothing to say. The discourses of the period eddy around his work, seemingly unable to touch it, or elicit much in the way of its connections with other artistic production of the time.

There are various explanations for Illingworth’s position. In the 1960s New Zealand was a conservative society with a distinct distrust of outsiders. Keith points to a kind of cultural xenophobia which existed, and which certainly was applied to Illingworth, who was not only English by birth, but had begun painting overseas. A form of cultural cringe, and an exaggerated sense of the besieged nature of art in the 1960s, often meant that returning artists were shunned by those who had stayed, and saw themselves as truer to this country, and to the struggle that needed to be waged on art’s behalf.³⁵ This is something noted by Russell Haley in his biography of Pat Hanly:

There were moments when Pat felt he was regarded as an aggressive interloper in an art scene which was too comfortable with its present conditions... The late Michael Illingworth, Pat’s contemporary, was another painter arguing for a changed vision of the artist in society. According to Pat, Michael suffered physically for his strongly expressed views. Illingworth, Pat said, was punched on the nose in Queen Street for having dared to criticise some aspects of New Zealand life in a television interview.³⁶

There is no doubt that this cultural difference was also perceived in terms of style, since Illingworth’s work seemingly bore little resemblance to his contemporaries. According to Billy Apple, who knew Illingworth in London during the period he worked at Gallery One, there were a number of painters who showed with Victor Musgrave at the gallery, and whose work is clearly the origin point of Illingworth’s own style.³⁷ This would seem to be particularly true for Illingworth’s work until 1965, when the expressionist, textured surfaces give way to the hard-edged ‘realism’ of the ‘classic’ Illingworth painting. While Illingworth tailored this distinctive style to New Zealand subjects, and framed his paintings with a

social critique based on the problems and lacks of this country, it still left his painting standing somewhat outside the normal stylistic concerns of his peers. At least, so it appeared to observers at that time. Today, Illingworth clearly belongs with the hard-edged realists such as Don Binney, and younger pop-inspired painters such as Richard Killeen and Ian Scott.

Illingworth’s ambivalent position was heightened by the desire of this period to formulate a history and context for art in this country, another offshoot of the new professionalism. This was a constructive process, based on seeking out and articulating shared concerns, values and influences—such as landscape, and a concern with national identity—which inevitably further isolated those whose practice fell outside these boundaries.³⁸ Lineages and circles were established, in which Illingworth sat awkwardly or, more often, not at all. For example, Keith wrote in the introduction to the *New Zealand Painting 1965* catalogue:

The nineteenth century watercolourists working in the Auckland area demonstrated a crispness of technique similar to that of the contemporary painters. While it may seem a far cry from Kinder, Hoyte and Sharpe to Hanly, Binney and McCahon, there are certain undeniable similarities.³⁹

Although from the point of view of the 1960s, Illingworth’s art was not easily assimilated within the national tradition, it was his engagement with landscape that became the most commonly used method for granting the artist a context. The conservation-focused Barry Lett Galleries exhibition *Earth/Earth* in 1971 bracketed Illingworth with Colin McCahon, Don Binney, Michael Smither and Toss Woollaston as artists ‘whose territory has been the land.’⁴⁰ While in Illingworth’s painting, landscape can seem like a kind of afterthought, or a background detail against which a drama of alienation and protest is staged, it in fact forms one of Illingworth’s most sustained subjects of investigation. While this was in part noted by critics and curators in the 1960s, a sense of unease remains about Illingworth’s approach towards landscape. In a 1968 review, Gordon H. Brown noted ‘the odd little *Landscape of Puhoi* [Figure 5] that is simply observed as a real and not imagined landscape’.⁴¹ What Brown points out is that the usual set of visual quotation marks around the landscape that commonly occurs in Illingworth’s images such as *Portraits from Society and Landscape* (1967) [Plate 8], or the sometimes heavy-handed gendering of the land in paintings such as *Land, Land and Island* (1970) [Plate 12], is absent here.

Brown’s comment offers a possible clue as to why Illingworth fits so awkwardly into New Zealand art history, despite his use of characteristic subjects and his seemingly close relationship to the hard-edged realist painters like Don Binney who came to prominence during the same period. Illingworth is connected to Binney through subject—landscapes filled with iconic symbols—and style—tightly painted surfaces, clarified and simplified landscapes. But whereas Binney’s landscapes and birds, while impossibly schematic, are natural elements, Illingworth’s scenes refuse to exclude the imagined. Even where the landscape is ‘real’, to use Brown’s terminology, the complex relationships between the parts of the image, particularly when the painting is structured by the grid, promote the landscape as a metaphor or symbol of the unattainable, and thus belonging to the realm of the imagined, a visual indication of the loss sustained by those who live within the bounds of civilisation. Landscape gets lost within sociological discourse, which makes these images that much more slippery in relation to the phenomena of identity building.⁴²

Critic Mark Young has described Illingworth’s approach to this subject as ‘the creation of an imaginary landscape to express more fully one’s philosophy’ which ‘stretches from the berserk world of Hieronymus Bosch to the whimsical fantasies of Paul Klee and Joan Miro’.⁴³ Gordon H. Brown suggests that part of the reservation toward Illingworth’s art was due to its perceived surrealist overtones, an approach that was never accepted in New Zealand.⁴⁴ From the perspective of today, Illingworth’s supposed debt to surrealism is not a barrier to placing his work within the artistic context of the 1960s and 1970s, but rather suggests the way in which his paintings actually belong to the tradition of ‘anxious images’ that came to prominence in the 1970s.⁴⁵



FIGURE 5
Landscape of Puhoi
1968
oil on canvas
200 x 250mm
Collection of Ian Prior, Wellington



FIGURE 6
An Offering to the Queen of a New Land
1962
oil on canvas
510 x 610mm
Collection of the Baxter Family, Paekakariki

four

The most common explanation provided for the subject of Illingworth’s art is found in his 1965 statement that his work is a response to the ‘hypocritical façade of suburbia’. His work, like the artist himself, critiques the dehumanised dwellers of suburban New Zealand, with their blank gazes and ‘lost quality’. Petar Vuletic wrote in 1968:

Illingworth’s figures stare out of the canvas, mute. This is man’s tragedy—he is enclosed by society which itself isolates him. He is an individual entity in a group that has overcome all individuality and imposes a stagnant uniformity. But not only is ‘man’ lost within society but also within the modern world. The figure staring out of a landscape has lost not only his voice in society but also his senses—a being subservient both to social norms, and to machines.⁴⁶

Acting in the role of social critic, Illingworth’s work illustrates such themes in a self-conscious manner. His 1963 exhibition at the Ikon Gallery is probably the single most intensive statement of this kind. The paintings can be divided into representations of the City and the Wilderness—to borrow binary descriptions Baxter uses in his criticism—signalled through Illingworth’s titles and opposed formal principles. *Too Far for You to See* (1962) with its open composition and use of highly-keyed colour, is vastly different to the dark sombre colour scheme and closed, gridded composition of *A City in Exile* (1963) [Plate 3]. *Too Far for You to See* and other paintings such as *An Offering to the Queen of a New Land* (1962) [Figure 6] depict figures in the landscape—in a wilderness of magic and mystery, of centaurs and other strange beasts. This is a world apart from the scenes of the city where the presence of traffic lights, parking signs and television sets (broadcasts began in Auckland in 1960) are testament to what Illingworth regarded as the increasing regulation of the human spirit within city limits. Baxter claimed that it is only from the wilderness that ‘the city is seen in its true light, as the world of triviality and injustice.’⁴⁷

Illingworth seemed to share Baxter’s faith that the regenerative powers of art must be drawn from the wilderness. He registered these ideas both thematically and in his artistic practice. The heavily textured surfaces of this early work, often incorporating shells and pebbles to indicate what Illingworth saw as the ‘purity’ of nature, clearly suggest allegiance to the wilderness side of the

binary, and Illingworth would not have been disappointed with critics labelling his paintings ‘at times akin to child or primitive art.’⁴⁸ Baxter described a similar quality he admired in the works of contemporary poets such as Alistair Campbell and Denis Glover as ‘animism’, and claimed that society’s loss of this quality ‘is probably the greatest privation we must suffer in our materialist, technological civilisation.’⁴⁹

The themes of fleeing, retreat and exile that dominate the paintings from the 1963 exhibition are presented as the only response to the horrors of modern civilisation. Illingworth especially represents this horror through the presence of the sun, which, pictorially resolved into an atom (nucleus encircled by electrons), symbolises the ever present threat of the atomic bomb. The idiosyncratic form of his human figures also emerges from the fear of atomic/nuclear destruction. Illingworth wrote:

The shape of my heads I take from that which nature has drafted as the shape strongest for protection (seen in such as an egg). My bodies come from the pyramid. The head I make is often to act as a canopy against nuclear fallout. The pyramid seems a sensible fallout shelter also. An Egyptian deity lay safely for a long time in such a structure until pillaged by barbarians.⁵⁰

It is in these paintings from the early 1960s that Illingworth introduces the grid as a compositional element which suggests alienation and fragmentation. A means of expressing multiple scenes of city life, the grid becomes a key device by which Illingworth indicates the disjunction of suburban society. In later paintings such as *Portraits from Society and Landscape* (1967) [Plate 8], the grid indicates the separation of the blank-faced figures from the landscape that fills the central frame of the composition.

