

SPLIT LEVEL

VIEW FINDER



**DAMIAN SKINNER
AND AARON LISTER**

THEO SCHOON AND

NEW ZEALAND ART



Theo Schoon *Untitled* date unknown

RIGHT Theo Schoon *Split Level View Finder* 1965





**DAMIAN SKINNER
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THE ROCK ART
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WORKS LIST



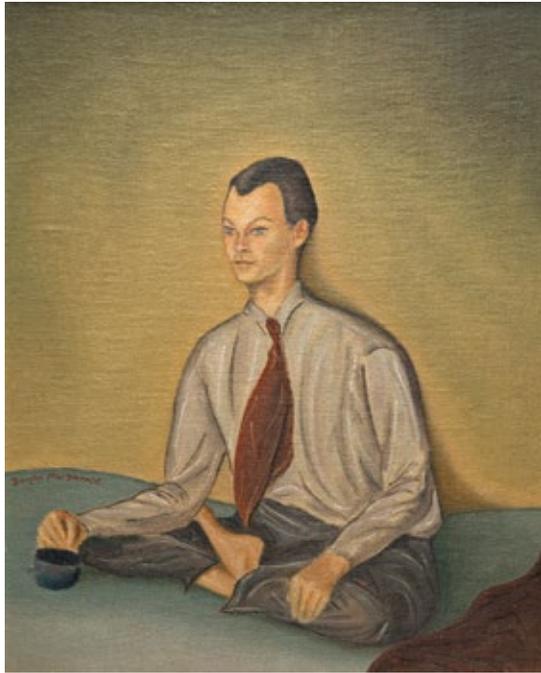
Spencer Digby Studios *TN Schoon* 1943

INTRODUCTION

To hell with making art. What you do is experiment. What that experiment leads to is quite inconsequential. The only thing it leads to is knowledge.

—Theo Schoon¹

Theo Schoon danced his way into the art and culture of Aotearoa. The Indonesian-born Dutch national arrived in Christchurch in his early twenties in 1939. He came with his family, essentially as a war-time refugee, and in the vanguard of a large wave of Dutch migration that would gain momentum in the postwar period. He claimed, however, to be ‘only Dutch by half’.² The other half of his cultural makeup was realised through classical Javanese dance, of which he was a trained practitioner. Some of the performances were public—at balls or reviews. Others took place at private parties, often featuring the art community with whom he immediately fell in (and as frequently out) with after his arrival. The elegant movements, poses, costumes, and masks of these dances embodied his Indonesian connections and the life he had left behind. They also asserted his otherness from what Schoon regularly described as the disappointingly monocultural, mainstream Pākehā society he encountered—‘a branch of the Salvation Army’ as he memorably put it.³ His dances carried dangerous ideas—opening access to the trance state, alternative realities, and ‘the east’.



Douglas MacDiarmid *Portrait of Theo Schoon* 1946

Schoon was a figure of cultural fascination. Photographer Spencer Digby took a dramatic suite of staged portraits of Schoon in full dance mode, one of which was published in *Art in New Zealand* in 1944, alongside Schoon's essay 'Oriental Dancing and the Trance'. There are also less formal photographs of Schoon performing in various venues in Christchurch and Auckland, where he stands out against the drab interiors and occasional skepticism of those watching him. Even when not performing, Schoon moved with a distinctive grace and rhythm. When Douglas MacDiarmid painted a portrait of Schoon in 1946, he chose to depict him in the lotus position. This is how Schoon always sat—part of the repertoire of rhythmical movements and contorted hand gestures he would regularly enact. Such gestures were equally performative—a way to mark a bodily difference from most New Zealanders and prevailing mid-century notions of masculinity. Schoon confronted those terms in almost all possible ways. He was European, an artist, a dancer, gay, a war-time pacifist.

This project uses MacDiarmid's depiction of Schoon as an alien figure dropped into the local context to account for his role and importance in art and culture here. He was a reluctant arrival, carrying his dual European and Indonesian cultural inheritance. He had trained as an artist in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, and had a first-hand experience of European modernist art and ideas that was rare in Aotearoa in the 1940s. His immersion in Indonesian art and culture was even more unique. MacDiarmid's portrait seems haunted by the question of just what this strange being would bring to Aotearoa, or what Aotearoa would offer him.

Schoon was a restless, nomadic artist. He refused to settle anywhere—both inside and outside his work. His regular movements up and down the country brought him into contact with many of the most important artists and developments in Aotearoa. He arrived to a Christchurch in full swing as the Bloomsbury of the South, and developed friendships with some of its key figures: Rita Angus, MacDiarmid, and Betty and Allen Curnow.

In 1942, he moved to a culturally flourishing Wellington, rejuvenated by a strong European émigré community. His studio in the basement of the YMCA on Willis Street became a regular gathering point for artists like Gordon Walters, Dennis Knight Turner, and Rita Angus. (Angus and Schoon would paint portraits of each other during this time—the suave, sophisticated Schoon conjured by Angus also evinces the sense of cultural difference found in MacDiarmid's portrait.)

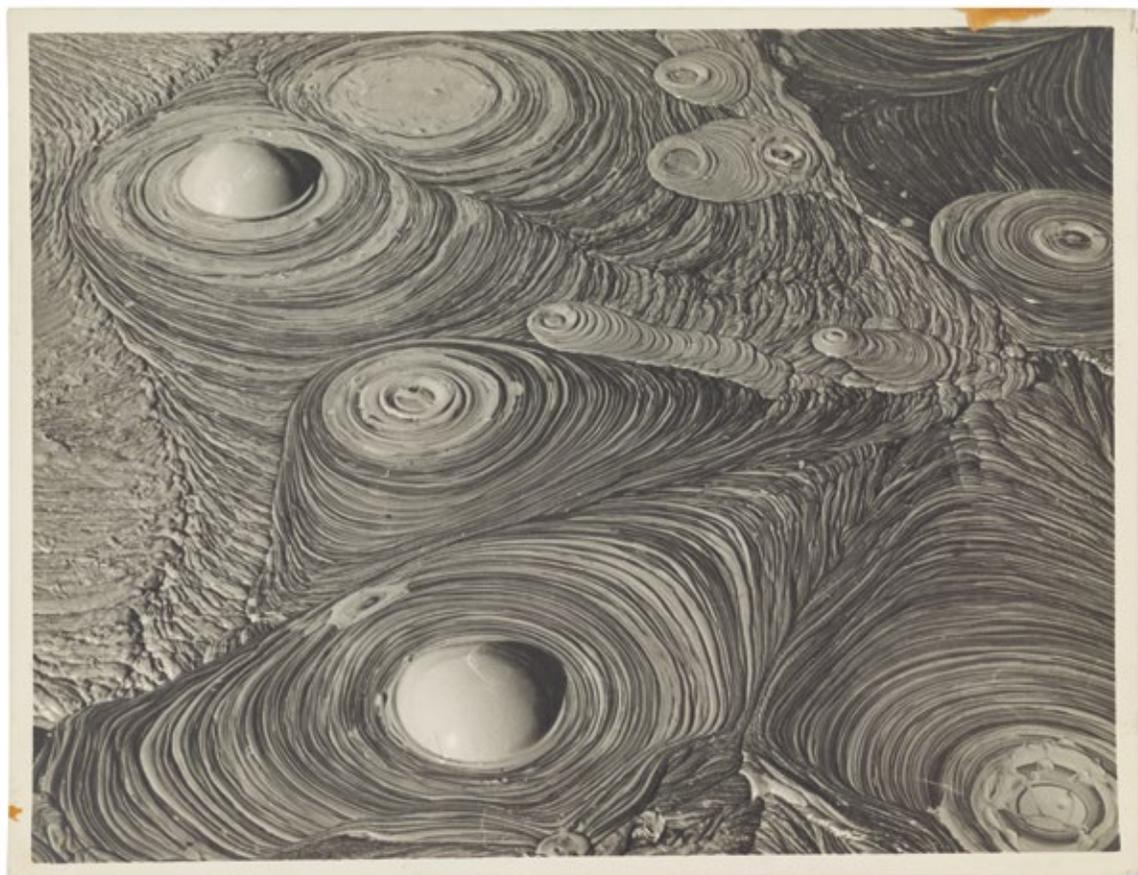
Schoon's shift to Auckland in the 1950s paralleled and contributed to the city's replacement of Christchurch as the centre for modernist art. He became closely connected to and exhibited in the gallery of fellow émigré artist Kees Hos, befriended artists like Colin McCahon, and joined the growing craft community headed by potters Len Castle and Barry Brickell. A subsequent move to Rotorua located Schoon within a complicated site of Māori art at the moment when customary and modernist factions were negotiating over the future of Māori cultural production. A later obsession with jade carving took him to the West Coast, and into the orbit of carvers Peter Hughson and Bill Mathieson.

Schoon's desire to seek out new experiences saw him contribute to many of the key developments of modern art in Aotearoa. He appears either peripherally or centrally in many accounts of key artists—resembling a Leonard Zelig or Forrest Gump figure moving through the background of others' stories. Nevertheless, in each of those moments or relationships, Schoon made and pursued new discoveries that stepped outside what the main figures were doing.

In Christchurch, his project of copying and arguing for the importance of the Ngāi Tahu rock drawings went far beyond the prevailing regionalist imagery of rolling hills and empty tracts of land awaiting culture's arrival. Schoon forced recognition of what was already there, making new claims for the importance of these drawings, and, of course, his own work that sprung from it. Decades later, in Rotorua, he would make photographs that capture the effects and patterns created by light hitting geothermal formations. This 'mudpool modernism'



Theo Schoon, Dennis Knight Turner, and Gordon Walters in Schoon's studio in the basement of the YMCA, Wellington, 1942.



Theo Schoon *Untitled* c.1966

celebrated the mysterious workings of nature, and made a unique contribution to the broader modernist project of finding or making the modern within the local. The photographs can legitimately be considered in the *objets trouvés* tradition and as an alternate local landscape tradition—but Schoon may have pushed it a bit far by claiming in 1970 that they constituted a twenty-year contribution to ‘environmental art’.⁴ Earlier in Auckland, he had made a similar ‘discovery’ in the drawings of institutionalised schizophrenic Rolfe Hattaway. He made improvisational paintings based on these drawings, and it can be argued that in his desire to escape or unlearn conventions he offered the major (and certainly the most problematic) contribution to the burgeoning primitivist interest in the art of children, the untrained, and the mentally unwell in Aotearoa.

Schoon’s body of work and the contribution it made to modern art here is substantial. Yet, to him, the work itself was always of secondary importance. Schoon was an inquiry-driven artist, always seeking new discoveries, possibilities, and revelations as the primary outcome of his practice. It was getting there that mattered most to him: generating the idea, working it through as an idea, process, and form. The finished work itself was the least interesting part of the process. Once a work was completed, he would photograph it as a record or to show others, then essentially discard it—often giving it away or destroying it. Sometimes it is hard to tell what Schoon considered a finished work, and what was a sketch. Some of the paintings now thought of as major works were made on cheap materials to be used as backdrops in photographs of his carved gourds—more props than paintings, or props as paintings.

Over recent years, Schoon’s photography has been reassessed and revalued as arguably his greatest achievement. While he certainly pushed the possibilities of the camera (as he did with every medium), Schoon never treated photography as an end in itself, but rather as a means to record or capture ideas. He treasured his tea chests full of negatives because they were a repository of artistic ideas and experiments, much more easily stored and transported than finished

artworks, and infinitely reproduceable. Like a lot of Schoon’s work, photographs were regularly given away or discarded. They were concrete realisations of ideas generated through discovery, debate, and process.

Schoon rarely pursued these investigations alone. He was an instigator, an agitator, and, while incredibly harsh and critical of those he deemed unworthy of his attention, he was intensely supportive of artists he valued. Schoon shared or even forced his ideas and knowledge onto others—and through this process introduced new possibilities into the cultural ferment. He worked closely with a handful of artists, always pushing them to extend beyond what was considered good practice here. Those closest to him, such as Gordon Walters and Rita Angus, acknowledged his role in the shaping of their own work. He also acknowledged the impact these artists had on his work, and always seemed to be in search of what we would now consider a collaborative or even collectivist approach to making art. He even described the photographs of geothermal activity as a form of collaboration—with nature ‘as an artist’.⁵ This is the Schoon invoked in MacDiarmid’s portrait—the charismatic outsider, mysteriously arrived in Aotearoa, who sees the world, culture, and art with fresh eyes and a ‘double vision’, which he was impelled to share to make a difference and transform an art scene and wider society that was, to his way of thinking, unable to see and appreciate what truly mattered.

These ideas all collide in what would become Schoon’s overarching project—to find a way of fusing Māori art traditions and European modernism to reinvigorate both. He saw this as a process of give and take—another form of collaboration, although one where he always maintained control. Māori art would reveal its secrets to him—a sympathetic receiver already familiar with non-western art forms—and then, through a Bauhaus-inspired process of analysis and synthesis, he would master and breathe new life into it. This, Schoon asserted, was necessary for Māori, since their culture had lost its way and become decadent. Māori art needed somebody to speak for it and carry it forward, and Schoon had



Theo Schoon *Incised Gourd* c.1969

no hesitation in appointing himself to this role. By the end of his career, he would claim to be making authentic Māori art, the equal of any of the taonga preserved in local museums.

Presenting Schoon's work now involves facing up to a series of issues. The most urgent is his appropriation of Māori art. The colonialist—at times, patently racist—ideas underpinning his project are difficult to see past from a contemporary perspective. There are legitimate questions as to whether such work should be given time and space now and if an exhibition such as this necessarily endorses or excuses such attitudes. Māori art certainly did not need or ask for Schoon to be its saviour—this was a delusional and potentially harmful position to adopt. But Schoon's overt and unashamed assertion of these dynamics opens up a way to put them on display, and to discuss how these kinds of ideas have shaped modernist art in Aotearoa. At a time when some of Schoon's contemporaries are receiving surveys of their work based on their interactions with Māori art, the rawness of Schoon's claims—and the various ways he co-opts entire artistic genres that are also obviously Māori modes, such as gourd and jade carving—forces unpleasant realities into view that can more easily be subdued in tasteful retrospectives of paintings that keep Māori art in the category of 'sources', far away from the artworks themselves.

There are other issues that a Theo Schoon exhibition raises. His work is as chaotic, uncontrolled, and as porous as his life. A tasteful 'masterpieces' show is out of the question—Schoon's work never aspired to and actively refutes such status. He freewheels across media, breaking established boundaries and hierarchies, such as those delineating art and craft, or the finished and unfinished. Such an exhibition would necessarily have to impose a rigorous shape and order on a practice that simply didn't have them. Value judgments around the relative merits of diverse modes and objects would need to be artificially and arbitrarily asserted. Exhibitions in this mode also do not like to acknowledge the input of others—the artist needs to be sealed off to assert their primacy and the value of their creations.