Māori motifs appear in Illingworth’s art during this period, most notably the three-fingered hand used in representations of the human figure in carving. *Citizen of the Polished City* (1963) [Figure 8], features a three-fingered figure; in *Dwellers in the Distant Village* (c.1963) [Figure 7], the three-fingered hand is both attached to a figure, and featured as a disembodied element inside one of the rectangles (which is the more common use of the motif in the paintings from this period). Illingworth uses this motif until the mid 1960s, when it disappears. Such motifs are not at all common in Illingworth’s work after this time; the only equivalent gesture is

Untitled from 1971 [Plate 14], in which a spiral appears in the lower front of the image, accompanied by two holes, as though the motif was carved in stone, a kind of pendant, or a relief incised into rock, into the bones of the land.

Illingworth’s experiences with the Māori of Matauri Bay in the 1950s, may explain why he included Māori motifs into his work. As an indication of difference, a sign of Māori art and an alternative system of representation, the three-fingered motif indicates an alternative realm to that of the Pākehā city and suburbs. Gil Docking’s reading of Illingworth’s work supports this interpretation, describing *Painting with Rainbow I* (1965) [Plate 4] as a representation of the distance between the ‘ticky-tacky cottages of suburbia’ and the ‘romantic memory’ night-time landscape of Matauri Bay in the upper right corner of the painting.⁵¹ The rainbow links the ‘boxed-in’ rate-payers with their ‘military formation’ cottages and the individual cottage at Matauri Bay, but refuses any real relationship between the two realms, instead highlighting their difference and distance. For Illingworth, Matauri Bay acts both as a residual landscape against which his figures and suburbia can be posed; and the site of experience where he becomes initiated into a new relationship with the land, with nature, that changes him personally. The graphic representation of Māori motifs in the early paintings of the 1960s convey similar kinds of meanings.

Illingworth’s most enduring symbol of the disfunctionality of urban society appears in the character of the Piss-Quicks, first seen in 1961. Although *Thomas P.Q.* (1961) [Plate 2] is in the characteristic textured style of Illingworth’s early work, the iconography is fully developed. When the Piss-Quick returns in 1967, this time accompanied by his wife, the figure is tightly rendered and precisely painted, a result of Illingworth’s now mature style. The most literal explanation for the Piss-Quicks was told to Steve Rumsey by Illingworth himself, who said the figure represented a specific type of middle aged man he observed in London, who would move quickly through art exhibitions, barely glancing at the art, before asking directions to the toilet.⁵² In his hand, he holds a coin, ready in case he should need to pay for the use of the facilities.

One of the obvious iconographical elements of the Piss-Quicks is their clothing, which helps establish their identities and values. As *Mr and Mrs Thomas Piss-Quick* (1968) [Plate 11] illustrates, the Piss-Quicks are dressed up, they have both the time and the money to

spend on what are clearly meant to suggest expensive, conservative, garments. The coin, held at the ready by the male Piss-Quick, literally indicates wealth. Like the clothes and the coin, the titles clearly locate the figures within a certain strata of society, suggesting they are men and women of consequence of a specific type—Kelburn or Remuera businessmen, and their wives, the Ladies Who Lunch. This is a conservative, patriarchal society, in which the women gain their identity and position through their husbands. While the men gesture, however ineffectually, to the viewer, the women have no hands, no voice, no individual identities.

There are a large group of paintings by Illingworth which, through title (*Portrait of a Man of Consequence*, 1979) or clothing (*Man with a Red Tie*, 1969), could be linked with the Piss-Quicks. These figures wear the same kinds of garments as the Piss-Quicks, and each portrait, whether of an individual or a couple, is located in an interior space, more or less marked as domestic. Where the figures have arms, they are always hand-less, usually located on the right side of the body for men, and on the left side for women—although, when women appear with men, they remain armless. Some of these paintings offer clear trappings of power: *Gent of Consequence* (1971) [Plate 9], one of a number of paintings with this or a similar title, looks like a lawyer in a gown and wig. More usually, the men are left indet-erminately employed, each with their oval heads, ambiguous eyes and sombre, important clothes.

The portraits of women offer a more problematic image, for in many of these paintings the female partner in a couple is naked, while her male counterpart is dressed formally. *Lady of Consequence* (1968) [Plate 10] for example, features a semi-naked woman playing solitaire. The female figures all have long hair and breasts, and are often accompanied by smooth, round pieces of fruit. The titles of these paintings usually grant the figures some kind of identity by emphasising their positions within systems of power and social relations, most notably gender inequality.

If the Piss-Quicks are Illingworth’s weapon against the distortions and corruption of the city and suburbs, their mirror images are the paintings featuring Adam and Eve. Generally Illingworth’s most controversial paintings, these images stand in direct contrast to the clothed and domesticated Piss-Quicks. Adam and Eve are almost always represented in the landscape. They are always naked, and not just naked in the manner of the female figures in 23



FIGURE 7
Dwellers in the Distant Village
c.1963
oil on canvas
593 x 639mm
Collection of the Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin



FIGURE 8
Citizen of the Polished City
1963
mixed media on canvas
665 x 565 x 20mm
Collection of the Waikato Museum of Art & History, Te Whare Taonga o Waikato

OPPOSITE PAGE
FIGURE 9
Man and Woman Figures with Still Life and Flowers
1969
oil on canvas
400 x 350mm
Collection of Tim & Helen Beaglehole, Wellington

paintings like *Man and Woman Figures with Still Life and Flowers* (1969) [Figure 9], where breasts are the only physical indication of sex. The Adam and Eve paintings are explicitly genital, their bodies anatomically detailed. Clearly, Adam and Eve are a man and woman of consequence, framed by their prominence in Judeo-Christian art and literature, but their nakedness—their genitals—places them outside the web of social relations and power dynamics that indicate consequence for the Piss-Quicks. Both Adam and Eve gesture with single raised arms to the viewer.

In the Adam and Eve images, Illingworth creates a pre-fall Eden in which men and women live in harmony with each other and the environment. With the exception of *Adam with Gun* (1966), none of these paintings hint at the expulsion to come, and the ruptured humanity that this creates in the biblical narrative. As Illingworth wrote in the 1970s:

The naked and unashamed Adam and Eve are beyond the comprehension of people with clothes hang-ups. Each and every one of our ancestors were the product of phallic energy. Those of us who have transpired from the action of male and female sex organs plus the unashamed meeting of two pairs of human eyes are lucky indeed. I contend that only lovers will face Adam and Eve.⁵³

There is a real irony here, considering the hostile reaction to *As Adam and Eve* in 1965, when it was exhibited at the Barry Lett Galleries. The 'Piss-Quicks' who complained about the painting, seeing only indecency in the nakedness, hold the kind of hypocritical beliefs that Illingworth parodied in his Piss-Quick paintings. Illingworth was firmly irreligious, and seems to have subscribed to a kind of post-D.H. Lawrence attitude to nudity and sexuality, so the religious origins of Adam and Eve should not be taken as a suggestion of personal belief on the artist's part.⁵⁴ But if a fall from grace is understood as more than a theological statement about God's relationship to human nature, it would seem plausible to view the sadness in the eyes of Illingworth's figures as representing fallen humanity remembering its pre-fallen state.

Illingworth's paintings seem to move along a continuum of the relationship between human culture and nature, which may explain the shifting visibility of landscape in his work. In *Portrait of a Man of Consequence* (1979) the arched window that offers a vista onto the landscape serves to emphasise the Piss-Quick's disengagement from





FIGURE 10
Adam and Eve
 1965
 oil on canvas
 915 x 1025mm
 University of Otago, Frances Hodgkins Fellowship Collection

nature. The anthropomorphic landscapes of the 1970s that identify human shapes and forms in nature offer an interesting take on this relationship. These landscapes are entirely free of the suburban clutter Illingworth often presents as a mark of the debris of bourgeois culture; rather, paintings such as *Land, Land and Island* (1971) [Plate 12] depict explicitly male and female forms residing beneath or within the landscape. The pā site on top of a breast-like mountain form in *Pah Hill* (1971) is a mark of human presence unusual for these paintings. It is suggestive of Illingworth's belief, as he expressed in the *Earth/Earth* catalogue, that Māori culture was more in tune with the primordial forces of nature, which is the essential subject of these landscapes.

We the Europeans who have usurped the tribal right, the ancestral lands in a most undignified manner eg through the office of shyster lawyers and grafting politicians, are hardly the ones to talk conservation for as a breed we stand by and live for the perpetuation of a way of life that means the complete destruction of the natural order in the name of materialism... Save Manapouri etc by all means—seal it entirely from the junk of our civilisation—let man only go there naked and on foot to learn to love this land as do our Maori hosts when they speak of the ancestral lands.⁵⁵

In their celebration of 'the natural order', the anthropomorphic landscapes are closely connected to the Adam and Eve paintings. Adam and Eve are depicted in the landscape, not separated from it, and like these landscape paintings symbolise a now lost, natural order. This shared symbolism is characteristic of the way Illingworth's paintings constantly play off one another, almost in the manner of a series.

Illingworth connected this theme to his artistic practice. He discussed the creative process as a tapping into elemental forces, and it is this ability that separates the creative individual from the *Piss-Quick*. In the 1965 interview with Barry Lett, he outlined his approach to painting:

'Painting for me is sometimes a joy, sometimes an agony. I have to be utterly shut away so that I can completely indulge myself, so that I can do anything I like: attack, destroy, cry, vomit. Sometimes I get into a wild frenzy and hurl things at my painting. But something will evolve from this fury. When I am painting well I am painting obliviously—I don't even know afterwards how I got the colours. I never plan a painting. It unrolls

as I go along, it just happens. Most of my paintings are spontaneous gestures—the more spontaneous the more pure. Far too many painters force things out. They must come straight from the heart, from the primeval being... The initial attack is spontaneous, blind. But then the painting has to be rounded off. There is a gradual process of refinement, hours and hours of work until it is finished and then I am utterly exhausted by the effort.'⁵⁶

This statement is revealing in regards to Illingworth's practice, occurring at the point when there is a dramatic shift in his stylistic production, away from the earlier expressionistic work toward a tighter figurative style. Petar Vuletic characterised the new work as 'icons'.⁵⁷ On the whole, the later work tends to be small in scale and often deals with the traditional art historical genres of still-life, portraiture and landscape. Technically the 'icons' are based on a meticulous attention to the surface of the painting, building up layers of oil paint with the aim of capturing what Illingworth's valued source book Sir Charles Eastlake's *Methods and Materials of Painting of the Great Schools and Artists* describes as 'the gem-like quality'.⁵⁸ This is a time-consuming process, dependent on careful planning and skill. There is little room for the expressive gesture which Illingworth celebrates and connects to 'the primeval being' in this interview.

This stylistic shift was marked by other changes in Illingworth's practice, notably in the ways he characterised and presented his art. In 1965 he stated 'Painting has no intellectual meaning and my work carries no message,' an abrupt shift from an artist who had always been vocal in discussing the content of his art and who was characterised as the socially minded critic of society.⁵⁹ Illingworth's next exhibition, at the Barry Lett Galleries in 1967, was titled *Paintings With No Titles to Obey*. While the paintings strangely did have titles, they were very prosaic, far removed from the suggestive literary titles belonging to the earlier expressionist work. The *Paintings and Constructions* exhibition in the same gallery in 1971 best reveals Illingworth's now preferred method of presentation. The exhibition consisted of the anthropomorphic landscapes and portraits, hung along either side of the gallery.⁶⁰ This presentation encouraged a reading of these paintings within the nature/culture binary that seems to structure Illingworth's oeuvre. Yet all the work was untitled, unnumbered and there was no guide to the chronology of the exhibition. Hamish Keith, reviewing the exhibition, was unimpressed with this 'stony literary silence'.⁶¹ 27

It is incorrect to say that Illingworth himself stopped talking at this point, because his media profile remained in place, articulated from the 1970s around his double life as an artist and farmer. He remained voluble, opinionated, still offering critiques about society, especially in relationship to the environment—brought on, one imagines, by his financial and emotional interest in Coroglen, his property on the Coromandel Peninsula. When his presence in the press fell away in response to his lessening exhibition and gallery profile, and by the slowing production of new work, his personal correspondence, and notebooks, marked the continuing flood of characteristic Illingworth opinion. His work, on the other hand, became removed from any immediate identification with his chosen role of societal conscience. The *Piss-Quicks* and *Adam and Eve* figures, so closely related to his own role modelling of life, drop away in favour of more idiosyncratic subjects: luminous nudes and still lifes, landscapes filled with the evidence of his imagination (magnifying rings, floating canoes, and *taniwha*). It is as though Illingworth the painter of social critique entirely embraced the strategy he outlined in his 1965 interview with Barry Lett. Illingworth moved deeper into the creation and imaging of ‘a little world of my own’ posed against ‘the establishment façade, the façade of hypocritical suburbia’.

five

The 1963 photograph by Steve Rumsey [Figure 1], produced for the Ikon Gallery catalogue, suggests something important about Illingworth’s art.⁶² Illingworth and Rumsey collaborated to construct a representation of Illingworth as the quintessential modernist artist. The essential function of this photograph is to present what are coded values and ideas regarding the character and purpose of the artist to his audience. Focusing on Illingworth’s head and piercing gaze to symbolise the artistic vision and psychological insights integral to the mystique of the expressive artist, the dramatically lit image draws on the pictorial conventions and symbolic associations of the modernist tradition of photographic portraits, most famously pursued by Brassai, Alexander Liberman, and Hans Namuth. The emphasis on ‘the eye of the artist’ in Illingworth’s portrait suggests what Rumsey considered to be the essential feature of Illingworth’s practice—‘the critical view of New Zealand society he robustly expressed in his paintings’.⁶³

The act of seeing assumes crucial significance in Illingworth’s art. As the Rumsey photograph reveals, the idea of critical vision is central to Illingworth’s projected artistic identity, continually rehearsed in notions of seeing through the façade of civilisation, or identifying the extraordinary and poetic in nature. On another level, the eye, and its gaze, is fundamental to the meanings produced within Illingworth’s paintings, since seeing, or its lack, characterises much of the social disfunction Illingworth describes through the *Piss-Quicks* with their vacuous stares and blank faces. The literally one-eyed arts professionals and confused gallery patrons that populate his paintings from 1984 clearly lack this critical faculty. Finally, especially in his later work, through attention to the act of painting and to the mechanics of presentation, Illingworth focuses on the ways the viewer sees. In demanding a direct visual engagement with the paintings, he offers a particular challenge to viewers of his art, articulated in a statement from 1970 that ‘too many people ask me what kind of painter I am. I wish they would stop talking and use their eyes.’⁶⁴

Aaron Lister & Damian Skinner

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Damian Skinner is currently completing a Ph.D. thesis at Victoria University of Wellington. His thesis is about modernity and its relationship to visual culture in New Zealand.



FIGURE 11
Untitled
c.1984
oil on canvas
610 x 711mm
Private collection, Wellington

Endnotes

1 Michael Illingworth, Artist's Statement, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland, 1965.
2 Dene Illingworth, interview with Damian Skinner, 12 April 2000.
3 Barry Lett, 'Interview with Michael Illingworth', *Barry Lett Galleries Newsletter*, 19 August 1965.
4 Anthony Stones suggests that the European aesthetic of the New Vision Art Centre explains why Illingworth held his first exhibition in the predominantly craft oriented gallery. (Anthony Stones, letter to Aaron Lister, 26 February 2001.)
5 'Faced Poverty for Art', *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, 22 April 1963, p.34.
6 Hamish Keith, 'A Living Can Now Be Made', *Auckland Star*, 5 November 1965, p.10.
7 'People Are Talking About...', *New Zealand Vogue*, 13 August 1965, (Newspaper Scrapbook, Illingworth Estate Archive, Coroglen).
8 Jane Hill, 'A Question of Survival: Jane Hill Interviews Artist Michael Illingworth', *Eve*, July 1970, pp.10–13.
9 Russell Haley, *Hanly: A New Zealand Artist*, Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989, p.125.
10 Robert Ellis, interview with Damian Skinner, 12 February 2001.
11 Haley, p.125.
12 Iain MacDonald, 'Illingworth: A Man Before His Time', *New Zealand Herald*, 21 July 1988, Section 2, p.1.
13 Kate Caughlan, 'Sometimes Cold on the Feet: Pauper Painter likes Good Life', *The Dominion*, 16 June 1980, p.5.
14 Caughlan, p.5.
15 Illingworth, Report to the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship Committee, August 1966, (Illingworth Estate Archive).
16 Illingworth, Warrior School Biology Book, (Illingworth Estate Archive). All quotes from Illingworth's unpublished writings have been edited for clarity.
17 Gordon H. Brown interview with Damian Skinner, 17 April 2000.
18 Barry Lett, interview with Damian Skinner, 19 April 2000.
19 Barry Lett, interview with Damian Skinner, 19 April 2000.
20 'Action by Police After Complaint', (Newspaper Scrapbook, Illingworth Estate Archive).
21 Illingworth, Letter to the Editor, *New Zealand Listener*, 14 February 1976, (Pacific Students Biology Book, Illingworth Estate Archive).
22 Tim Jones, *A Hard-Won Freedom: Alternative Communities in New Zealand*, Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975, pp.5–6.
23 'Dedicated Art Fellow Delighted with City', *Otago Daily Times*, 25 January 1966, p.3.
24 Illingworth, Warrior School Biology Book, (Illingworth Estate Archive).
25 Illingworth, Warrior School Biology Book, (Illingworth Estate Archive).
26 James K. Baxter, 'Recent Trends in New Zealand Poetry' in Frank McKay (ed.), *James K. Baxter as Critic*, Auckland: Heinemann, 1978, p.9. The underlying concern with social justice is the same for Baxter and Illingworth, but the mantle of prophet with its religious overtones sits less comfortably on Illingworth's shoulders.
27 Baxter, 'The Man on the Horse', McKay (ed.), pp.99–100.
28 Illingworth, draft letter, (Illingworth Estate Archive).
29 Hill, p.11.
30 Baxter, 'Recent Trends in New Zealand Poetry', p.11.
31 Tara Hawes, 'A Tribesman Cut Off from his Tribe: Baxter and the Family', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, n.13, 1995, p.44.
32 'Artist's New Dream Finds Fulfillment', *Thames Star*, 6 November 1973, p.5.
33 Illingworth, Warrior School Biology Book, (Illingworth Estate Archive).
34 Hamish Keith, interview with Damian Skinner, 19 February 2001.
35 Hamish Keith, interview with Damian Skinner, 19 February 2001.
36 Haley, pp.127–128.
37 Apple exhibited at Gallery One, and as a result was in close contact with Musgrave, Illingworth, and the artists who were part of the gallery's stable. A catalogue he brought back with him from London called *Gallery One: Ten Years* mentions artists such as Francis Souza, and exhibitions such as 'Seven Indian Painters'—these are the artists Apple remembers specifically as painting in the style Illingworth later adopted when he returned to New Zealand. (Billy Apple, interview with Damian Skinner, 18 February 2001.)