None of those conventions of the art world serves Schoon well, which might explain why this is the first major exhibition of his work since the 1982 survey curated by John Perry for the Rotorua Art Gallery. For a long time it has been difficult to see Schoon clearly, let alone imagine what an exhibition of his work might look like. The artist himself didn't make it easy. Almost every claim the work makes for itself on formal, material, and conceptual terms is met with its own counterclaim. He burned bridges and opportunities, and, in the process, a lot of his art was destroyed or lost. While this means that Schoon has not been seen as an 'exhibition ready' artist, the same qualities have made his work important to more discursive projects—notably group exhibitions, such as *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art* (1992), which sought to complicate prevailing nationalist narratives. Within such projects, Schoon's art serves as a productively troubling force. For the same reason, he has long been of interest to art historians addressing larger cultural issues and problematics that extend beyond the art work.

The time has come to see Schoon afresh, to embrace the problems of his work as its urgent and vital elements. In many ways, contemporary art leads the way here. What we describe as the atomised nature of Schoon's practice chimes closely with contemporary art which seeks to break media boundaries, roam between and across different modes and forms, and reject any notion of a coherent, signature style. The once rigidly upheld boundaries between art forms—especially between art and craft—have now well and truly been blown apart. Schoon's art is idea driven, process based, performative—all modes associated with the contemporary. The connection with Indonesian art, which was once so alien, now predates the mass artistic traffic between Aotearoa and Asia—based on the desire to forge connections that allow the art and cultures of the region to speak to each other in new ways.

Schoon is, in many ways, a proto-contemporary artist. He exemplifies a romantic, but non-heroic, model of the artist, the value of a life of pragmatic and dogged curiosity, and art-as-inquiry obsessively pursued largely for its own



Michael Parekowhai *Détour* 2018



Theo Schoon in his house at Home Street, 1962.
PHOTO Bernie Hill

sake. In this sense, his work speaks differently to the formalism and professionalism of many of his peers—then and especially now.

Contemporary artists are forcing us to look at Schoon again. Andrew McLeod's *Camowhaiwhai* works of the late 1990s inserted themselves into the problematic cultural space Schoon's work pried open with a more acceptable self-awareness and irony. Australian-Dutch painter Matthys Gerber has set up a decade-long dialogue with Schoon's art. An early-1960s photograph of Schoon surrounded by his gourds was the inspiration for a 2019 installation, *The Poet's Room*, by jeweller Karl Fritsch and curator Justine Olsen at Objectspace.

In 2018, Michael Parekowhai included a number of Schoon's works in his *Détour* installation at Te Papa, which draws from and unpicks the national collection. There is even a hint of a Schoon-like 'collaboration', turning the tables or returning the favour by 'touching up' one of his photographs, in reference to Schoon's own interventions within Māori art. The terms of this encounter are left open, but Parekowhai holds back on explicit critique. He says that Schoon's '*toi moko* images push my own limits of taste and what's acceptable',⁶ but that 'without them [Schoon and Ans Westra] breaking rules and protocol we wouldn't have a lot of the things they documented'.⁷ Schoon definitely did transgress in all sorts of ways—ways which *Détour*, like this exhibition, argues are equal parts vital, alive, and problematic for contemporary culture.

This is the most substantial gathering of Theo Schoon's art in almost forty years. Yet, like Schoon himself, it does not use these works as end or high points in a clearly defined and delineated practice. Rather, each work is treated as a point of gathering and departure that momentarily captures flows of ideas, histories, and processes that open onto a larger set of conversations and possibilities—often made with and between other artists, cultures, and art forms. We want to reveal Schoon's larger project. As such, the exhibition revels in moments of experimentation and encounter—it brings in the full range of his work and seeks to reveal the links and ideas that connect seemingly disparate

or even clashing forms and agendas. This is not a practice to be smoothed over.

Most importantly, this exhibition presents Schoon as an artist who was constantly in dialogue or dispute with others. Each section of the exhibition explores a connection or a relationship with other artists or cultural forms (often in combination). That most of these sections come with vexed questions of authorship and appropriation highlights something fundamentally important about Schoon's work—its blurring of lines between self and other, yours and ours, good and bad. Schoon took, took from, and exploited others in the pushing of his agenda for the creation of an Antipodean modernism synthesising Māori and European art. Yet he also gave many things back, to other artists and to culture.

Schoon was a catalyst and a node for modernist practice in Aotearoa. His art gathers its force from these moments of contact and rupture with other artists and cultural forms. While any artist can be understood within their network of artistic relationships and social connections, this exhibition argues that it is a particularly good way to approach Schoon and his work. It accounts for the ways his work atomised and pushed outside itself and into other things—including contemporary consciousness. This is where his importance to art in Aotearoa (then and now) can most strongly be felt.

This exhibition is itself in dialogue with a number of recent shows that reassess the modernist project in Aotearoa and/or the contribution of its key artists. In following close on the heels of *Gordon Walters: New Vision*, it continues what has been a four-decade long push-and-pull, call-and-response relationship between these two artists' works, which started in Schoon's Wellington studio in 1942, and has been played out in art history, the art market, and now in retrospective exhibitions. Each very different exhibition takes its cue from the approach of its subject. Schoon adroitly summed up these differences in his assertion that 'Gordon has been more a studio artist, while I have been the wanderer, the cat sniffing around in a strange warehouse'.⁸ *New Vision* takes a classic monographic approach, and is focused on

revealing Walters's development of a formalist abstraction based around a few core elements. It is an exhibition of the 'studio artist': spare, stripped back, marking internal progression, and focused on individual achievement. Schoon's role as instigator of many of the ideas that propelled the changes in Walters's work is acknowledged, but, by necessity, downplayed. While he is granted a larger role than just a footnote in Walters's development, as has often been the case, Schoon's presence is largely restricted to a series of references on wall labels.

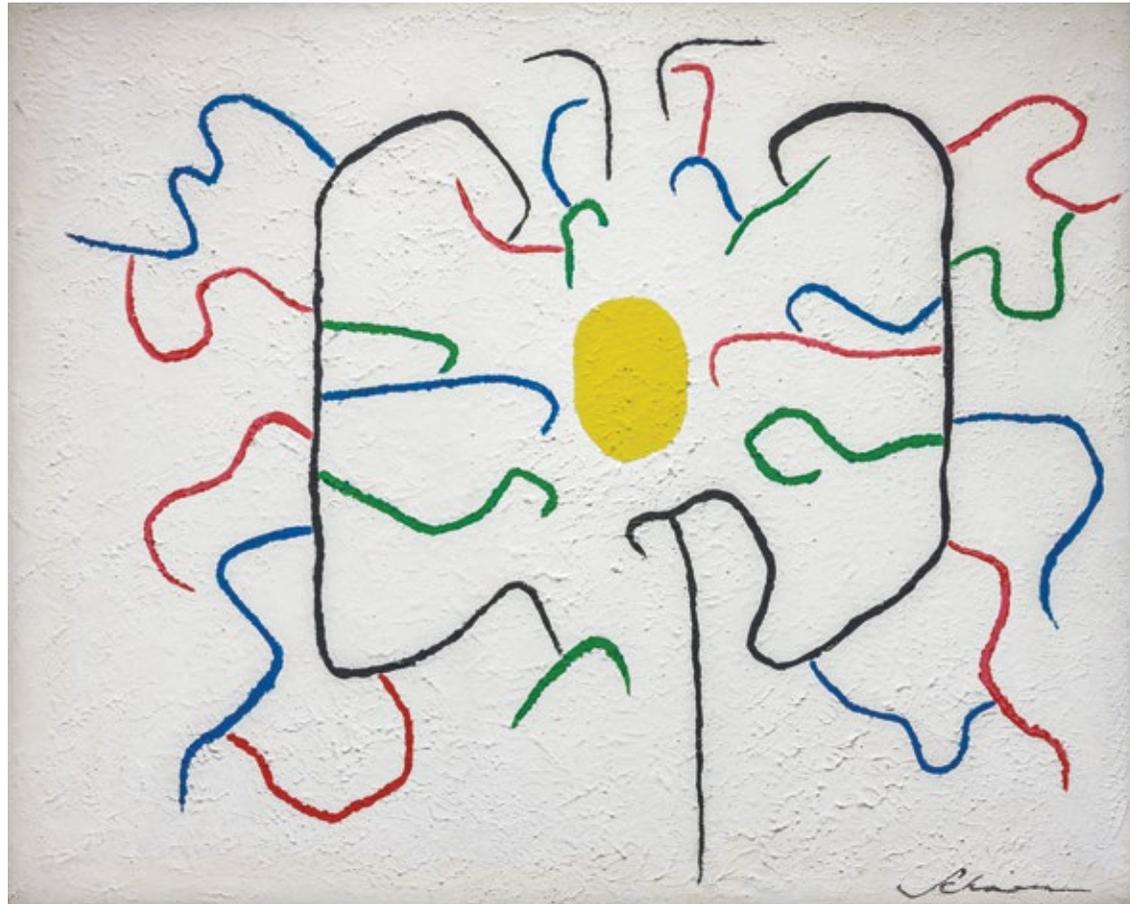
Schoon once wrote to Walters about the refusal of reviewers to acknowledge the influence of Rolfe Hattaway on his own work: 'The really interesting things never get into print do they?'⁹ They also rarely get into exhibitions. In focusing on artistic relationships and networks rather than individual artistic progression, *Split Level View Finder* seeks to pull what is often treated as supplementary—background information on a wall label or archival materials in a vitrine—into the exhibition. This is an attempt to get those 'really interesting things' into the show. Schoon's work makes more sense and a bigger contribution when it is allowed to be in dialogue with other artists and forms. Such an approach allows ideas and debates to come to the fore, read through, around, and as propelling the individual art works. The complex politics running throughout the exhibition can be grappled with, rather than buried beneath assertions of artistic progress or genius. It is a productive way to explore the work of that cat sniffing around the strange warehouse—the art and culture of Aotearoa that Schoon prowled through and left an indelible mark on.

The chapters in this catalogue follow and flesh out the sections of the exhibition. The first is a discussion of Schoon's project to copy and preserve the rock drawings of Te Wai Pounamu, and its ongoing impact on art and cultural exchange in Aotearoa. The second chapter considers Schoon's encounter with Rolfe Hattaway in Avondale Hospital, the nature of this relationship, and the work that he and Walters made as a result of it. The relationship between Schoon and Walters, a central element of this exhibition, is the focus of the third chapter which

explores the nature of their shared working process as it played out over or through Māori art—especially the koru form that both artists claimed for their own work and collaboration.

Schoon's interaction with Māori art is another current that runs through the exhibition. It is addressed in the fourth chapter, which uses Schoon's participation in the *First Māori Festival of the Arts* at Tūrangawaewae marae in 1963 to consider the relationship between his work and the burgeoning modernism of Māori artists at this time—all attended by trickier questions around what he took from and claimed to offer back to Māori and Māori art. The fifth chapter tracks a long-term relationship established between Schoon, Rita Angus, and sexologist John Money based around shared interests in Eastern culture, nature mysticism, and the psychological powers of art. The final chapter zeroes in on Schoon's 1965 exhibition at New Vision Gallery. It is the one section of the exhibition that shows Schoon's work by itself—summing up everything he had achieved by this stage of his career, and hinting at everything to come. Schoon's work may be presented on its own terms here, but those discussions and forms he was engaged with are ever present.

The catalogue also brings in other voices and perspectives. Nathan Pohio addresses Schoon from his perspective as a Ngāi Tahu artist and curator. Andrew Paul Wood explores the international connections and contexts for Schoon's work. These two essays, one looking from the inside out, the other from the outside in, also address the broader questions this exhibition grapples with—where and how can we locate Schoon's work? Where does it belong? And to whom?



Theo Schoon *Manchu Diadem* 1965

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- 1 'Theo Schoon Transcripts: Tapes 1–3, Rotorua 1982'. Martin Rumsby collection, Auckland.
 - 2 Theo Schoon, letter to Francesca Mayer, no.16, 1. CA000505, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.
 - 3 Theo Schoon, letter to Gordon Walters, undated, 4. CA000044/001/0001, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.
 - 4 Theo Schoon, letter to Michael Dunn, 17 October 1970.
 - 5 'Theo Schoon Transcripts: Tapes 1–3, Rotorua 1982'. Martin Rumsby collection, Auckland.
 - 6 'Michael Parekōwhai Talks about His Current Exhibition at Te Papa Tongarewa', *Artforum*, Summer 2018: 266.
 - 7 Anthony Byrt, 'How Influential Artist Michael Parekōwhai Is Transforming Te Papa', *Metro*, March 2018: 47.
 - 8 Theo Schoon, letter to Michael Dunn, 10 October 1983.
 - 9 Theo Schoon, letter to Gordon Walters, undated [1982], 2. CA000044/001/0001, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.