38 One of the main concerns of the 1960s, particularly from those painters associated with the Barry Lett Galleries, was an interest in the question of national identity. There was, as Elizabeth Caffin suggests, a distinct shift in the relationship poets (and artists) had to earlier formulations of nationalism during the 1950s and 1960s, and national identity did tend to become secondary to an interest in more universal questions of humanity. (Caffin, in Terry Sturm, *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1998, p.464.) The questions posed by Gordon H. Brown and Hamish Keith in *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting, 1839–1967*, illustrate that such concerns were still alive during this period, although their use of themes such as the interest in landscape, and the importance of New Zealand light, should be placed within the institutional consciousness of the time, as well as the desire to create an art history in the absence of any overarching explanation for New Zealand art, rather than taken as clear indications of contemporary concerns. The important thing here, however national identity might be formulated, is that Illingworth's relationship with concerns of New Zealand identity was idiosyncratic, since his work was complicated by anxieties around his personal identity and style.
39 Hamish Keith, 'Introduction', *New Zealand Painting 1965*, Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1965, unpaginated.
40 'Introduction', *Earth/Earth*, Barry Lett Galleries, 1971, p.1.
41 Gordon H. Brown, 'Best—and Happiest—of Illingworth', *Auckland Star*, 11 December 1968.
42 Yet even here Illingworth was not alone, for, as Keith Sinclair has written about New Zealand poetry: 'In the 1950s Louis Johnson and James K. Baxter could be heard berating their elders, especially Allen Curnow, for perpetrating a landscape school. They proposed to populate the landscape with neurotic suburban housewives and tortured Catholic bodgies and widgies.' (Keith Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart: New Zealand's Search for Identity*, Wellington: Allen & Unwin with Port Nicholson Press, 1986, p.54.)
43 Mark Young, 'Illingworth paintings are his best yet', *Auckland Star*, 26 May 1967.
44 Gordon H. Brown, interview with Damian Skinner, 17 April 2000.
45 Illingworth was not included in the *Anxious Images* exhibition, held at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1984, but his work readily fits into the framework laid out by exhibition curator Alexa Johnston in her essay (*Anxious Images: Aspects of Recent NZ Art*, Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1984, p.6). However, there is a significant difference between Illingworth's artistic practice (tight and controlled brushwork; the façade in which deeper disfunction is disavowed for toy-like and bright surface detail), and the expressionist process of most artists in this exhibition.
46 Petar Vuletic, 'Michael Illingworth: Alienation and Search for Innocence', *Craccum Art Supplement*, 2 September 1968, p.10.
47 Baxter, 'Recent trends in New Zealand poetry', p.10.
48 H.M., 'Illingworth's Art Will Baffle Many', *Auckland Star*, 16 March 1963.
49 Baxter, 'Recent trends in New Zealand Poetry', p.3.
50 Illingworth, *Scraps Book 2*, (Illingworth Estate Archive).
51 Gil Docking, *Two Hundred Years of New Zealand Painting*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1982, p.142.
52 Steve Rumsey, interview with Damian Skinner, 12 January 2001.
53 Illingworth, draft letter to *New Zealand Listener*, (Pacific Biology Book, Illingworth Estate Archive).
54 Don Binney, interview with Damian Skinner, 15 February 2001.
55 Illingworth, *Earth/Earth*, Barry Lett Galleries 1971, p.32.
56 Barry Lett, 'Interview with Michael Illingworth', *Barry Lett Galleries Newsletter*, 19 August 1965.
57 Vuletic, p.10.
58 Charles Eastlake, *Methods and Materials of Painting of the Great Schools and Masters*, New York: Dover Publications, V. 2, 1960, p.378.
59 'Painter Chose the Hard Road', *New Zealand Weekly News*, 1 December 1965, (Newspaper Scrapbook, Illingworth Estate Archive).
60 Anthony Green, 'Thoughts at the end of 1971', (Illingworth Estate Archive).
61 Hamish Keith, 'Imagery Minus Labels Stirs Thought', *Auckland Star*, 4 December 1971, p.11.
62 Illingworth's second solo exhibition in New Zealand, at the Ikon Gallery in 1963, provided the opportunity for Illingworth to present himself and his work in Auckland's most prestigious dealer gallery of the period. On his initiative a catalogue was produced. (Don Wood, interview with Damian Skinner, 20 April 2000.) Illingworth noted on his copy: 'The first time an Auckland gallery has presented an illustrated catalogue.' This concern for a professional form of self-presentation is also apparent in the dramatically lit Steve Rumsey photograph of the artist on the catalogue's cover.
63 Steve Rumsey, letter to Damian Skinner, 22 April 2001.
64 Hill, p.11.

Plates



PLATE 1
Celibate Young Man
 1961
 oil on canvas
 450 x 550mm
 Collection of Jan Phillips, Auckland



PLATE 2
Thomas P.Q.
 1961
 oil on canvas
 345 x 240mm
 Private collection, Wellington



PLATE 3
A City in Exile
 1963
 mixed media on canvas
 800 x 1085mm
 Courtesy of the Illingworth Family



PLATE 4
Painting with Rainbow I
 1965
 oil on canvas
 838 x 965 mm
 Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki



PLATE 5
The golden kiwione
 1965
 oil on hardboard
 850 x 1120mm
 Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

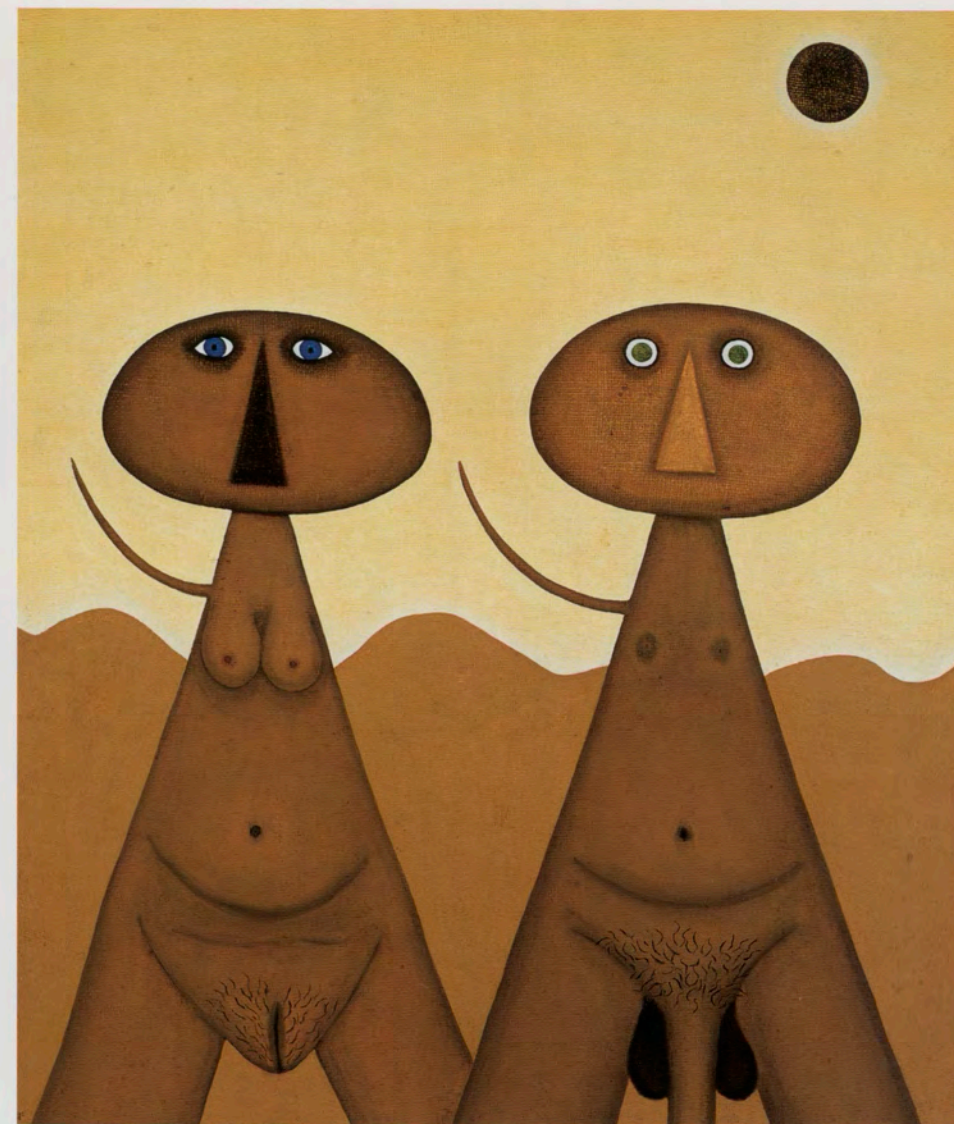


PLATE 6
As Adam and Eve
 1965
 oil on hessian
 930 x 790mm
 Paris Family Collection