OVERLEAF

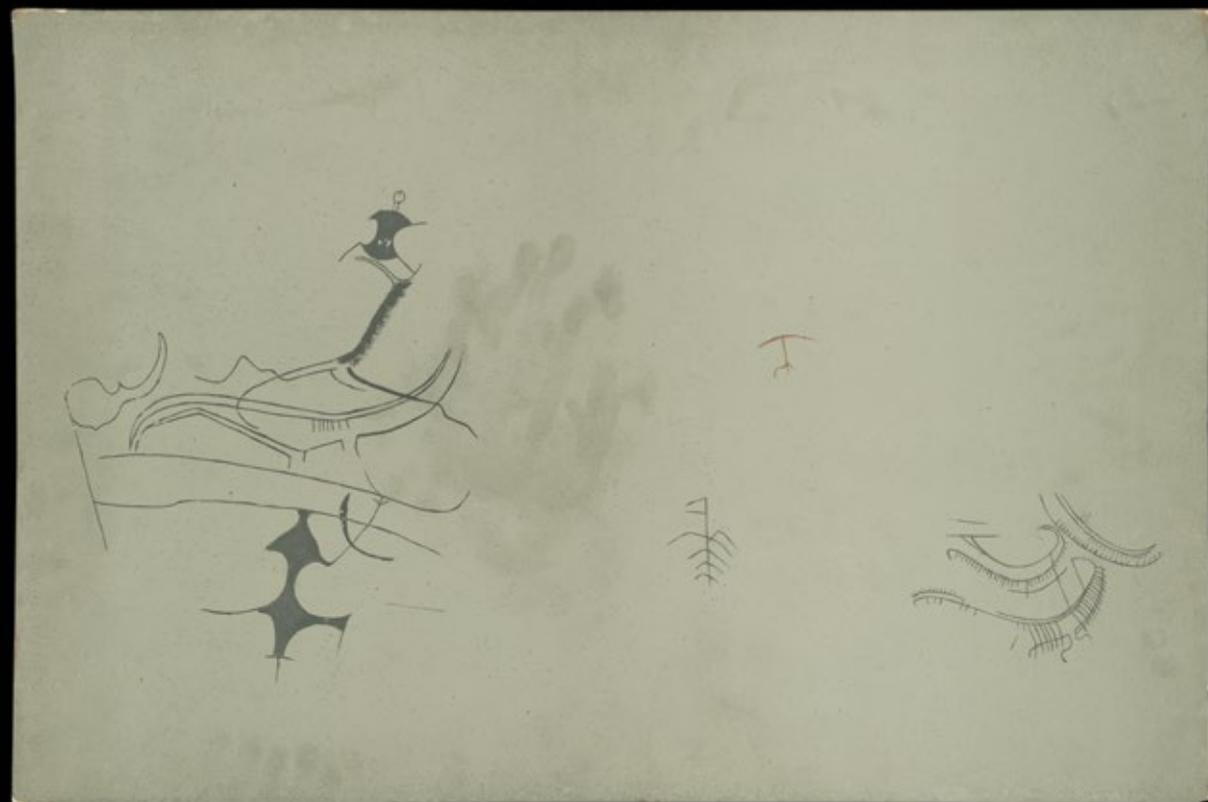
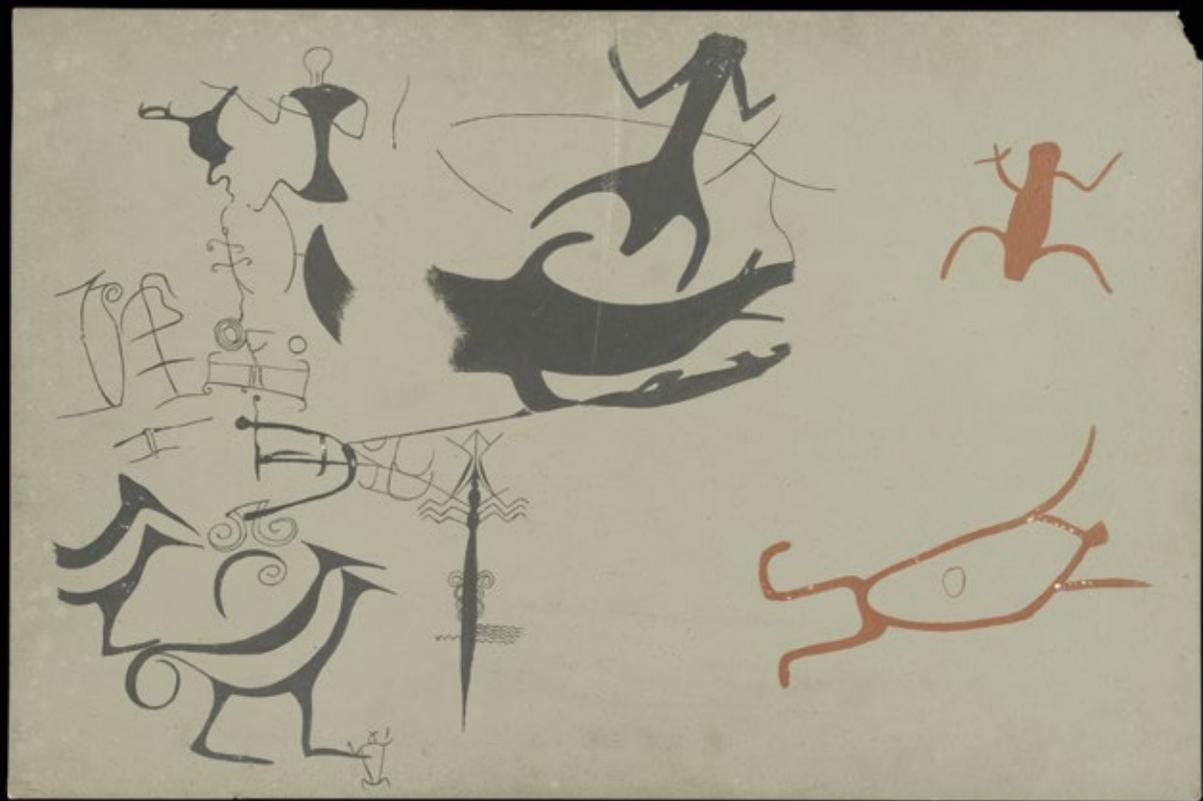
Theo Schoon *Painting: Māori Rock Drawing Hanging Rock Opihi Part 1* c.1947

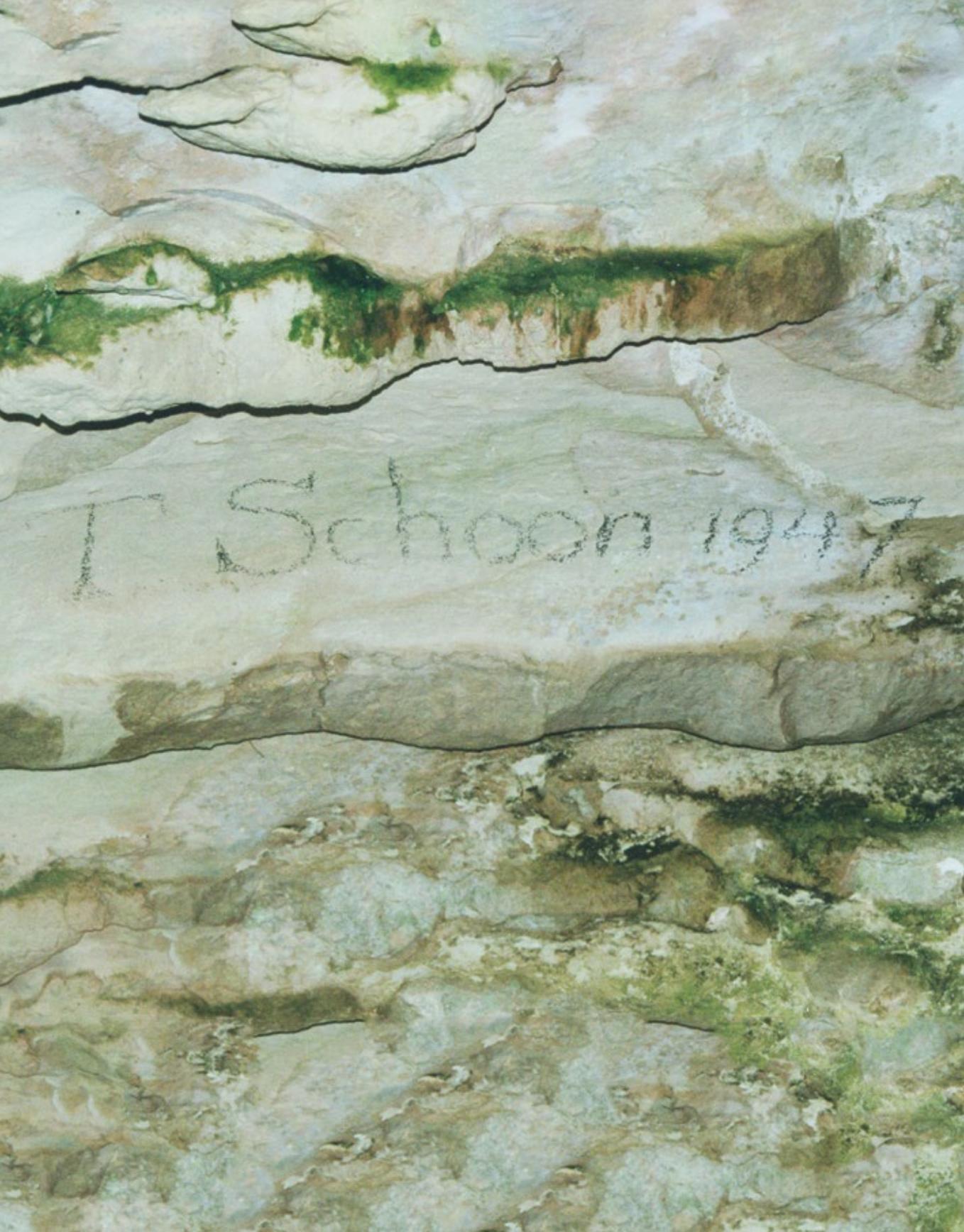
Theo Schoon *Painting: Māori Rock Drawing Hanging Rock Opihi Part 2* c.1947

Theo Schoon *Painting: Māori Rock Drawing Hanging Rock Opihi Part 3* c.1947

Theo Schoon *Painting: Māori Rock Drawing Hanging Rock Opihi Part 4* c.1947







THEO SCHOON AND THE ROCK ART OF TE WAI POUNAMU

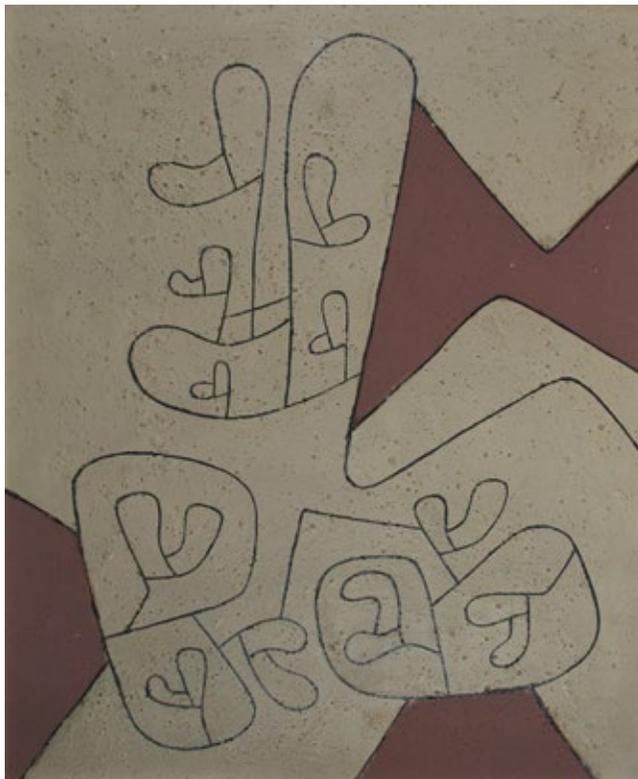
The rock art drawings of the South Canterbury region are now recognised as having great cultural significance. These predominately charcoal and red ochre drawings, found on, and occasionally incised into, the roofs and walls of shelters and rock faces, date back perhaps as far as 600 years. Now firmly under the guardianship of Ngāi Tahu, the drawings have a new base in the Te Ana Māori Rock Art Centre in Timaru. This ancient art form is more visible and accessible than ever before. A small video in the centre's permanent display suggests a different set of relationships and responsibilities to the drawings. Taken from old newsreel footage, it shows Theo Schoon setting off down the Waitaki River in an inflatable dinghy with sketching equipment under his arm. On his way to find and copy the drawings, he is presented as 'an enterprising artist opening up the hidden secrets of his adopted country'.¹ The black-and-white images, Schoon's clothes, and the plummy voice of the narrator clearly mark this film as coming from another time. Even so, it feels out of place and a rather uncomfortable fit with such a strong contemporary assertion of the cultural value of the rock art, and who has the right to speak for and about it.

The presence of the video acknowledges Schoon's crucial role in the research and preservation of the drawings, which paved the

Schoon's signature on the wall of a rock shelter,
Valley of the Moa, Craigmore, 2003.
PHOTO Michael Dunn



Theo Schoon *Early Rock Drawing Copy Painted at Ōpihi* 1946



Theo Schoon *Untitled* c.1955

way for their status as part of Aotearoa's unique artistic culture and their current value as taonga Māori. As a new immigrant who didn't expect to stay in Aotearoa, Schoon was shocked by the mistreatment of the drawings, which were slowly being destroyed by cattle, quarrying, hydrothermal developments, and general apathy. He found an ally in Canterbury Museum ethnologist Roger Duff, who in 1945 had completed a field survey of the rock art sites. While not valuing what he found as art—he referred to them as 'doodlings', a judgment Schoon never forgave—Duff insisted that their preservation was paramount. Schoon was the right person at the right time with the right enthusiasm for the task.

He was first commissioned by Canterbury Museum and later the Department of Internal Affairs to document the rock art sites and make copies of the drawings. The task was much larger and more arduous than anticipated. Schoon worked in appalling conditions, and often found himself dependent on farmers for shelter and support, even churning out what he called 'pot-boiler' paintings of local people and landscapes to keep afloat. Schoon completed the task, even after the grant had stopped and his relationship with Duff and other officials had soured.²

This was never going to be what John Coley would later optimistically describe as a meeting of 'the objectivity of the scholar with the empathy of the artist'.³ Hired ostensibly under the aegis of science and anthropology, Schoon only had art in his head. His artistic training in Rotterdam in the 1930s had exposed him to European primitivist modernism, headed by Paul Klee's search for universal modes of creativity that hadn't been corrupted by civilisation. Schoon saw the rock drawings through the lens of modernist art, and unsurprisingly saw modernist art in them. (One of Duff's many complaints was that Schoon was 'under a severe temptation to highlight those [drawings] which seem to conform to the modernisms of Paul Klee, or Picasso, and neglect those which don't'.⁴) For Schoon, already at war with the conservative Pākehā art world he encountered in this country, the rock drawings were the basis of a new, authentic tradition of art

in Aotearoa—with Schoon himself and the rock artists he had 'discovered' at its head.

Schoon's copies of the drawings betray the competing agendas. His first efforts in the Craigmore region of South Canterbury seek to accurately copy the drawings from limestone walls onto flat two-dimensional surfaces. First he made outline tracings of the drawings, then copied them in oils at a reduced scale onto specially prepared boards. He paid attention both to the drawings and their sites, often using colour and texture to mimic the limestone walls on which they were found. Sometimes his copies would extend over multiple boards to capture the impressive scale of the drawings, tracing the artists' movements across the rock face.

Schoon soon realised that this approach was not viable and rethought his strategy. He stopped paying attention to the character of the sites and focused on the drawings themselves, which he would float against a uniform background. The pale yellow and tan backgrounds that hinted at the original surfaces on which the drawings were made soon gave way to more indistinct, grey backgrounds, which speak of and to the realm of modernist painting. The shift is decisive: it emphasises that the complex optical effects created by the relationships between figure and ground in the drawings are to be read on modernist terms, as part of the ongoing development of European art in the twentieth century. Even the boards that he used referenced art traditions, being roughly the shape and size of the conventional Pākehā paintings that Schoon loved to despise. (Artist Tony Fomison would later follow in Schoon's footsteps, but challenge his methodology by working on large plastic sheets, which he argued allowed for more accurate copies.) Considering all of this, it is more accurate to say that Schoon doesn't really copy the rock drawings; he re-presents them through the conventions of European modernism. They are tidied up and aestheticised. They become more unified and consistent—as though they are the work of a single artist, rather than made by multiple artists working on the same rock surface over multiple visits and long periods of time.



Theo Schoon *Basic Arawa Pattern and Bird Motif* 1957

The question of whether we are seeing Schoon's work or that of the original artists is made even more problematic because he retouched many of the original drawings. He would sometimes go over the faded marks with red or black crayon. It was an interventionist approach based on the belief that he was saving the drawings by authentically restoring them. The authorities saw it differently, and, after initially agreeing, repeatedly denied his requests to touch up the drawings. Schoon's transgressions became an ongoing source of dispute. Duff was dismayed by Schoon's delight in the possibility that his drawings might be mistaken for the originals. In one cave in Craigmore, Schoon left a two-metre long signature on a rock face—the ultimate assertion of authorship and ownership.

Behind Schoon's intervention is a problematic ideological position. Schoon believed that the months spent living in these limestone shelters and paying close attention to the rock drawings had transformed him, opening up a connection with the original artists, whom he described as 'artist-priests', and the drawings, which he described as 'frozen music in which the very soul of the mythopoetic Polynesian has been crystallised'.⁵ He claimed to have been initiated into the source or essence of Māori art, and this granted him the necessary permission—even the responsibility—to touch up and interpret these drawings. This music, he argued, was communicated with and through him.

The project was as much about Schoon as it was about the rock drawings. He later described the experience as 'somewhat like falling on your head. You would never quite be the same person again'.⁶ He claimed to have exited the caves with a 'new vision' and a special connection with Māori art through which he could escape the limitations of western art. This became the source of everything that followed: 'If my stuff has a distinctive flavour', he told Gordon Walters in 1982, 'it is due to the rock drawing experience. All knowledge leaves a trace in one way or another.'⁷

As well as a personal mythology, the rock drawings provided Schoon with a set of strategies, processes and designs that would sustain his

practice for years. A later work, *Untitled* (1955), evokes the rock drawings through its coarsely textured surface, created by mixing glue and sand into the gesso, and in the lines and hollow-centred designs applied to the tan-and-grey surface—precisely the colours of his rock drawing copies.

Basic Arawa Pattern and Bird Motif (1957) uses a version of a bird pattern 'discovered' (as Schoon's inscription on the back of the painting puts it) near Mangakino in the North Island in 1952. The bird sits in a field of kōwhaiwhai designs. It is a combination designed to demonstrate Schoon's belief that the bird, originally applied to a rock wall, is constructed from the 'sacred ingredients' of the koru, a process Schoon thought was 'very elegant, and clever, and original'.⁸ Notably, Schoon never passes off these elements as his own. The original source is acknowledged in the title, and the site of encounter is recorded on the back of the painting. Yet the work attests not only to what Schoon has received (taken) from Māori art, but also to his fervent belief in his access to the secrets of Māori art. This initiation, so he thought, enabled him to make authentic Māori art—underpinning his later self-appointed mission to revive the arts of tā moko, kōwhaiwhai, and gourd and jade carving.

Schoon enthusiastically shared his reverence for the rock drawings with the culture at large. He worked for their preservation and protection through the museum system and through government departments, and through articles and lectures set on raising the profile of what he considered to be New Zealand's oldest art. He also brought other artists into the conversation. In 1946 and early 1947, he invited Gordon Walters to visit him twice at rock drawing sites in South Canterbury, and Walters was equally compelled by the drawings and their potential to be read through the framework of European modernist art.

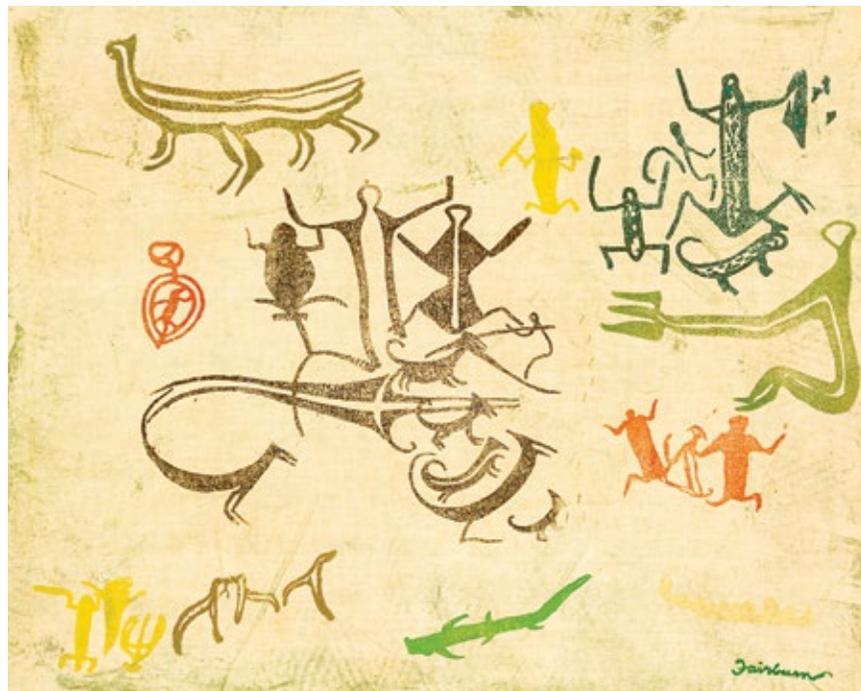
Just before this first visit, Schoon and Walters each made a painting of a dancing human figure transformed into a transparent, non-naturalistic form, splayed and flattened



Theo Schoon *Untitled (Dancing Figure)* 1940s

RIGHT Gordon Walters *Untitled* 1945





A.R.D. Fairburn *Untitled* c.1949



Dennis Knight Turner *Abstract Painting with Polynesian Motifs* 1953

in a way that bears resemblance to those in the rock drawings. The timing and common elements (subject, colour, approach), suggest that the paintings were made alongside or in relation to each other. Both read as self-portraits—or perhaps portraits of each other—as travellers into the other realms symbolised by the rock drawings. The paintings embody this shared enthusiasm and wonder. Schoon gifted his painting to psychologist John Money at their first meeting in June 1946, and he would accompany Schoon to the rock art sites near the Ōpihi River the following year.

If these two paintings signal the start of a shared adventure, it is one that eventually took Schoon and Walters down different paths. For his part, Walters later claimed to have ‘shared his [Schoon’s] enthusiasm for these works and for a time that had an influence on my painting’.⁹ Immediately following his visits to Schoon, he made now famous works like *The Poet* (1947) and *New Zealand Landscape* (1947), which are closely bound to rock art sources in their non-naturalistic rendering of space and form, and in the play between negative and positive, figure and ground. Eventually, the explicit signs of the rock drawings disappear, fed into the development of an ever more rigorous form of abstraction—one which always maintains those figure/ground relationships that connect back to or through the rock drawings. A series of gouaches of interlocking geometric forms that activate figure/ground possibilities, which Walters started in the late 1950s, mark this transition.

According to Michael Dunn, Walters was more strongly compelled by the liberating formal possibilities offered by the rock drawings, rather than their imagery or connection to Māori sources, of which he was always a cautious observer.¹⁰ Walters used the rock drawings to facilitate a shift to a more formalised abstraction. Schoon used them to foster a personal mythology of initiation that brought him closer to what he perceived as the essence of Māori art. Both approaches are problematic in their acknowledgment of Māori. Schoon sticks too closely to his source, seeking a primitivist connection with the other; Walters denies any

direct connection by claiming a pure formalism. These different approaches, forged out of the same experiences, would fall on different sides of the appropriation debate of the 1990s. Within this debate, Schoon’s engagement and acknowledgement of Māori sources was argued to be less exploitative than Walters’s formalism.¹¹

Others followed Schoon to the rock art sites—in mind, if not in body as Walters had. Poet A.R.D. Fairburn was engaged in a similar search for ordinary creative sources as Schoon, but wanted to relocate these elsewhere—in the domestic realm. He made a number of fabric patterns from lino blocks using rock art designs provided by Schoon. The resulting prints became ubiquitous as curtains, screens, tablecloths, and wall hangings in mid-twentieth century Aotearoa. The wall hangings were printed on calico to recreate the textured surfaces of the rock art sites, and they were even sold in the United Nations gift shop in New York. Actress Vivien Leigh wore a scarf decorated with Fairburn motifs acquired during a visit to Aotearoa.

Artist Dennis Knight Turner made a series of paintings in the 1950s also based on the rock drawings. Like Walters, he was mentored by Schoon, but, unlike Walters, his paintings reveal an understanding of the possibilities of the rock drawings filtered through Schoon’s example. Schoon later said that Turner didn’t understand the lessons of Māori art in the same way he and Walters did; in other words, he didn’t realise it was a system of design.¹² Both Fairburn and Turner saw only the drawings, not the pictorial logic that governed how they were combined and turned into compositions. Positive/negative relations are not essential in Fairburn and Turner’s works, whereas they are the critical or essential aspect in the investigations of Schoon and Walters. Fairburn and Turner essentially made prints and paintings of Schoon’s interpretations of the rock drawings, using the figures and designs without any sense of the larger relationships that Schoon and Walters were seeing.

Schoon also used photography as a means of documenting the drawings. He developed the films in-situ to gauge the results, and printed



them later. In a canny move, he only promised the Canterbury Museum and the Department of Internal Affairs prints, not the negatives, which became another source of contention and enabled Schoon to keep printing copies years later. Photography offered one solution to the problems of documenting the drawings but raised others. Michael Dunn notes that the poor light and low contrast between the rock surface and faded drawings made some of them near impossible to photograph. He suggests that this may have led to Schoon retouching the drawings.¹³ They needed to be camera ready.

Schoon's photographs were never exhibited as art works in their time. Over recent years, they have become valued as more than a simple preparatory stage in his project. Like the painted copies, they were never 'truthful' documentation. Schoon selects, frames, and interprets his findings, often breaking down recognisable forms into abstracted shapes and patterns. They belong as much to modernist photography as to their archaeological sites and the aspirations and conventions of science. Schoon didn't just photograph individual drawings, he also took time to photograph the rock shelters and the South Canterbury landscapes that the Māori artists traversed on their journeys from the east to the west coast, or during their hunts for moa and other food. These photographs don't offer any increased sense of objectivity, however. Seen together, they conjure a mythical, almost alien place, distant from the dull cultural landscape he despised and that was being painted by many of his contemporaries. In this sense, Schoon's rock drawing photographs have a lot in common with the surrealist images he created during sketching and photography trips with Walters around the Kāpiti Coast region in the early 1940s. A surrealist aesthetic of eerie rock formations and stark, grass-covered hills was perfectly suited to Schoon's mythology of self transformation at and through these sites. 'In these labyrinths of limestone reigns a gloomy and mysterious atmosphere', Schoon wrote in 1948. 'These weirdly-shaped rocks, fantastic caves and seemingly endless subterranean passages can strike terror into the heart of modern