PLATE 7
Indecisive Banishment
 1965
 oil on canvas
 920 x 970mm
 Private collection, Wellington

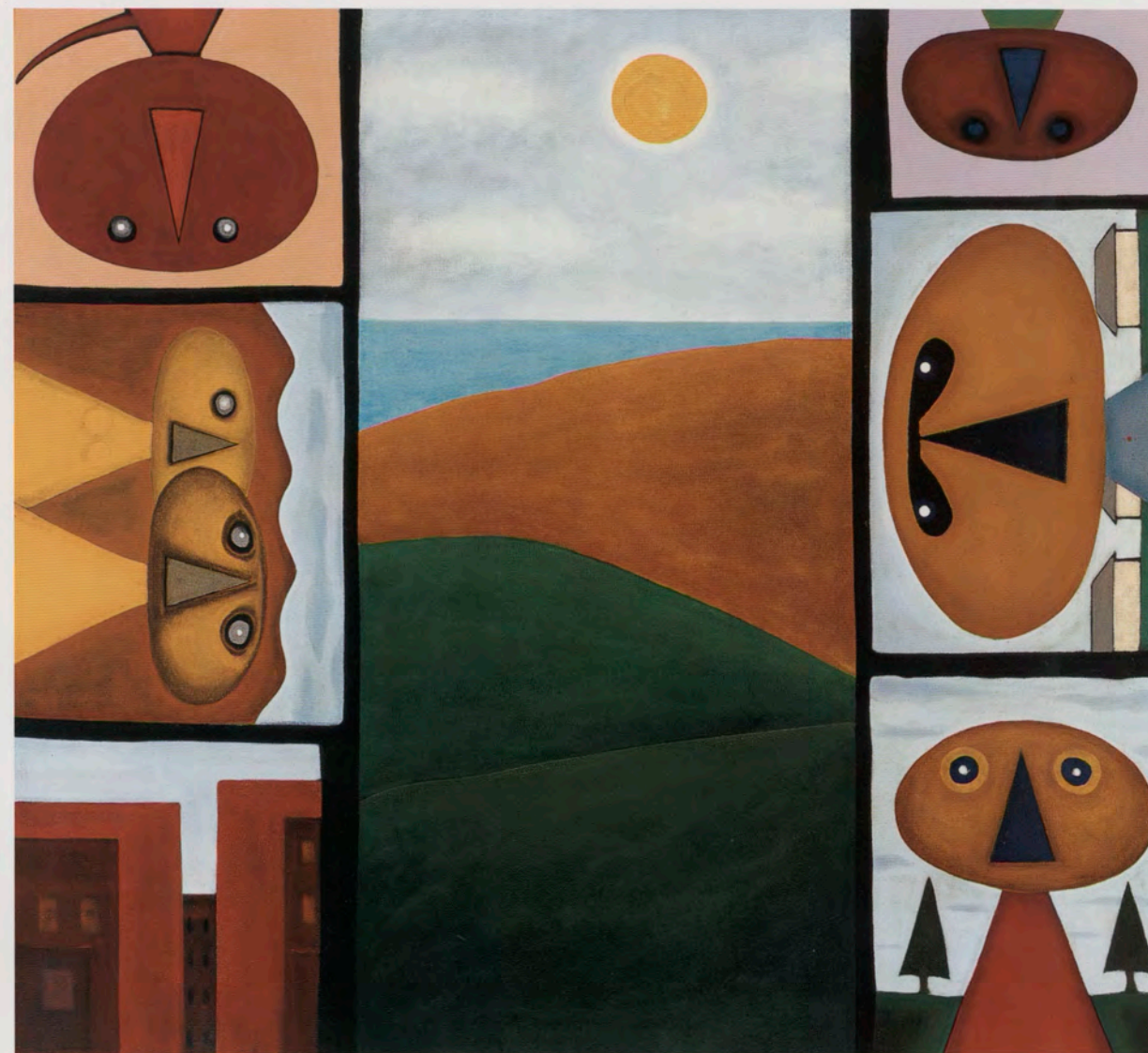


PLATE 8
Portraits from Society and Landscape
 c.1967
 oil on canvas
 1015 x 920mm
 Private collection



PLATE 9
Gent of Consequence
 1971
 oil on canvas
 1168 x 1014mm
 De Luca Wilson Collection

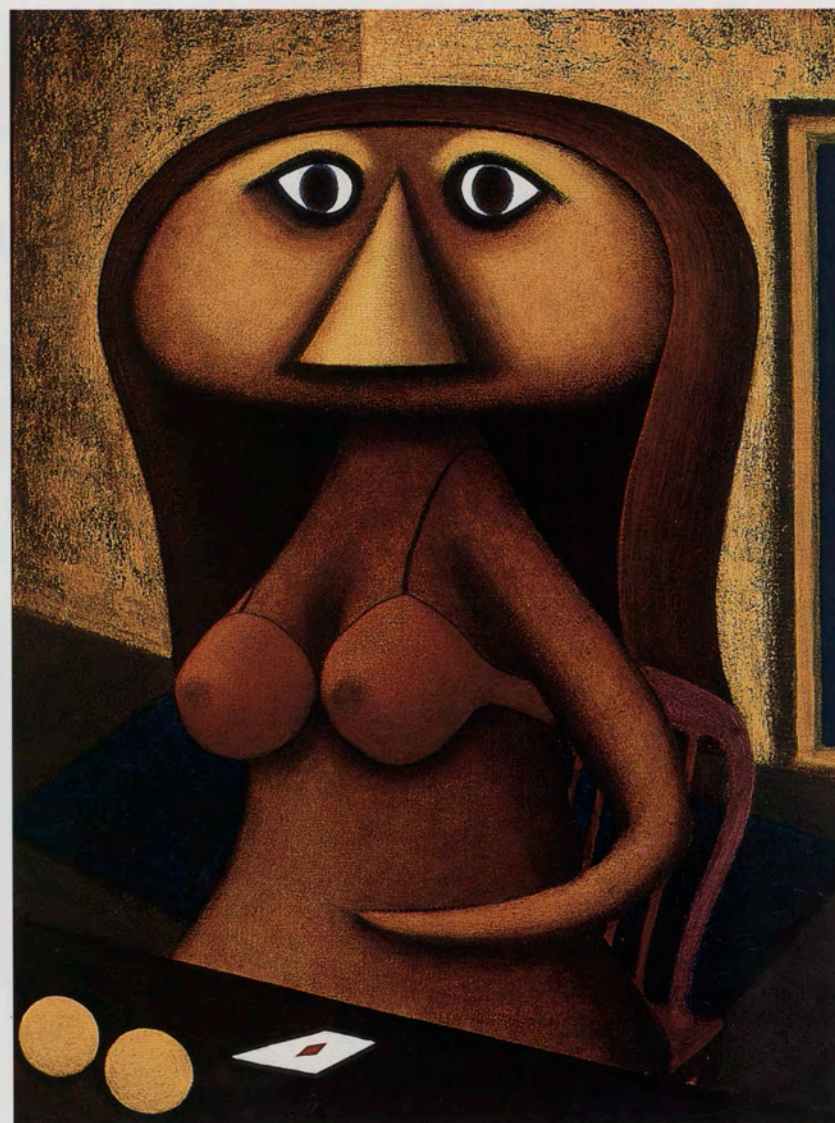


PLATE 10
Lady of Consequence
 1968
 oil on canvas
 410 x 305mm
 Collection of Gavin Yortt, Hawkes Bay



PLATE 11
Mr and Mrs Thomas Piss-Quick
 1968
 oil on canvas
 280 x 330mm
 Private collection

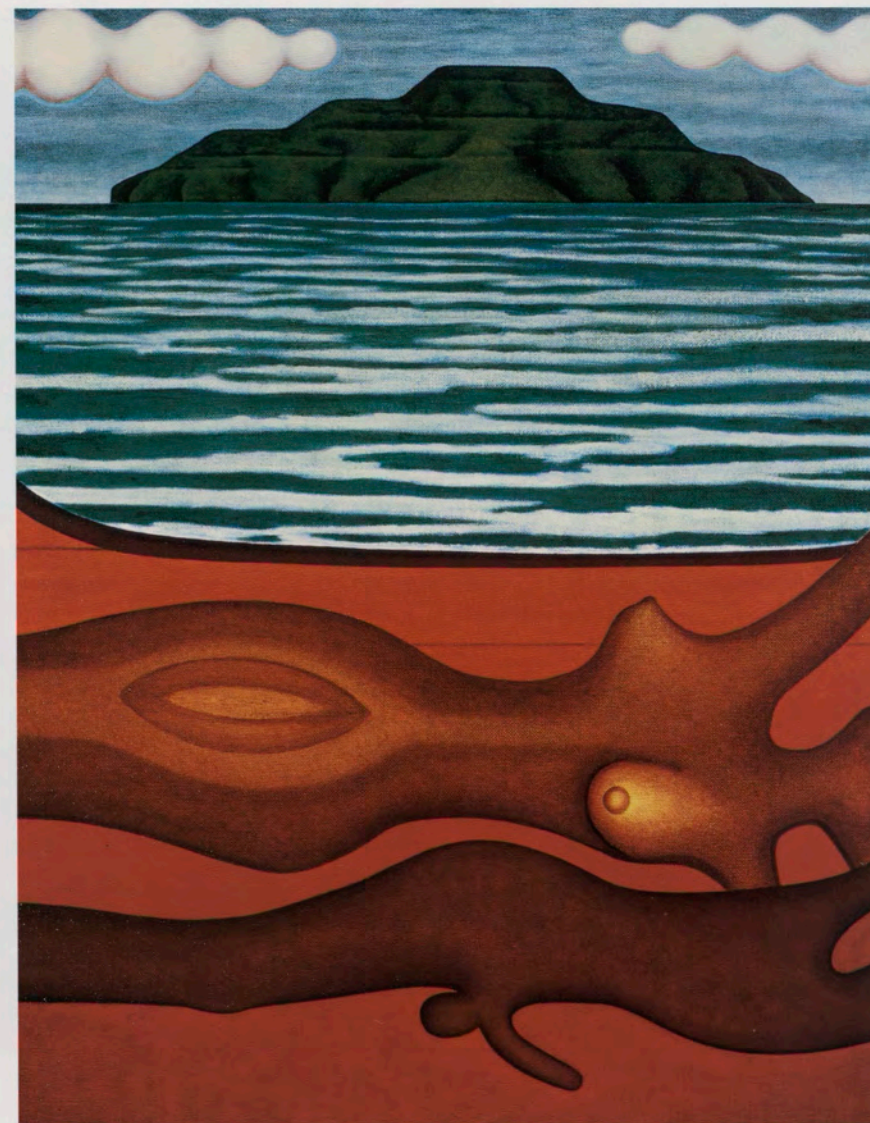


PLATE 12
Land, Land and Island
 1971
 1120 x 865mm
 oil on canvas
 Courtesy of Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland



PLATE 13
Balloons over a Landscape
 1971
 oil on canvas
 310 x 410mm
 Private collection, Auckland



PLATE 14
Untitled
 1971
 oil on canvas
 500 x 660mm
 Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
 Gift of Hans & Martha Lachman, 1995



PLATE 15
Still Life
 undated
 oil on canvas
 370 x 320mm
 Private collection, Auckland



PLATE 16
The Three Quark Man, Muster Mark
 undated
 oil on board
 225 x 275mm
 Courtesy of the Illingworth Family



FIGURE 12
Marti Friedlander
**Michael Illingworth at work on
an uncompleted painting**
1980
colour photograph
Courtesy of the photographer

Chronology

1932 Michael Harland Illingworth born in Shipley, York, England on 3 August to Jim and Mim Illingworth.

Born Yorkshire, 1932, of upper middle class new rich. I inherited a business ability. I chose never to conform. I felt somehow from my roots (Norman) that I was my own man.

Illingworth, undated writings, (Illingworth Estate Archive).

Educational highlights include time spent at Ilkley Grammar, and a significant experience with alternative education at a school in Wennington based on the philosophies of A.S. Neil. Studied for a textile design diploma in Bradford, graduating with distinction.

1952 I, a painter in this land since 1952 when I came from Yorkshire with my father & mother to find a new homeland and a climate more appropriate to my father's health that had been varied during the war. We arrived in November 1952 and chose Tauranga as the town to settle in.

I secured a part-time job with a local photographer and worked free lance for the Bay of Plenty Times and the old Freelance magazine. This arrangement giving me both income and time for paint and drawing.

Illingworth, draft letter, undated, (Illingworth Estate Archive).

1953 Met James K. Baxter in 1953 or 1954, and had significant periods of contact throughout the 1950s. Their friendship was reignited in 1966 at the beginning of their respective fellowships in Otago.

I always gained from Jim's added years of experience and I like to feel he gained from my more youthful vigour. A mutual stimulation. I the warrior he the strategist we helped each other to many a conclusion.

Illingworth, Warrior School Biology Book, (Illingworth Estate Archive).

1954 Befriended by Maori fishermen at Matauri Bay and continued to paint. This was a period of clarification of ideas as an artist and a feeling of need to look at works of art.

Illingworth, Application for the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship, 1966.



FIGURE 13
Michael Illingworth and Anna Hoffman, Vulcan Lane, Auckland, 1961. Photograph by Leon Lesnie.



FIGURE 14
'Auckland Artist Michael Illingworth with his painting *Poet Explodes* [actually *Celibate Young Man*].' Gill Shadbolt, 'Controversial Young Man with a Violent Style', *New Zealand Truth*, 3 October, 1961, p.20. Courtesy of Truth.

...Matauri Bay and the Maori people who gave me this land as my home when I had lived among them for some time.

Illingworth, draft letter, undated, (Illingworth Estate Archive).

1957 Works as a photographer and photo engraver in Auckland. Illingworth becomes part of the Auckland bohemian art scene centred around Vulcan Lane, and the Queens Ferry pub, including writers such as Kevin Ireland, Ian Middleton, Maurice Gee and notorious personalities like 'Queen of the Night' Anna Hoffman.

1959 ...I knew I needed to return to Europe to look at more painting and made my way rough with my cameras back to London where I got the job of assistant to Victor Musgrave of Gallery One. I stayed with Victor for three years and was in the eye of European art for that invaluable period with a fine teacher.

Illingworth, draft letter, undated, (Illingworth Estate Archive).

Following the advice and encouragement of [Francis] Souza [an Indian painter from Goa]; decided to leave professional gallery work at Gallery One and live as a full-time painter.

Illingworth, Application for the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship, 1966.

I was most happy in Athens on my own though I had an English companion. I found again a people I could easily share my ways with as I had done in the 1950s with my Maori hosts in N.Z.

Illingworth, untitled manuscript, undated, (Illingworth Estate Archive).

1961 Returns to New Zealand and settles in Auckland. He holds his first one-person exhibition, *M. H. Illingworth*, at the New Vision Art Centre, Auckland, 26 September–17 October. Some of the paintings were produced in Europe, others after Illingworth's return to New Zealand. The exhibition received a mixed critical reception:

I had my first one man show at Kees Hos's New Vision Gallery and made many lasting enemies, strangely for they were happy paintings.

Illingworth, draft letter, undated, (Illingworth Estate Archive).

1962 Moves to Coromandel to stay with Barry Brickell.

We started our roads more or less together—you a pioneer in your own land. Me who had recently returned from the shores of my birth knowing I had the makings of an artist. Our meeting that first time at the Uptown Gallery was for me a godsend for I had at last met a fellow who also had

the makings and the will to get on and do something about it. It was natural you invited me to your Driving Creek... I arrived in the early night at your door and enjoyed every moment of my stay. The fruits of that time together we know. What each our own art is we know. That our art blossomed during that fellowship is apparent to us both.

Illingworth, draft letter to Barry Brickell, undated, (Illingworth Estate Archive).

1963 Holds his second solo exhibition, *Illingworth: An Exhibition of Recent Work*, at the Ikon Gallery, Auckland, 12–22 March. Accompanied by an illustrated catalogue commissioned by Illingworth, the artist presents himself as a serious painter of the social condition, with reference to the impending atomic holocaust and the social ills of the city. This exhibition marks the conclusion of Illingworth's experiments in a heavily textured expressionist style.

Marries Dene White, a student at Elam art school.

1965 Illingworth holds his first solo exhibition at the Barry Lett Galleries, *Illingworth: An Exhibition of Recent Work*, 1 November–12 November. The exhibition becomes highly controversial after police receive complaints of obscenity levelled against *As Adam and Eve*. The gallery refuses to remove the painting and eventually the complaint is dismissed.

[The complaint is]... absurd and ridiculous. Even the Victorians didn't complain about the painting of nudes... It amazes me that this society should have such Calvinistic attitudes.

Illingworth, quoted in 'Police seek ruling on contentious painting', unsourced newspaper article, (Illingworth Estate Archive).

Illingworth included in group exhibitions in both dealer and public galleries: *Preview 65*, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland, 26 July–6 August; *New Zealand Painting 1965*, Auckland City Art Gallery, November.

1966 Awarded the inaugural Frances Hodgkins Fellowship in Dunedin.

That was a marvellous year because my wife and I got together with Jim Baxter and Janet Frame and we all tore around the Otago peninsula working furiously. We bought this old Ford van which I demanded artists should have—and we humped it all over the hills of Otago.

Illingworth, quoted in Kate Coughlan, 'Sometimes cold on the feet: Pauper painter likes good life', *Dominion*, June 16, 1980, p.5.

FIGURE 15
'My work carries no message. Painting is a matter of mood.' Michael Illingworth, 'Painter Chose the Hard Road', *Weekly News*, 1 December 1965.



FIGURE 16
'The first winner of the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship, the artist Michael Illingworth works on a canvas in his cottage at Massey.' 'Painter Chose the Hard Road', *Weekly News*, 1 December 1965.

FIGURE 17
'Two-year-old Seba (named after Michael's [great] grandfather), here with his mother, waves at the "little man" in the painting above his cot, when he wakes up in the mornings.' Jane Hill, 'A Question of Survival: Jane Hill interviews artist Michael Illingworth', *Eve*, July 1970, p.12.



This was the first reasonable income I had had as a painter and I had sufficient paint to do the job. I willed but found the university to be short on the promised studio facilities and In August of my year I left Otago and found a studio of my own at Puhoi.

Illingworth, untitled manuscript, undated, (Illingworth Estate Archive).

Included in *New Zealand Painting 1966* at the Auckland City Art Gallery, December.