Theo Schoon *Rock Art Sites* c.1947

Theo Schoon *Duntroon Detail* 1947

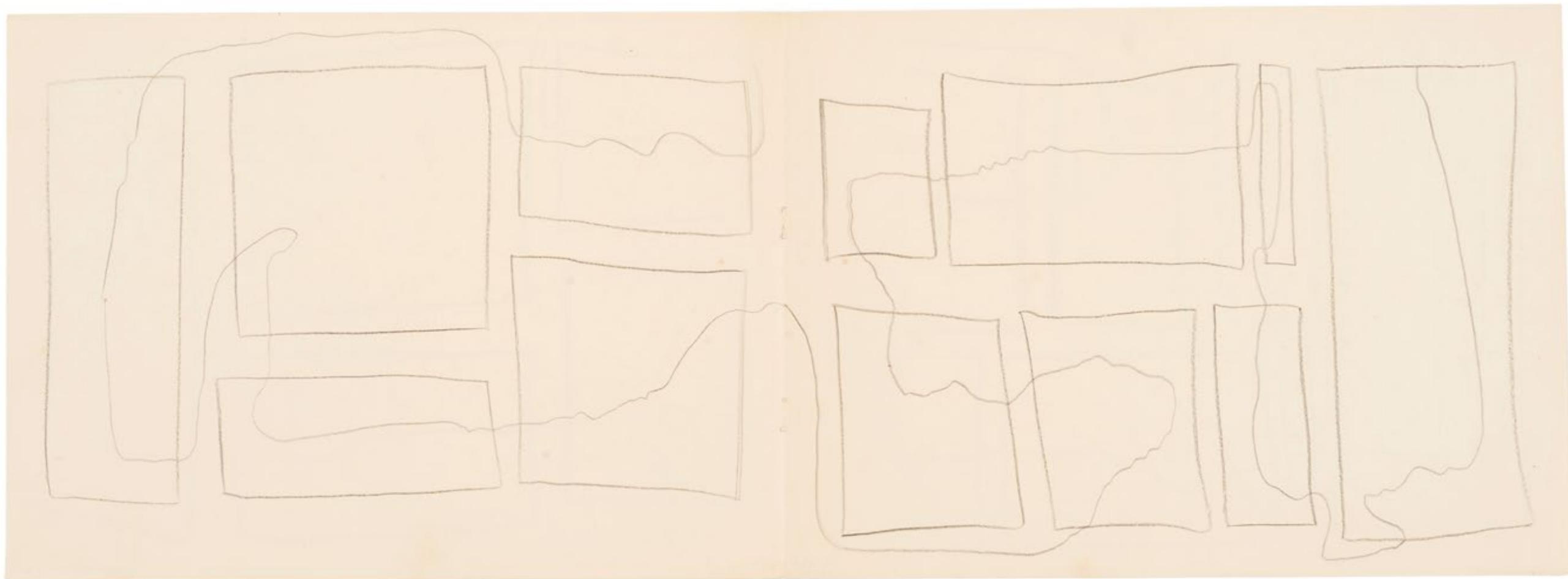


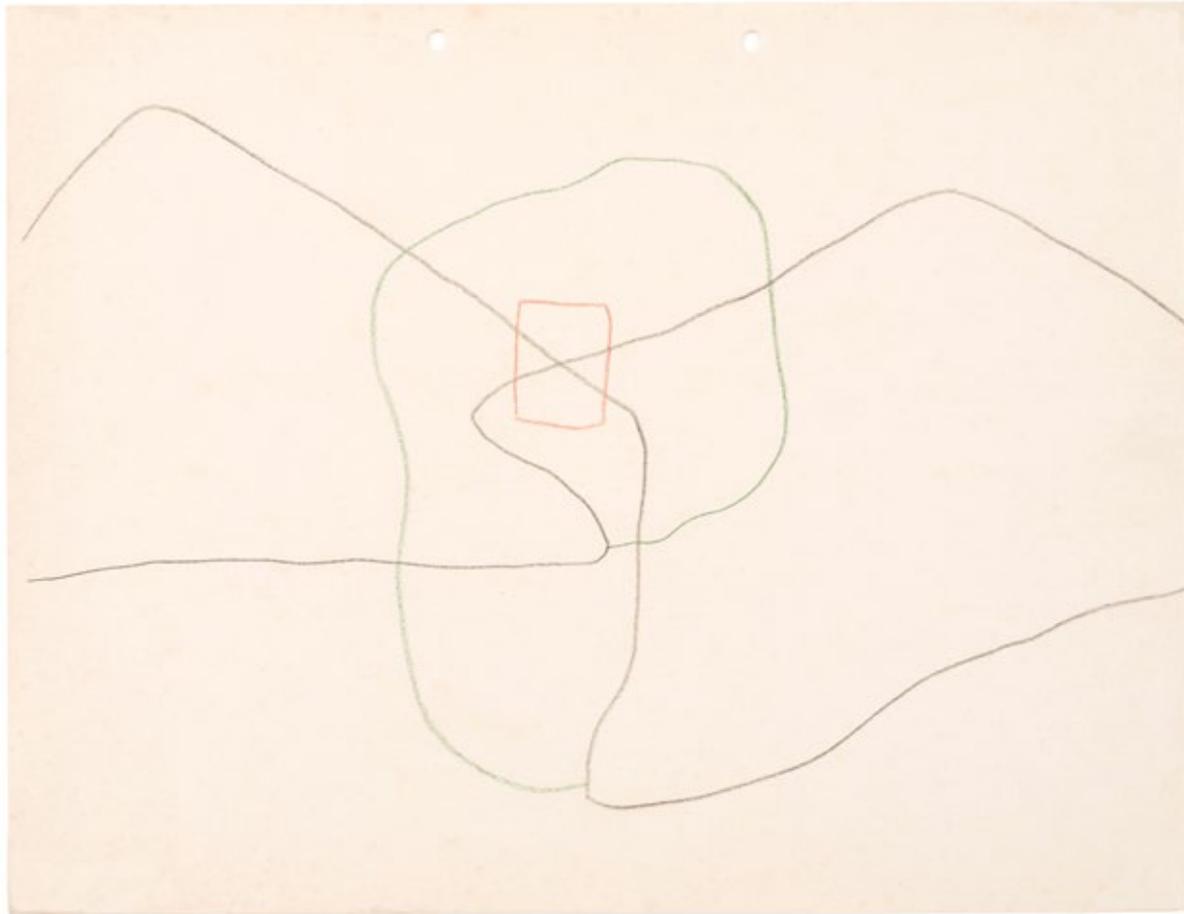
Theo Schoon *Rock Art Sites* c.1947

man.’¹⁴ This is a landscape of his own invention, a place where he could be ‘the European cave man’—with a camera.

It is true that Schoon was instrumental in creating a climate where the rock drawings were researched, preserved, and valued by Pākehā, and that he worked tirelessly to carry out his mission. His description of the sites as ‘New Zealand’s oldest art galleries’ lives on in Te Ana Rock Centre’s tagline ‘the oldest art galleries of Aotearoa’. But Schoon had his own agenda. He believed that he had discovered and saved the rock drawings, and in that process something of the power of that art and the artist-priests who made them had transferred to him. He claimed to be able to absorb their lessons, speak their language, and vowed to carry this forward to transform the modern art of Aotearoa. Schoon became a modernist only after he had spent time studying, documenting, and physically altering the drawings. There is a story of transformation here, but not one in which a Dutch artist born in Java becomes a modern-day tohunga. Rather, a Dutch artist born in Java is changed by Māori art and becomes a modernist.

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- 1 ‘Artist Records Carvings of Maori Hunters’, *Movietone News*, 1948.
 - 2 Neil Roberts, ‘Maori Rock Drawing and Theo Schoon’, in *Maori Rock Drawings: The Theo Schoon Interpretations* (Christchurch: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1985), unpaginated.
 - 3 John Coley, ‘Foreword’, in *Maori Rock Drawings: The Theo Schoon Interpretations* (Christchurch: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1985), unpaginated.
 - 4 Roger Duff, letter to H.D. Skinner, 20 June 1947, 1. CMR 6/10 Folder 25A, Canterbury Museum, Christchurch.
 - 5 Theo Schoon, ‘New Zealand’s Oldest Art Galleries’, *New Zealand Listener*, 12 September 1947: 6–7.
 - 6 Theo Schoon, ‘Pictures by a Caveman’, *Australian Photography*, December 1972: 40–5, 68, 81.
 - 7 Theo Schoon, letter to Gordon Walters, undated [1982], 2. CA000044/001/0001, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.
 - 8 Theo Schoon, letter to Virginia Umberger, undated. CA000216, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.
 - 9 Gordon Walters, letter to Michael Dunn, 15 October 1982. Christine Fernyhough collection, Auckland.
 - 10 Michael Dunn, ‘The Art of Gordon Walters’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 1984), 36.
 - 11 Rangihiroa Panoho, ‘Maori: At the Centre, On the Margins’, Mary Barr (ed), *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992), 132.
 - 12 Theo Schoon, letter to Michael Dunn, November 1983.
 - 13 Michael Dunn, ‘Rock Art, Landscape and Limestone: Theo Schoon’s Photographs in North Otago and South Canterbury, 1946–48’, *Journal of New Zealand Art History*, vol. 27, 2007: 17.
 - 14 ‘Ancient Rock Drawings Found in Southland’, *Southland Times*, 10 January 1948.





Rolfe Hattaway *Untitled* 1949

THEO SCHOON, ROLFE HATTAWAY, AND GORDON WALTERS

Over a three month period in 1949, Alfred Rolfe Grave Hattaway made around 300 drawings with coloured pencils on paper. Many are abstract, created from straight and wobbly lines set within rectangles and squares. A few have recognisable subjects, such as a letter or a parcel with handwritten address and postage stamp, a radio, and a movie projector. Hattaway would slowly dissolve or disintegrate these objects across a series of drawings, gradually transforming them into abstract lines and shapes, following an inscrutable but undeniable set of rules that only he understood. Hattaway also produced texts: streams of words that don't make sense, but sometimes rhyme or make puns; mirror writing, where the words are backwards; and calligraphy that is totally unintelligible because it resembles the shapes of words but doesn't have letters.

Hattaway was a 42-year-old permanent resident at what was then known as Avondale Mental Hospital in Auckland. Little is known of his life before this point. The youngest of three sons, he was born in Pakuranga, and probably boarded at Auckland Grammar when his family later moved to Te Kūiti. He had an interest in art, and it is likely he had some form of training, possibly at Elam School of Fine Arts. A poem published in the Australian tabloid *Smith's Weekly* in 1928 suggests aspirations to be a writer. His family brought him back from Australia following

court charges and a period of care at Gladesville Mental Hospital in Sydney, following a diagnosis of schizophrenia. He worked as a librarian in Auckland for a few years until his schizophrenia worsened and he was admitted to Avondale.¹

In 1949, following his time documenting the rock art sites of Te Wai Pounamu, Schoon moved to Auckland where he secured a job as an orderly at Avondale. There he encountered something totally unexpected: drawings, up to seven metres long, made by Hattaway using lumps of clay on the asphalt surface of the exercise yard. Seeing these drawings, and Hattaway at work on them, was a revelation for Schoon, as if he was encountering a contemporary version of the same creative impulse that fuelled the rock drawings. As he saw Klee in the rock drawings, Schoon must have seen both Klee and the rock drawings in Hattaway's large abstract drawings. Similarly made with materials available to hand on rough surfaces, they were not only undocumented, but also ephemeral—washed away with a hose at the end of each day. Finding extraordinary art in a most unlikely place, in its own way as other-worldly as the limestone landscape of South Canterbury, must have validated Schoon's personal investment in the rock drawings. It also seemed like an extraordinary opportunity, since he was aware of the modernist beliefs that linked the artistic expression of 'primitive' peoples with that of children and the mentally ill. Each sprung, so the belief went, from a pure creative realm, uncorrupted by western forms of knowledge and experience.

As with the rock drawings, Schoon made the most of his contact with such an unexpected source of art. He started by copying Hattaway's drawings. 'I soon realised that I had to copy this work everyday, to understand the nature and meaning of this very systematic output', recalled Schoon in 1982. 'Thanks to my own background in design I quickly realised that I was looking at the work of a real wizard.'² That process proved unsatisfactory, as he mostly worked night shifts, after Hattaway's drawings were destroyed by the cleaning of the exercise yard. Patients were also denied access to the exercise yard at night,

restricting the production of new drawings. A new strategy was devised. With the rock drawings, Schoon touched up or added new elements to existing designs; with Hattaway, he was able to intervene before the drawing process began. Schoon gave Hattaway paper and coloured pencils, and Hattaway, who slept in a dormitory of straw mattresses laid directly on the floor, would sit on his bed with the pieces of paper around him, drawing compulsively until he ran out of paper. At the end of each session, Schoon collected and sometimes dated the drawings, and took them home. This never seemed to bother Hattaway, who appeared less interested in the finished drawing than in the process. He would lose interest once he ran out of paper, and he only used the pencils and paper when he was unable to draw outside.³

Hattaway was a withdrawn and uncommunicative patient. He followed instructions but rarely spoke. Hattaway did seem to respond to Schoon's presence and interest in his art, however—at first by taking up the opportunity to use the provided materials, and then in the drawings themselves, which seemed to become more naturalistic in response to Schoon's interest. The drawings came to include recognisable objects and scenes, such as an Egyptian pyramid, the Sphinx, and a rider set within a landscape. If he was responding to expectations of 'proper' forms of representation, he was doing the opposite of what Schoon valued. Schoon was most excited when Hattaway used drawing as a tool of disintegration, breaking down or through representational forms and recognisable objects in the creation of organic abstractions. He described Hattaway's mind as working 'like a computer programmed for infinite variables along clearly defined systems'.⁴

The small drawings carry a set of larger artistic and ethical problems. They only came to exist and survive because of Schoon, whose authorship and ownership of them blurs with Hattaway's in ways that remain uncomfortably charged over fifty years later. It is impossible to know if, in his supervisory role, Schoon encouraged Hattaway to draw in particular ways—if the already blurred line between finding and manipulating these drawings was breached, for example, by Schoon drawing

alongside Hattaway or showing him other artists' work. (After all, this is the artist who touched up rock drawings and later 'soaped the geyser' to get the results he needed out of art or nature.⁵) Colin Watson, a fellow orderly at Avondale who observed the exchange, cannot recall any such intervention and doubts that Hattaway would have responded to any stimuli.⁶ Moreover, such an intervention would run counter to Schoon's larger concern with accessing unmediated modes of consciousness, which was the very source of his fascination with Hattaway's drawings. Most importantly, such a claim would deny Hattaway's own agency. It is likely that he was involved in art before his illness, which may have included prior knowledge of and dealings with European abstraction. It is more interesting to consider that Hattaway had his own agenda, and that he is best thought of as an active participant or even a rogue element within Schoon's primitivist project.

Schoon described himself as being in 'awe' of Hattaway's art. He wrote, 'I could only produce something like this laboriously and slowly, by an exhaustively slow process of manipulation, of trial and error.'⁷ Hattaway was, to quote Schoon again, 'a genius, a master' who was 'unburdened by Ego, recognition or respectability, or even art fashions'.⁸ Yet Schoon's praise is loaded. Hattaway might get there much faster than Schoon, but he isn't in control of the process, unlike Schoon, who designs his way to a similar end result, lifting himself up through artistic knowledge, training, discipline, an informed knowledge of art movements, and, although he doesn't say it explicitly, a share of the genius he so readily ascribes to Hattaway's art. After all, Schoon says he did produce something just like Hattaway, it just took much longer.

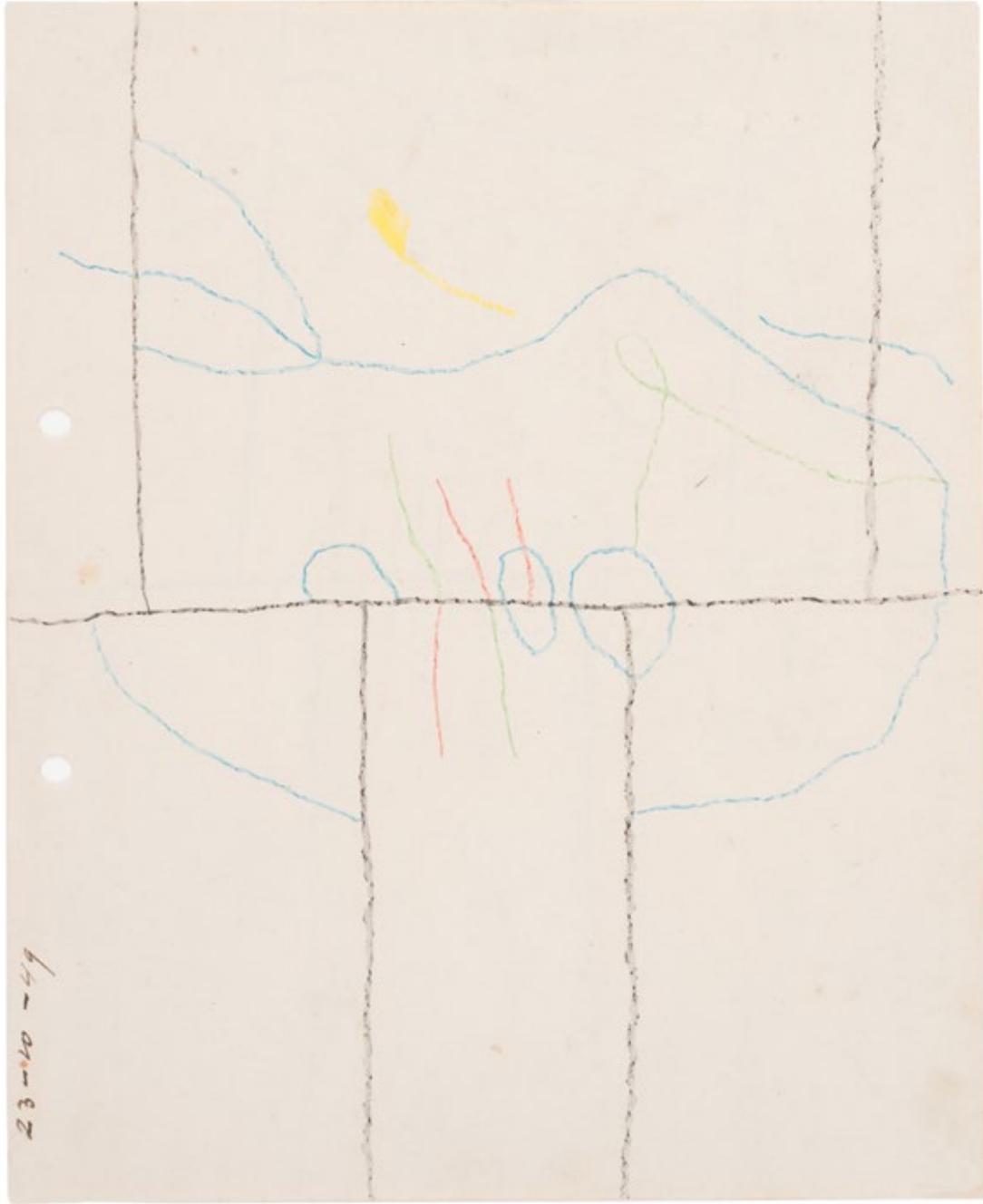
Then there is the important role that Schoon's support for Hattaway plays in the artist's investment in his own myth making. It takes a certain genius to recognise genius in another, especially one located on the margins of society. Schoon, fresh off his proselytising for the Māori rock drawings, found himself immediately in another fight to overcome the prejudice of the ignorant. He regularly told the story of being stopped while copying one of the drawings in the

exercise yard by the hospital's director, Dr Palmer, who scoffed, 'You consider that art! My notion of great art is that of Michelangelo!' The set up was perfect, right down to the invocation of the name of the great Italian sculptor, which allowed Schoon to conclude, 'It is, of course, the semi-literate colonial's perfect platitude that serves every occasion where cultural erudition is required.'⁹

Schoon regularly called on his encounter with Hattaway to highlight the limitations and inadequacies of the art scene in Aotearoa, and to mark out his own unique place within it. Writing to Gordon Walters at the time of his solo exhibition at New Vision Gallery in Auckland in 1965, he declared that Hattaway was the 'key' to the paintings. He then noted, in response to a newspaper review connecting him to Colin McCahon, that there was 'No mention of my getting art lessons from a lunatic, Hattaway, in Avondale mental hospital. The really fascinating things never get into print, do they?'¹⁰ A later letter to Michael Dunn more directly articulates the point Schoon was making. 'My art lessons from Hattaway', he wrote, 'is inevitably as much an acid comment on the NZ intellectual and scientific calibre as it is a story of a remarkable artist.'¹¹ There is a remarkable artist sitting behind those comments, but it is Schoon, rather than Hattaway.

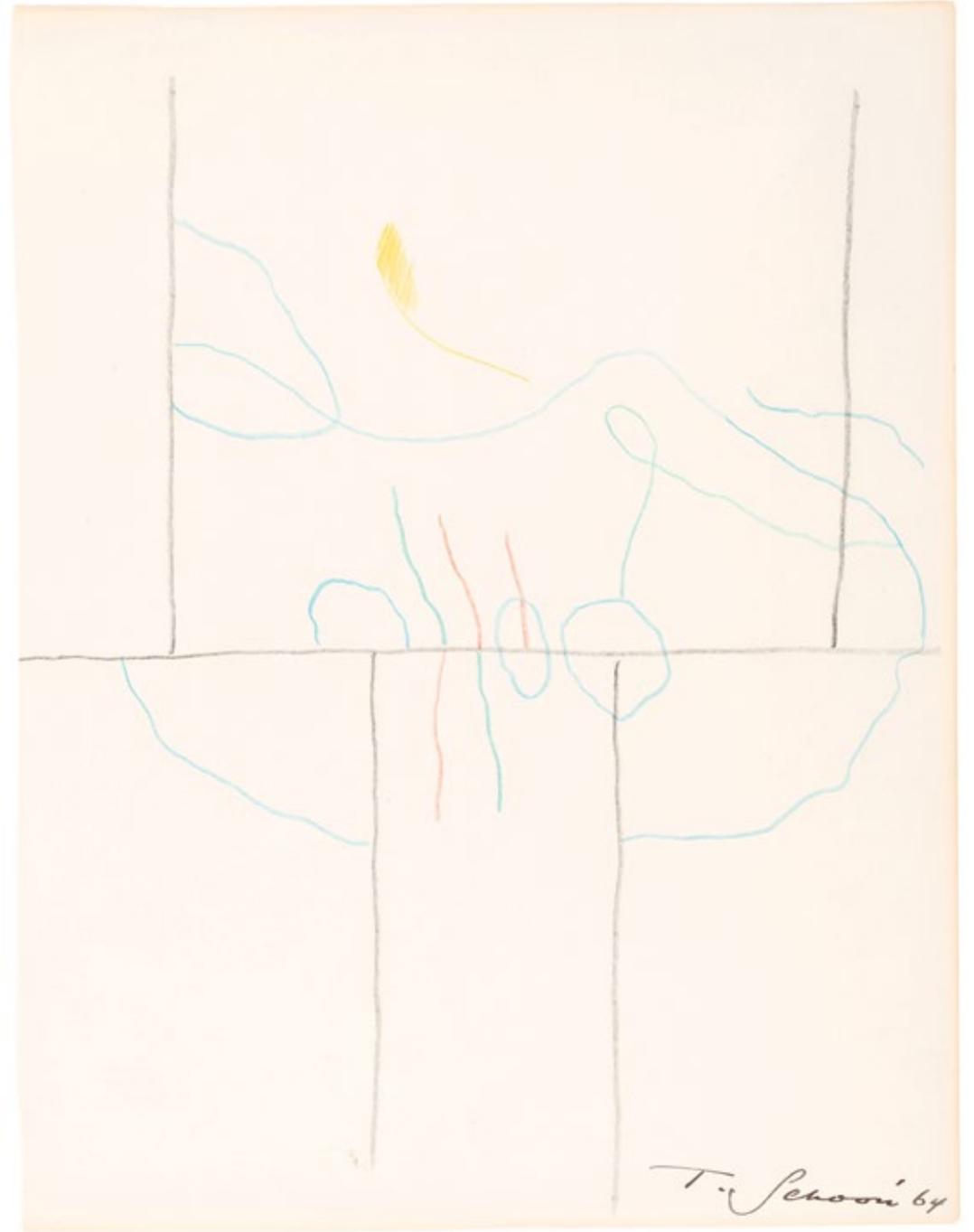
Schoon's initial copies of Hattaway's drawings are difficult to distinguish from their source. They are made with the same materials, and closely follow, absorb, or even enact Hattaway's linear style. Some have been mistaken as Hattaway's work—seven Schoon drawings have been extracted from an institutional collection's cache of work originally classified as made by Hattaway. It is possible that there are others still masquerading as Hattaway's drawings. As with the rock drawings, Schoon's documentation is unreliable, and even subject to trickery and disruption. If he was happy to make convincing rock drawings that could be passed off as original, why would he not do the same with Hattaway?

After he finished working at Avondale and presumably ceased contact with Hattaway, Schoon continued to extrapolate artistic lessons from the



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Rolfe Hattaway *Untitled* 1949



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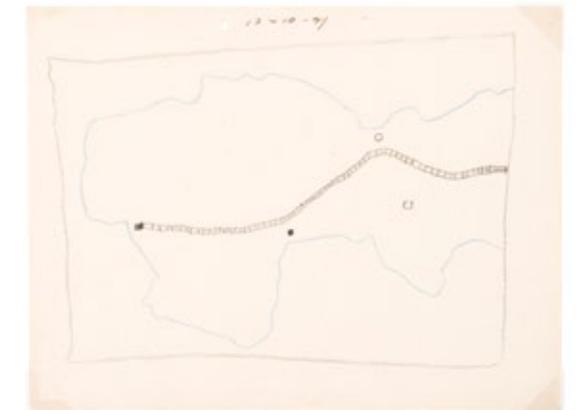
Theo Schoon *Done Up in Pins and Curlers* c.1965

drawings in his possession. His most sustained investigation of the possibilities of Hattaway's abstract visual language and processes came fifteen years later in the suite of paintings created for his show at New Vision Gallery. The coloured lines that move fluidly across the prepared white surface were the product of an automatic, almost trance-like process that sought to bypass rational thought and tap into a deeper consciousness. *Done Up in Pins and Curlers* (1965) is the most Hattaway-like of these paintings in the way it evokes something of his way of seeing the world. The marks on the rough, gessoed surface are suggestive of an image—the head embellished with curlers identified by the title—yet the image appears on the verge of proliferating into a multitude of various kinds of representation, if only we could be jolted into seeing them. This is the same effect that Hattaway so consistently achieved in his work. The viewer senses that, with new evidence of a source, the drawing will suddenly shift, revealing itself as a representation of a subject not imagined a moment before, but latent all that time.

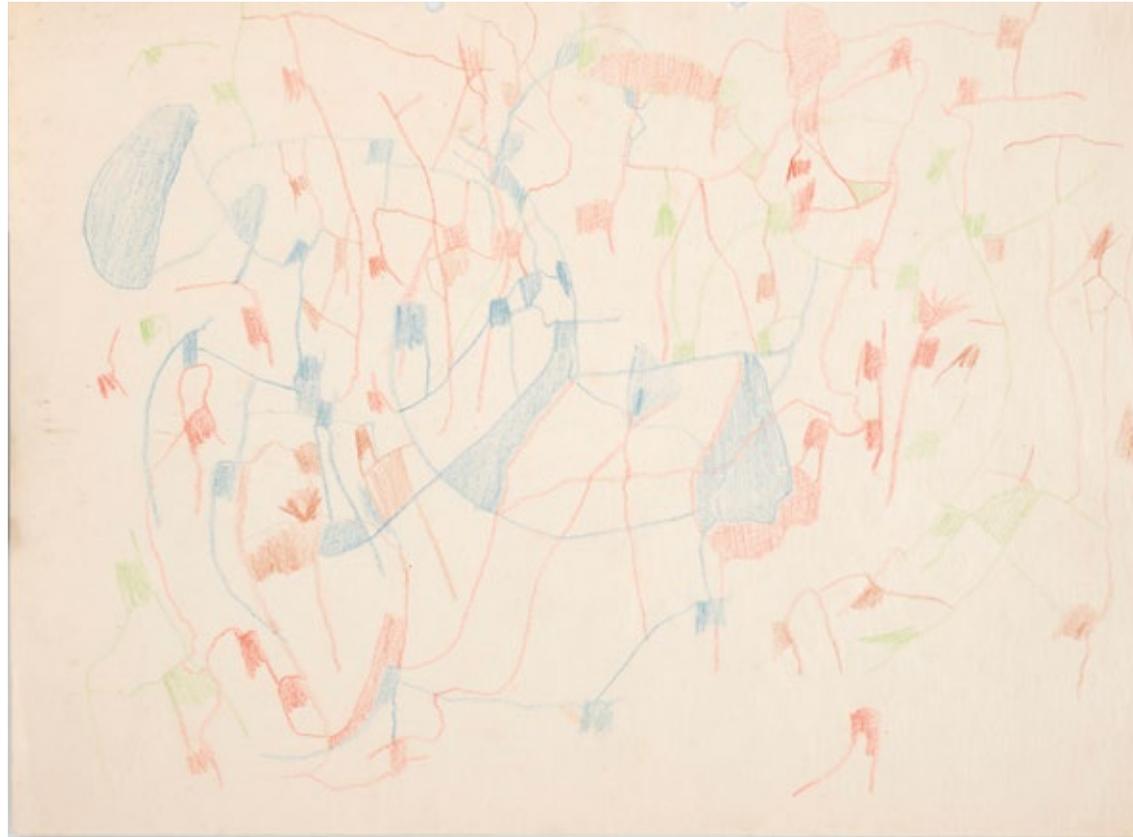
Always keen to share his discoveries and to play the role of catalyst in the artistic development of others, Schoon shared Hattaway's drawings with Gordon Walters in 1953. Walters had recently returned from living in Australia, and a visit to Europe, both of which had offered him the chance to study modernist abstract art in person.¹² He too saw the potential of Hattaway's drawings and immediately began a series of gouaches which incorporated various elements of their artistic strategies. Where Schoon was pulled towards Hattaway's automatic process and the connections to the unconscious, Walters was primarily interested in his formal devices, such as the meandering line bisecting various geometric shapes, especially the open rectangle form that becomes a recurrent element of these gouaches. The design echoes the vertical bands that Walters developed out of his encounter with the rock drawings, but with the addition of a pulsating organic phallic shape inside the rectangle; creating an inside/outside relationship that disturbs the standard dynamics of the picture plane. These devices add a sense of the uncontrolled, the



Gordon Walters *Untitled* 1955



Rolfe Hattaway *Untitled* 1949

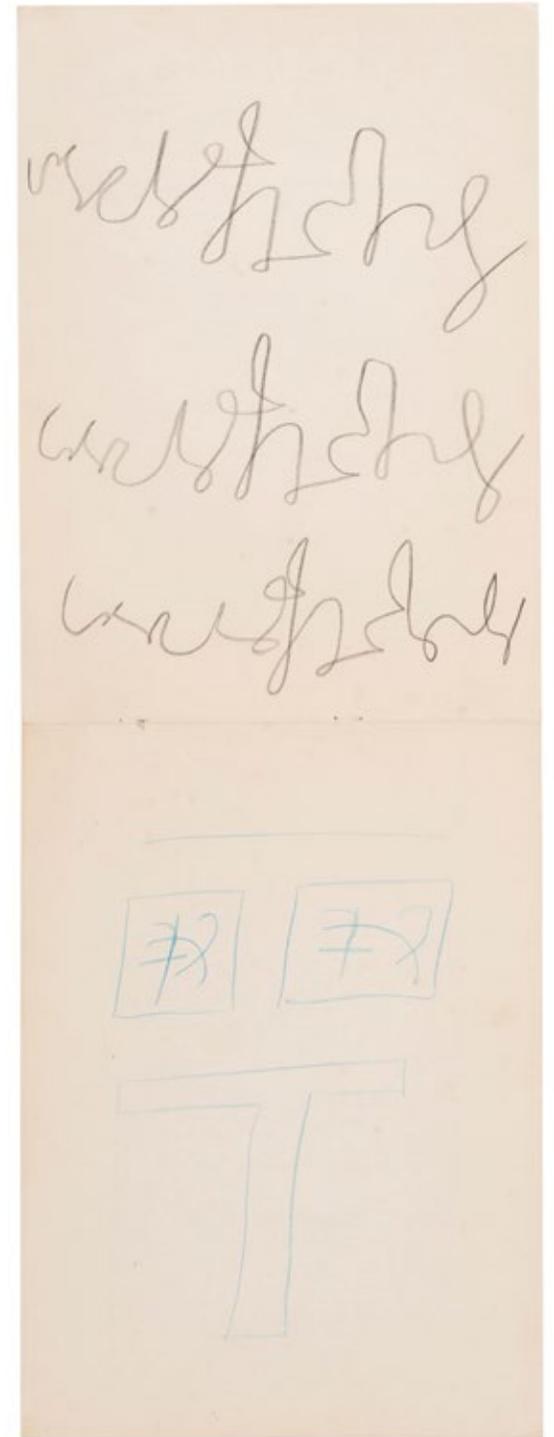


Rolfe Hattaway *Untitled* 1949

biomorphic and the bodily, which rubs against the control and order of the abstraction Walters was gradually achieving in his work. In this sense, he and Schoon both extended their interest in surrealism through Hattaway, something that first appeared in their work in the early 1940s. According to Michael Dunn, the wavering line in Walters's *Untitled* (1955) was created through the chance effect of dropping a piece of string across the surface of the gouache, something that resonates closely with those fluid lines Schoon uses to such dynamic effect in his paintings for the New Vision Gallery exhibition a decade later.¹³

After Schoon returned to Hattaway's drawings in the 1960s, Walters revisited his ideas later that decade. In his case, it was a drawing he saw in 1953, a horizontal rectangle with a vertical line inside a larger horizontal rectangle also with a vertical line. It was translated into a small painting, reversing black (large rectangle) to white (small rectangle), and then a second painting, slightly larger, called *Oriental II* (1967), which Walters showed at his solo exhibition at New Vision Gallery in 1968. The key element of this drawing—a large, open rectangle that is repeated inside at a smaller scale—provided the central structure for Walters's 'mise en abyme' paintings, in which destabilising optical effects are induced by repeating elements 'inside' the original element, in a way that invokes a kind of vertiginous and never-ending series. According to Francis Pound, these works are evidence of a 'radical respect' for Hattaway's drawings and for his mental illness: Walters's paintings using the 'en abyme' structure absorb the utterance of madness in Hattaway's original drawing and allow it to reshape Walters's own art, which like the original image becomes a representation of 'consciousness folding in and in on itself'.¹⁴

Here Schoon and Walters both converge and diverge in their interest in Hattaway's work, and what they believed it represented. Schoon was drawn to Hattaway's process and the realms of creativity it sprung from and tapped into. Walters was drawn to the formal and structural resolution of these processes, and how they could be used to disrupt an existing formula. Schoon saw madness





Lyonel Grant, pou pou in Ngakau Makahi whare whakairo, Te Noho Kotahitanga Marae Unitec Institute of Technology, Auckland. PHOTO Stephen Robinson

drawing, while Walters saw madness drawn. In both cases, the encounter led to the making of major works which owed a considerable debt to Hattaway.