1967 Illingworth's exhibition *Paintings With No Titles to Obey*, Barry Lett Galleries, 22 May–2 June, makes history in New Zealand art when it sells out at the opening. An anonymous collector buys the entire exhibition (except for four works which had already sold to other collectors), dramatically increasing Illingworth's media and critical profile.

It may give me the chance to establish myself on a more permanent basis... At least it will mean that I can stop living in squalor.

Illingworth, quoted in 'Collector buys 17 paintings by one artist', *New Zealand Herald*, 23 May 1967.

Illingworth also included in the group show *Preview 1967*, at the Barry Lett Galleries, 31 January–10 February.

1968 Illingworth holds a joint exhibition with Barry Brickell, *Little Paintings/Big Pots: Michael Illingworth & Barry Brickell*, at the Barry Lett Galleries, 9–20 December. This exhibition is one of the few instances of the display of crafts at the Barry Lett Galleries.

Included in *10 Years of New Zealand Painting in Auckland, 1958–1967*, Auckland City Art Gallery.

Included in Mark Young's book *New Zealand Art: Painting, 1950–1967*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed; and featured by Petar Vuletic, 'Michael Illingworth: alienation and search for innocence', *Craccum Art Supplement*, 2 September 1968.

Birth of first child, Seba.

1969 Illingworth has his first exhibition *Eleven Paintings*, at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, June.

Illingworth is included in *Multiples* at the Barry Lett Galleries, 3–14 November, an exhibition of unsigned, unlimited prints by twelve artists. Illingworth was not particularly enthusiastic about this concept, describing the exhibited print as an Illingworth trademark rather than a work of art.

Included in Gordon H. Brown and Hamish Keith's, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting: 1839–1967*, Auckland: Collins.

1970 Illingworth paintings are included in two touring exhibitions, *New Zealand Art of the Sixties*, a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Travelling Exhibition, and an international exhibition *Contemporary Painting in New Zealand*, organised by the Smith-sonian Institute, Washington.

As *Adam and Eve* is temporarily removed the Charleston Art Gallery, West Virginia, due to another complaint of indecency.

Interviewed in 'A question of survival: Jane Hill interviews artist Michael Illingworth', *Eve*, July 1970, pp.10–13.

1971 Illingworth included in *Earth/Earth*, Barry Lett Galleries, 19 April–30 April. Illingworth's contribution to this exhibition includes five landscape paintings, a polemical conservation-focused statement, and a poem:

I hear the Tui
I hear the helicopter
I hear the Tui
until
I hear the helicopter
again and again.

In contrast to the outspoken role Illingworth assumes in the *Earth/Earth* exhibition, his December 1971 exhibition at the Barry Lett Galleries, *Paintings and Constructions by Michael Illingworth*, 29 November–10 December, consists of untitled work, with no guide to the chronology of the exhibition. It marks the logical conclusion of Illingworth's attitude as expressed in the title of his 1967 exhibition: *Paintings With No Titles to Obey*.

Solo exhibition: *Michael Illingworth*, Victoria University of Wellington, 24 May–13 June.

Included in Gil Docking's, *Two Hundred Years of New Zealand Painting*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed.

Birth of second child, Hana.

1972 Included in *Drawings: Group Exhibition*, Barry Lett Galleries, 14–25 August.

Solo exhibition: *Michael Illingworth*, Peter McLeavey Gallery, August–September.

1973 Included in two group shows at the Barry Lett Galleries: *New Year—New Work*, 30 January–9 February; and *Landscape—A Survey Exhibition*, 5–15 June.

The end of the Puhoi period—this is the end of the day and my last day of painting in Puhoi. I must start packing and pulling down my studio by tomorrow... Puhoi has been a good place to live and I will have many fond memories of these people and this landscape. It is with sorrow that we think of leaving people as good as Arch and Les Schollum and that my friendship with Father Skinner will come to an end. These bohemian people have good honest eyes... Little studio that I built you have rendered good service in your 3 years and tomorrow down you come and you will be used to form the nucleus of a new studio with some of your features retained. As a model of what I want to build you are proven.

Illingworth, Warrior Schoolbook, (Illingworth Estate Archive).

Illingworth moves to Coroglen on the Coromandel Peninsula. His new dual role as an artist and a farmer impinges upon his output as his dedication to the act of painting always demanded a methodical and time consuming approach. The later works tend to be much smaller in scale than the bulk of the paintings produced in the 1960s, a shift Illingworth characterised as arising directly from his new circumstances.

I'd like to paint a symphony but have to dabble with sonnets.

Illingworth, quoted in Peter Verschaffelt, 'Artist ripped off', *Waikato Times*, 10 January, 1980, p.1.

I just enjoy making a good animal—like creating a good picture.

Illingworth, quoted in Phil Taylor, 'Artist visiting capital', *Contact*, 1 June, 1984, p.1.

FIGURE 18
Michael Illingworth in his studio, Puhoi (north of Auckland), c.1972.



1974 Included in *The Kim Wright Collection of New Zealand Painting*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, May–June.

Michael Illingworth: Pictures from the Painter's Collection, 1960–1972, Barry Lett Galleries, 14–25 October, is a retrospective display of paintings from Illingworth's collection, the earliest examples dating back to the start of the 1960s and his period in Europe. The recycling of previously displayed work becomes a recurrent feature in Illingworth's dealer shows from the 1970s, another sign of his conditions on the Coromandel farm.

1975 Included in an exhibition at Pakuranga Art Society. *As Adam and Eve* is removed from the exhibition without the consent of the artist or his dealer, a fact which worries Illingworth more than the charge of indecency once again levelled against his painting.

I am talking about one of the classical symbols of our society—the love and joy of man and woman, and procreation. Without procreation there is no you or me. These people have a terrible block-up or a death wish.

Illingworth, quoted in 'Adam and Eve banished again', *New Zealand Herald*, undated.

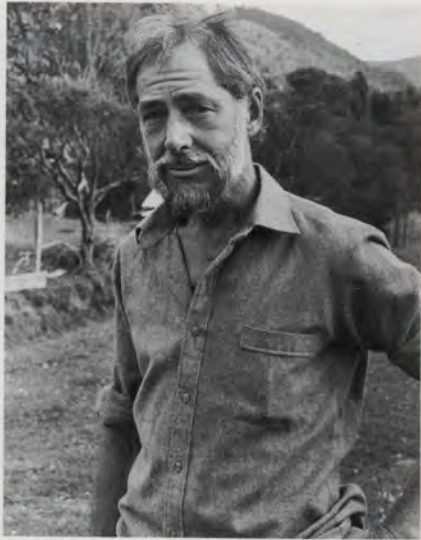


FIGURE 19
'Artist Michael Illingworth—at home on the farm.' Phil Taylor, 'Oil and Water Do Mix', *Waikato Times*, 10 March 1984. Courtesy of *Waikato Times*.

1975 The *10th Anniversary Exhibition*, Barry Lett Galleries, 28 April–9 May, is Illingworth's last showing at the Barry Lett Galleries. Peter McLeavey becomes Illingworth's sole dealer. Holds a solo exhibition at the Peter McLeavey Gallery *Seven Paintings by Michael Illingworth (1962–1973)*, 23 September–10 October.

Birth of third child, Kuika.

1976 Illingworth's exhibition from the previous year at the Peter McLeavey Gallery is reviewed in the *New Zealand Listener* (14 February 1976, p.22) and includes a reproduction of *As Adam and Eve*, sparking a flurry of angry letters to the editor. Illingworth writes to the *Listener* explaining that 'Each and everyone of our ancestors was the product of phallic energy', and that 'those of us who have transpired from the action of male and female sex organs... are lucky indeed.' (Pacific Students Biology Book, Illingworth Estate Archive, Coroglen.) These comments are excised from the published letter, leading to a further letter from Illingworth decrying this censorship (*New Zealand Listener*, 15 May 1976).

Birth of fourth child, Tama.

1978 Solo exhibition: *Six Paintings and Two Sculptures by Michael Illingworth (1962–1977)*, Peter McLeavey Gallery, 4–21 April.

1980 Illingworth describes the motivation for his solo exhibition *Six Recent paintings by Michael Illingworth*, at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, 10–27 June as:

It was a case of having to. I have \$800 till the next wool clip money comes in November, so I had to get some money together.

Illingworth, quoted in 'Sometimes cold on the feet: pauper painter likes a good life', *The Dominion*, 14 June 1980, p.5.

Included in Jim and Mary Barr's *Contemporary New Zealand Painters A–M*, Martinborough: Alister Taylor.

1981 Paintings featured in Don Barrier's book of poetry, *Such Feet Little Horse*, Coromandel: Coromandel Press.

Organises the first memorial conference dedicated to the life and work of James K. Baxter.

1984 *Michael Illingworth: Paintings 1979/1984*, Peter McLeavey Gallery, 5–24 June, is Illingworth's final solo exhibition. The exhibition marks a return to his satirical Piss-Quick figures, this time directed at the art world.

Ian Wedde, 'Illingworth turns irony against the art world', *Evening Post*, 13 June 1984.

1988 Illingworth dies at Coroglen, 15 July.

Obituaries include Gill Shadbolt, 'The end of Michael's rainbow', *More*, November 1988, pp.200–206; Anthony Stones, 'Michael Illingworth', *The Independent*, 10 August 1998, p.14.