The accompanying question is whether Schoon and Walters ever repaid this debt, and what this means for Hattaway and for art history. Both acknowledged Hattaway as a key source, initially to each other and subsequently to art historians seeking to understand more about this period in their work. But such acknowledgement is troubled by the demands of modernist authenticity and originality. Walters claimed that in 1967 Schoon offered him the collection of Hattaway's drawings, and, after he declined to take them, they were destroyed.¹⁵ In fact they survived, but it is a troubling anecdote. It suggests that despite all his rhetoric about Hattaway's genius, once Schoon had fully absorbed and used up his work—this is two years after the New Vision Gallery exhibition and the considerable debt it owed to Hattaway—he discarded the drawings as no longer useful to his artistic development. Walters is similarly culpable. While in retrospect he called himself an 'idiot' for not taking the drawings, he initially decided to reject Schoon's offer because 'Theo had made such extensive use of them I could not touch them again.'¹⁶ To Walters, the potential of Hattaway's drawings had already been fully mined by Schoon, so they were worthless to his own artistic development. Both artists could only see Hattaway's drawings through the needs of their own practices, and through the often troubled and highly competitive relationship they had with each other.

The drawings, of course, were not destroyed. Schoon ended up giving them to a friend and fellow artist, Peter Sauerbier, while others were given to his friend and anthropologist Roger Oppenheim; a group of them eventually made their way to Auckland Art Gallery, where they are part of the library research collection rather than the art collection. It is a status that confirms the role most often ascribed to Hattaway—at best a vital source and at worst a troubling footnote in stories of the development of Schoon, Walters and modernism in Aotearoa. The drawings simply

would not exist, and Hattaway's name would not be spoken, if Schoon did not bring coloured pencils and paper to Avondale Mental Hospital in 1949, and if he and Walters had not interrogated the visual lessons of Hattaway's drawings in their own construction of New Zealand modernist art. Yet this does not mean that we can regard Hattaway and his work in the same way that Schoon and Walters did. We should be able to see more than just echoes of Schoon and Walters in these drawings.

There have been recent efforts to recognise Rolfe Hattaway in a more significant way—a project this exhibition hopes to contribute to. In 2009, master carver Lyonel Grant completed the whare whakairo Ngākau Māhaki, as part of the Te Noho Kotahitanga Marae complex for Unitec—on the site of the old Avondale Hospital. One of the pou inside the house is dedicated to Hattaway as a figure of importance in the history of the site. Grant looked to the drawings that Schoon and Walters saw decades earlier, and extracted a different Hattaway, one empowered for the contemporary moment. In part, Schoon saw Hattaway through the lens of his encounter with Māori rock art, and the two became fused in his personal artistic mythology. Now, through Grant's actions, Māori art becomes a way to extract Hattaway from his overwhelming relationship with Schoon.

- 1 See Damian Skinner, *Theo Schoon: A Biography* (Wellington: Massey University Press, 2018), 100–3.
- 2 Theo Schoon, letter to Michael Dunn, 23 October 1982.
- 3 Damian Skinner, *Theo Schoon: A Biography* (Wellington: Massey University Press, 2018), 100–3.
- 4 Theo Schoon, letter to Michael Dunn, 23 October 1982. Christine Fernyhough collection, Auckland.
- 5 Damian Skinner, 'Soaping the Geysers: Authenticity, Modernism and Tourism in the Rotorua Photographs of Theo Schoon', *Landfall*, no. 216, 2008: 134–51.
- 6 Colin Watson, interview with Damian Skinner, 10 October 1999. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
- 7 Theo Schoon, letter to Michael Dunn, 23 October 1982. Christine Fernyhough collection, Auckland.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Theo Schoon, letter to Michael Dunn, 23 October 1982, 2. Christine Fernyhough collection, Auckland.
- 10 Theo Schoon, letter to Gordon Walters, undated [1982]. CA000044/001/0001, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.
- 11 Theo Schoon, letter to Michael Dunn, 23 October 1982. Christine Fernyhough collection, Auckland.
- 12 Lucy Hammonds, 'Gordon Walters: An Expanding Horizon', in *Gordon Walters: New Vision* (Dunedin and Auckland: Dunedin Public Gallery and Auckland Art Gallery, 2018), 25.
- 13 Michael Dunn, *Gordon Walters* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983), 14.
- 14 Francis Pound, *Walters en Abyme* (Auckland: Gus Fisher Gallery, 2004), 50.
- 15 Gordon Walters, letter to Michael Dunn, 11 November 1982.
- 16 Ibid.



Theo Schoon *Modernist Head Study with Korus*
date unknown

THEO SCHOON, GORDON WALTERS, AND THE KORU

In June 1968, an argument broke out over the work of Theo Schoon and Gordon Walters in the Letters to the Editor section of the *New Zealand Herald*. The *Herald* had reviewed Walters's second exhibition at New Vision Gallery featuring paintings constructed from a horizontal bar ending in a circle, now known as his 'koru' paintings. Arene Teira wrote in response that this was 'the traditional Maori koru motif, first used in an op form by another European artist, Theo Schoon, at least 12 years ago'.¹ The critic responded that, while he knew about Schoon's use of the koru, it was only carved onto the surfaces of gourds. Teira responded in another letter, saying that she had photographs and slides of Schoon's paintings and drawings that showed him experimenting with the koru 'in its traditional form, and to some effect optically'.² She was backed up by another correspondent, D.G. Buxton, who wrote that he had attended a lecture by Schoon at Ardmore Teachers' College in 1957, 'at which he displayed several examples of Maori koru patterns in "op" or "mural" form, on what I took to be hardboard'.³

Schoon himself waded into the debate. Taking no prisoners, he wrote 'The history of the paintings by Gordon Walters begins with me.' He continued, 'It is based firstly on my 10 years of field work, exploring and recording New Zealand rock drawings. Gordon Walters pored

over this material right from the beginning. He also followed my subsequent analysis and synthesis of Maori design in the following decades.⁷⁴ The usually reticent Walters was impelled to reply. He wrote: ‘In the 1950s I studied Theo Schoon’s work, but equally, Schoon pored over my work ... He requested and was given my permission to use the motif which occurs in my recent paintings.’⁷⁵

If this public spat over who did what first now feels a little precious and—in relation to the later issues of cultural appropriation which undercut either of their claims to ownership of this or any Māori form or motif—even more misguided, their private letters take things much further. Schoon was especially vitriolic. He wrote in one letter: ‘I will not mention you at all in the history of my development and career unless I am actually questioned on it, and even then I will be as vague as I can possibly be. The step by step progression of my studies will explain by inference what really happened. No need for me to spell it out.’ He continued, ‘You call me a consumer, meaning perhaps, not a producer. If that was so I could not have dictated the course of your work from what it was: the “in thing” of your fellow Kiwis then and now.’⁷⁶

If taken simply as a battle around originality, by 1968 it was clear that Walters had already won. Whether he came up with this design first or not, by this time it was obvious that Walters had done the most with the koru in terms of understanding its potential to make abstract paintings. He was well on his way to turning this motif into his own. His paintings were rigorously geometric abstract compositions, painted so that there is no trace of the artist’s hand in the brushwork, and creating optical shimmers and visual effects through the bar-and-circle design that makes foreground turn into background as your eye scans from side to side. Schoon, in contrast, occasionally made koru-based paintings, but these were part of a larger, more atomised practice that shifted between art forms—by this time he was exploring the koru and many other Māori designs in paintings, photographs, and jade and gourd carvings. Schoon was chasing an open set of ideas, Walters the potential of a specific element to make modernist paintings.

The two projects had become entirely different. Schoon was seeking a fusion of European modern art and Māori art in order to revitalise both. His paintings were very close to the customary patterns of *kōwhaiwhai*, whereas Walters’s paintings looked nothing like them. Walters was making modern art, with no claims about its value or relevance to Māori cultural practices. While some of the paintings have Māori titles, Walters denied any relationship to Māori art: ‘The forms I use have no descriptive value in themselves and are used solely to demonstrate relations.’⁷⁷ At this point Walters was, as he put in a letter to Michael Dunn, ‘out of sympathy’ with what he saw as Schoon’s revivalism, dismissing it as ‘trying to bring back the past’.⁷⁸

By the late 1960s, Schoon and Walters’s paths had clearly separated. The intense feelings this split generated can perhaps be accounted for by the significance of the bond that had been formed a decade earlier. Through the 1950s, they were involved in an extraordinary artistic conversation, a fertile call and response in artworks—in sketches, studies, and paintings that were traded in photographs, seen in person, and discussed when the artists visited each other. Walters was living in Wellington but made occasional visits to Auckland with a folder of his new work to show Schoon.⁷⁹ The two artists were involved in an intense experimental phase, focused on working out how Māori art could be transformed into modern art. They were doing it together.

As Schoon recounted to Michael Dunn in the 1980s, the exchange had actually started in the 1940s, when both artists were living in Wellington. It specifically came from a shared interest in Italian painter Giuseppe Capogrossi, whose abstract paintings created a rich and seemingly endless variety of forms from a ‘family’ of irregular comb-or fork-shaped elements. At the same time, Schoon and Walters had been looking at a beautifully illustrated German book in the Parliamentary Library about tattoo from the Marquesas Islands.⁸⁰ They saw that Capogrossi had obviously been looking at Marquesan tattoo, and his abstract paintings were based on designs he had adapted from this Pacific art form. It was

a breathtaking realisation. What to a mediocre or less ambitious artist would have been an extreme limitation—restricting yourself to one basic element—was revealed by Capogrossi to be a source of endless possibilities, a dazzling display of design wizardry.⁸¹

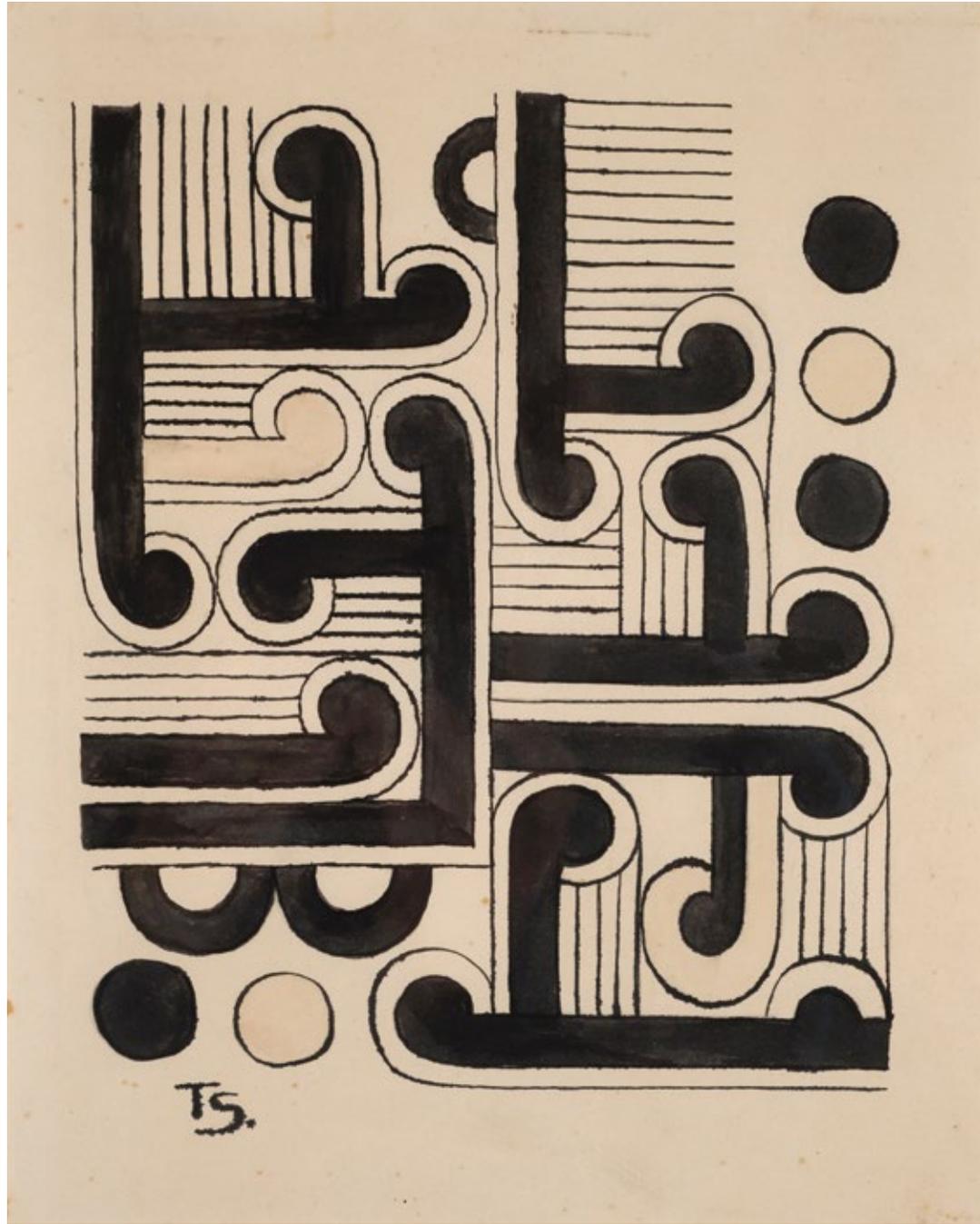
Capogrossi’s example validated Schoon and Walters’s shared belief in the importance of analysing the art of different cultures to reveal the fundamental rules and conventions that make up a design system. Once the rules were understood, the art could be used very differently from how it was employed by those who invented or perfected it. They started applying the approach to Māori art. They looked closely at different forms including *kōwhaiwhai* patterns from meeting houses (the curvilinear patterns painted onto the rafters) and *tā moko* (the designs that Māori tattooed onto their faces and bodies). They realised that *tā moko* and *kōwhaiwhai*, while appearing very different, were similar design systems. Formulating a set of rules and conventions, they proceeded, like Capogrossi, to take the basic designs from *tā moko* and *kōwhaiwhai* and use them to make abstract art. Schoon would undertake a similar process with his photographs of Māori art from museums and marae taken through this period. On one level they are documentary. Schoon pays close attention to his subjects, especially the ways different designs sit alongside one another, and on their various surfaces and supports. Yet, he also reinterprets these objects through modernist photographic modes, radically flattening form, compressing space, and playing up tonal contrasts in a conscious effort to decontextualize the objects and turn them into something else.