1992 Illingworth was, to the surprise of many, featured in *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. In this exhibition Illingworth is used as a figure around which an alternative history of New Zealand modernism is formulated.

List of Works

Celibate Young Man 1961
oil on canvas
Collection of Jan Phillips, Auckland

Saint Klee 1961
oil, papier mâché on board
Lekner Family Trust

The Poet Explodes 1961
oil on canvas
Paris Family Collection

Thomas P.Q. 1961
oil on canvas
Private collection, Wellington

An Offering to the Queen of a New Land 1962
oil on canvas
Collection of the Baxter Family, Paekakariki

Androcles Last Year 1962
mixed media on canvas
Courtesy of the Illingworth Family

Self Portrait 1962
oil on canvas
Collection of the BNZ

Times Beyond the City 1962
oil on canvas
Courtesy of the Illingworth Family

Too Far for You to See 1962
oil on canvas
Collection of C.M. & F.S. Maloney, Sydney

Two Friends of Different Cultures 1962
mixed media on canvas
Courtesy of the Illingworth Family

A City in Exile 1963
mixed media on canvas
Courtesy of the Illingworth Family

A New Lord Demanding Much Attention 1963
oil on canvas
Private collection, Wellington

Citizen of the Polished City 1963
mixed media on canvas
Collection of the Waikato Museum of Art & History, Te Whare Taonga o Waikato

Dwellers in the Distant Village c.1963
oil on canvas
Collection of the Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin

Passing Out of a Great City 1963
oil on canvas
Private collection, Wellington

Adam and Eve 1965
oil on canvas
University of Otago, Frances Hodgkins Fellowship Collection

As Adam and Eve 1965
oil on hessian
Paris Family Collection

Indecisive Banishment 1965
oil on canvas
Private collection, Wellington

Painting with Rainbow I 1965
oil on canvas
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Thegoldenkiwione 1965
oil on hardboard
Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

The Painter and the Poet 1965
oil on hessian
Collection of the Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin

Untitled 1965
oil on canvas
JAG Collection, Auckland

Adam with Gun 1966
oil on hessian
Private collection, Auckland

Untitled 1966
oil on canvas
Private collection

Deity and Bushscape I 1966
oil on canvas
James Wallace Charitable Arts Trust

Deity and Island 1967
oil on canvas
Collection of M.R. Camp, Wellington

Deity and Landscape with Portraits 1967
oil on canvas
On loan from New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade

Eve 1967
oil on canvas
Private collection

Portrait of Girl 1967
oil on canvas
Private collection, Auckland

Portraits and Island with Boat 1967
oil on canvas
Collection of David & Gail Williams

Portraits from Society and Landscape c.1967
oil on canvas
Private collection

Tawera and Landscape 1967
oil on canvas
Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
Gift of Hans & Martha Lachman, 1995

Tree Deity 1967
oil on canvas
Private collection, Wellington

Adam and Eve 1968
oil on canvas
Private collection, Wellington

Adam and Eve Figures with Landscape and Flowers 1968
oil on canvas
Fletcher Trust Art Collection

Bird Friend 1968
oil on canvas
Collection of Andrew & Jenny Smith

Flower Painting 1968
oil on board
Collection of Andrew & Jenny Smith

Lady of Consequence 1968
oil on canvas
Collection of Gavin Yortt, Hawkes Bay

Landscape of Puhoi 1968
oil on canvas
Collection of Ian Prior, Wellington

Mr and Mrs Thomas Piss-Quick 1968
oil on canvas
Private collection

Portrait of Flower 1968
oil on canvas
Collection of Andrew & Jenny Smith

Portrait of Alan Thornton 1968
oil on canvas
Collection of the Manawatu Art Gallery

Still Life 1968
oil on canvas
Private collection

Still Life 1968
oil on canvas
Collection of Peter & Sylvia Siddell, Auckland

Tawera Landscape with Flowers 1968
oil on canvas
Private collection, Auckland

Photographer 1968
oil on canvas
On loan from the Sarjeant Gallery, Te Whare O Rehua Whanganui

Man and Woman Figures with Still Life and Flowers 1969
oil on canvas
Collection of Tim & Helen Beaglehole, Wellington

Man with Red Tie 1969
oil on canvas
Collection of P.E. Boyd, Sydney

Portrait of a Man of Consequence 1969
oil on canvas
Private collection, Auckland

Fertility 1970
oil on canvas
Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
Gift of Hans & Martha Lachman, 1995

Balloons over a Landscape 1971
oil on canvas
Private collection, Auckland

Gent of Consequence 1971
oil on canvas
De Luca Wilson Collection

Man and Woman with Still Life and Flowers 1971
oil on canvas
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Land, Land and Island 1971
oil on canvas
Courtesy of Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland

Pah Hill 1971
oil on canvas
Collection of Briar Wilson, Auckland

Tawera 1971
oil on board
Courtesy of the Illingworth Family

Untitled 1971
mixed media
Private collection, Wellington

Untitled 1971
oil on canvas
Private collection

Untitled 1971
oil on canvas
Private collection

Untitled 1971
oil on canvas
Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa
Gift of Hans & Martha Lachman, 1995

To Father Skinner and the People of Puhoi 1973
varnished rimu and pine
Courtesy of the Illingworth Family

The Juggler's Bowl 1978
oil on canvas
Paris Family Collection

Portrait of a Man of Consequence 1979
oil on canvas
Private collection, Auckland

Untitled 1979
oil on canvas
Private collection, Wellington

Untitled c.1979
oil on canvas
Courtesy of the Illingworth Family

Untitled undated
oil on canvas
Courtesy of the Illingworth Family

Untitled c.1984
oil on canvas
Courtesy of the Illingworth Family

Untitled c.1984
oil on canvas
Private collection, Wellington

Untitled c.1984
oil on canvas
Private collection, Wellington

The Director/Die Kunst Führer 1985
oil on canvas
Kevin Ireland, Auckland

A Man and a Woman 1986
oil on canvas
The Rutherford Trust Collection

The Three Quark Man, Muster Mark undated
oil on board
Courtesy of the Illingworth Family

Stephen A. Rumsey
The Eye of the Artist 1963
black & white photograph
Courtesy of the photographer

Marti Friedlander
Michael Illingworth at work on an uncompleted painting 1980
colour photograph
Courtesy of the photographer



As Adam and Eve (detail)
1965
oil on hessian
930 x 790mm
Paris Family Collection

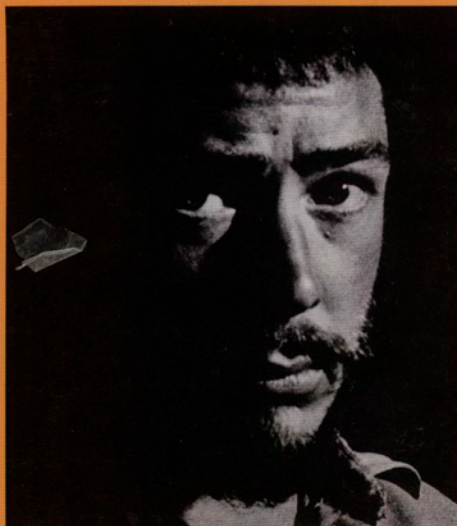
Michael Illingworth is one of New Zealand's great painters of myths. But rather than exploring the dark primordial landscape, he is a painter of daylight and the modern world. A British immigrant to New Zealand, he brought with him what Kevin Ireland has described as 'a secret item in his luggage: his scorn for authority', tempered by an engagingly subversive wit and a dazzling sense of satire. Illingworth's critiques of the contemporary bourgeoisie retain their sardonic power four decades after they were painted.

For much of his life Illingworth lived on farms with his family, supporting conservation causes and identifying with the land. Illingworth's later work reflects a shift away from social critique to an emphasis on the imaginative landscape. Exhibition curators Damian Skinner and Aaron Lister examine Illingworth's complex relationship to New Zealand society and culture at a key moment in the development of the professional arts in New Zealand, exploring the often ambivalent 'outsider' stance which Illingworth embodied both in his work and in the myths which circulated around it.

As Skinner and Lister point out in their major essay, the first significant piece of contemporary scholarship into Michael Illingworth's work, Illingworth's canvases are very much a product of the 1960s and '70s—they embody changing attitudes to the environment, gender relations and morality. His paintings are often unashamedly sexual and they were certainly shocking to some members of the public when they were first exhibited. Casting a disapproving eye on both suburbia and bureaucracy, Illingworth—like his friend James K. Baxter—used his art to vent his disenchantment and rage. From behind jewel-like canvases a complex and fascinating figure emerges, who is described with warmth and humour in Kevin Ireland's recollection of high times together in the late 1950s.

A Tourist in Paradise Lost—The Art of Michael Illingworth reveals the scope, energy, humour and pathos of Illingworth's art. This important project allows an unprecedented overview of the life of a remarkable cultural figure, a major New Zealand artist whose works have been, until now, under represented in the account of New Zealand art history. The art of Michael Illingworth is a human and enduring vision that demands our respect and affection, and ultimately our attention.

City Gallery Wellington



I myself have reached the age of thirty-three without being activated by money, political, academic, religious or plain middle-class motivations. It has not been easy, yet over the years I have managed to paint a body of work sufficient now to start looming over me, and when this happens one begins to realise one's own size.

Michael Illingworth, 1965



City Gallery WELLINGTON
Te Whare Toi

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