The shared process of analysis and synthesis can be traced across a collection of work, most often on paper, made by Schoon and Walters through the late 1950s and early 1960s, which treat the koru as a single ingredient around which a larger system can be understood. For Schoon and Walters it was quite simple: a step-by-step process, where the basic ingredient of the koru was manipulated and transformed in different ways, creating a logical sequence of permutations. They

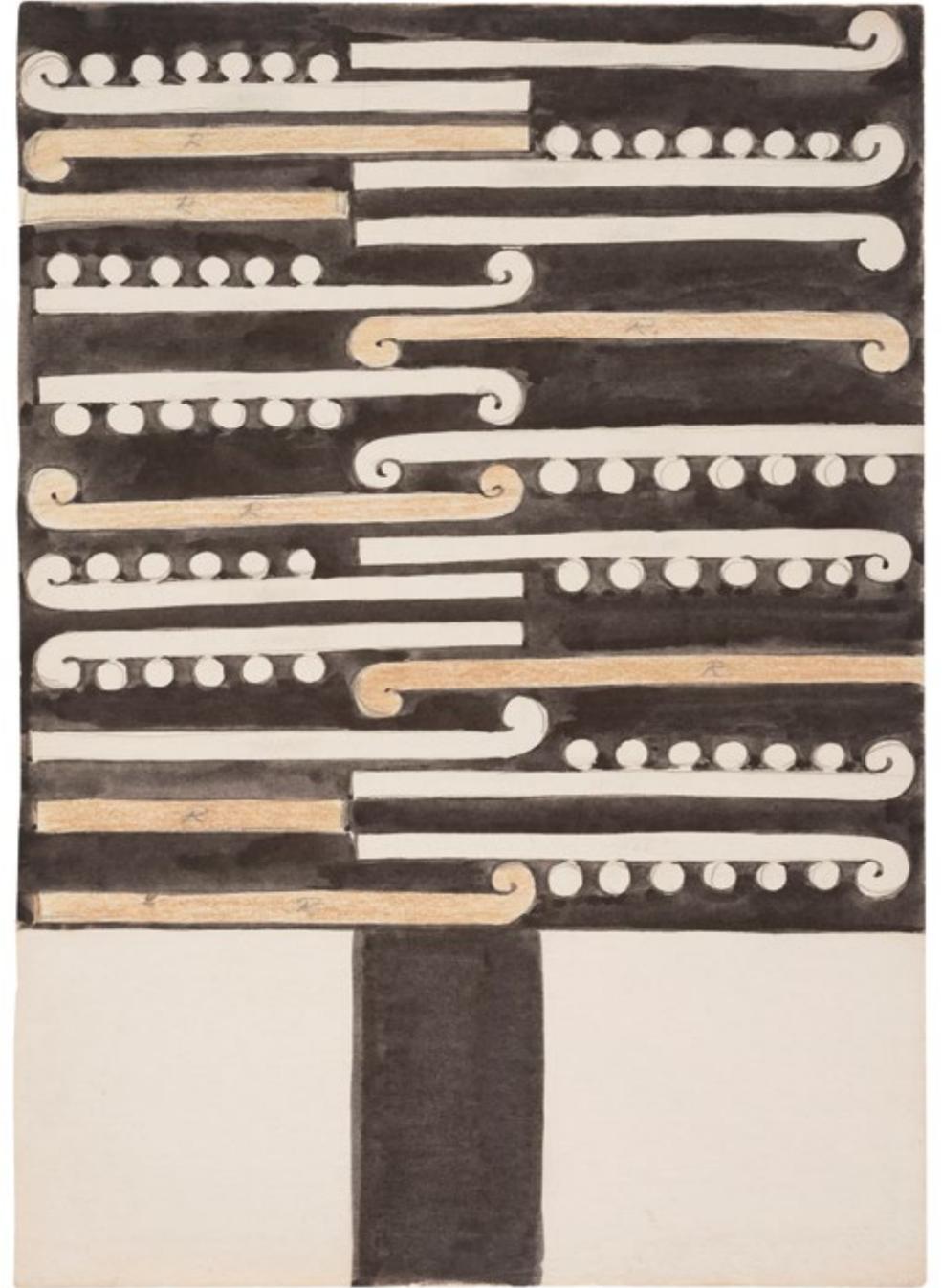
were exploring the vocabulary of an art form. Its different elements—particular types of spirals or lines—were treated like the building blocks of a sentence, the visual equivalents of nouns, verbs, and adjectives that could be combined in different ways for different effects. As with any language, once you became a confident speaker, the rules become internalised. Schoon would later claim to have become a native speaker in the visual language of Māori art, while Walters asserted that this wasn’t how his work should be understood.

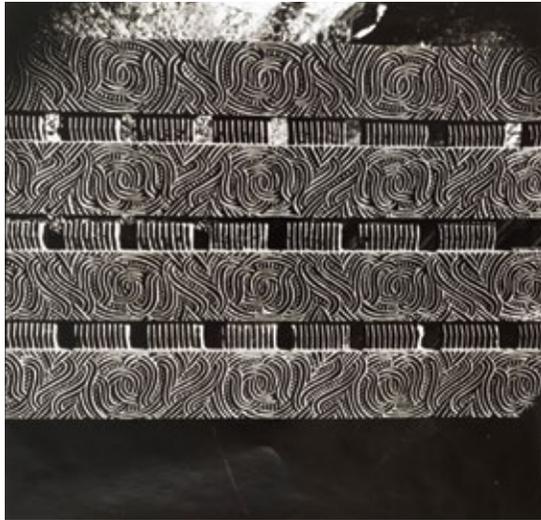
Schoon and Walters developed several techniques to extend their vocabulary: cut-out paper motifs that were moved around until they made an interesting pattern, or designs on tracing paper that could be superimposed and multiplied. Sometimes a successful design was photographed and then the photographic print could be cut up and reassembled. Many of the works feel preparatory, as though they were studies for larger works. Some are. But all are explorations of a larger idea or set of possibilities.

These works betray a constant push and pull between customary and modern, Māori and European, and between Schoon and Walters. They were each making their own art—this wasn’t a collaboration, but an artistic conversation that involved close study of what each other was doing. Walters said in 1968 that he studied Schoon’s work, and Schoon pored over his. It was about engaging with what the other was doing, responding to it in new work, and proposing alternative possibilities and insights. It is notable that the process starts with a loosely shared treatment of the koru, but, as the conversation extends, their individual approaches take shape and their paths diverge. The curvilinear, organic form of Walters’s early koru slowly straightens out to become the rigid bar-and-circle motif which he would later claim has no relationship to Māori art. The range of optical effects and colour also expands as he slowly pushes the motif elsewhere. Walters’s trajectory towards formalism is clearly mapped through these works, as is Schoon’s divergence. Schoon’s koru always remain identifiable, but they are stretched and extended formally, conceptually, and even perhaps jokily

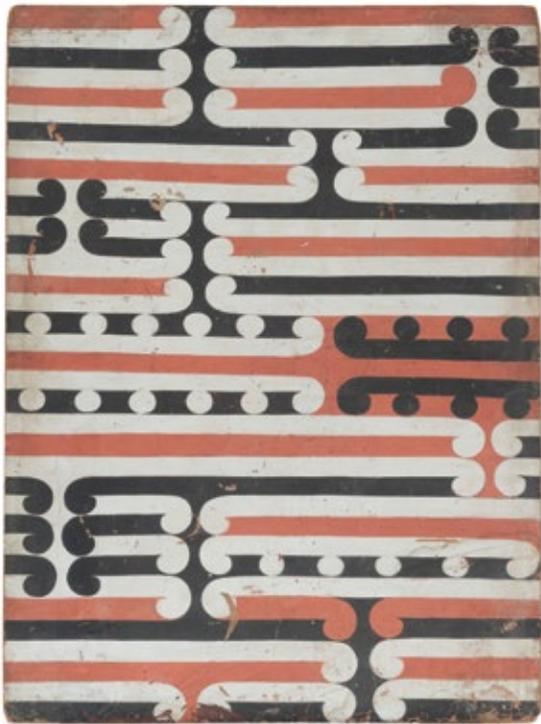


Theo Schoon *Koru Study* date unknown





Theo Schoon *Untitled (Carving 1)* date unknown



Theo Schoon *Untitled* date unknown

in the case of two later drawings of a comic-like woman with koru for facial features, which are difficult to read as anything other than a gentle goading of Walters's obsession with formalist application.

Throughout it all, Schoon constantly offered advice as to how Walters might develop his patterns. In one letter from the early 1960s, Schoon suggested that one of Walters's paintings, which he liked very much, could be treated like music. 'One half or ¼ of the picture with a prelude like a silly little tune—you give the ingredients—which contain all the elements you are working with, and in the other half the thing you contrived from it.' Another idea: Walters should take three rigid designs and project them onto buckled enlarging paper or ferrotype mirror sheet and see what happened. Perhaps it would provide a new direction; at the very least it would seem to have fascinating possibilities. But, as Schoon knew before making these suggestions, 'this may not fit into your scheme of things at all'.¹² This is a rare verbal expression of what was happening visually in their work of the period. It also demonstrates a significant difference between them: Schoon was all over the place, willing to do things with the koru that sometimes failed, or were quite often simply weird, driven by a restless need to experiment. Walters was more focused, keen to work out the possibilities of a few deliberately chosen forms.

Both Schoon's and Walters's works of this period would become key to the cultural appropriation debate in the 1990s which challenged the right of Schoon and Walters to use the koru and Māori art in this way and their particular beliefs about what it was they were studying so closely. In his 1992 essay 'Maori: At the Centre, On the Margins' published in the *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art* catalogue, Rangihiroa Panoho drew out the distinction between Schoon and Walters to argue the complex dynamics of cross-cultural dialogue and appropriation. To paraphrase: Schoon's concern with tradition meant that he recognised something of the reality of Māori art to Māori makers and audiences, and led him to seek out

Māori artists. Walters's rebuttal of those kinds of meanings around his paintings made him someone who used Māori art to recharge and renew his own work without any acknowledgement of what had been critical to his artistic breakthrough.¹³

Schoon's relationship to what might be called a Māori way of thinking about Māori art is complex. He subscribed to the belief that the meaning of another culture's art could be understood through looking and copying. Schoon didn't think he needed to speak Māori or study with experts in Māori art in order to understand it, although he did do both of these things. He believed he had discovered and decoded the design system that underpinned all the different art forms, whether tā moko, kōwhaiwhai, or the carved patterns of whakairo rākau. Once he mastered that, there was no difference between him and an artist who was Māori, who spoke the language, knew the history, and subscribed to Māori ways of seeing the world. What mattered most were how well you could manipulate the rules of the system and the artistic excellence of what you did with it.

Schoon thought Māori art was dead, so he proposed a way for a new generation of Māori artists to use what was left of their culture and make something new with it: 'Take something old—and make it new. It sets a fine example on how you can give new life to an ossified or near forgotten heritage.'¹⁴ But beginning in the 1960s, and increasingly in the 1970s and 1980s, Māori artists fought precisely that kind of attitude. It wasn't a design challenge that Māori artists were facing, but rather the struggle to reclaim and recover cultural practices and knowledge systems that had been denied by colonialism. Schoon's approach couldn't offer Māori what they most needed, and his stubborn certainty that Māori art was dying now reads like another version of oppressive Pākehā superiority.

- 1 Arene Teira, 'Maori Motif', *New Zealand Herald*, 10 June 1968: 6.
- 2 Arene Teira, 'Maori Motif', *New Zealand Herald*, 17 June 1968: 6.
- 3 D.G. Buxton, 'Maori Motif', *New Zealand Herald*, 17 June 1968: 6.
- 4 Theo Schoon, 'Artist Explains Use of Motif', *New Zealand Herald*, 24 June 1968: 6.
- 5 Gordon Walters, 'Artist Replies to Claim', *New Zealand Herald*, 5 July 1968: 6.
- 6 Theo Schoon, letter to Gordon Walters, undated. CA000044/001/0001, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.
- 7 Gordon Walters, 'Artist Statement', in *Gordon Walters: New Paintings and Drawings* (Auckland: New Vision Gallery, 1968), unpaginated.
- 8 Gordon Walters, 'Statements by Gordon Walters', in Michael Dunn, *Gordon Walters* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983), 124.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Theo Schoon, letter to Michael Dunn, 15 November 1983, 1.
- 11 Theo Schoon, letter to Michael Dunn, 10 December 1982, 2–3.
- 12 Theo Schoon, letter to Gordon Walters, undated [c.1963], 1.
- 13 Rangihiroa Panoho, 'Māori: At the Centre, On the Margins', *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art*, (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002), 122–35.
- 14 Theo Schoon, letter to Michael Dunn, 28 December 1982, 5. Christine Fernyhough Collection, Auckland.



THEO SCHOON AND MĀORI MODERNISM

Theo Schoon described the invitation to participate in the *First Māori Festival of the Arts* at Tūrangawaewae marae in Ngāruawāhia in December 1963 as a 'surprise ... it remains a mystery to me who has been responsible for picking me'.¹ The *Festival* celebrated the centennial of the Kīngitanga, the Māori King movement established in the nineteenth century to combat the ongoing loss of land at the hands of Pākehā settlers. The exhibition components of the *Festival* were held in Māhinarangi, a meeting house carved by the Rotorua School of Māori Arts and Crafts, and it was a showcase for then emerging and now major Māori artists Paratene Matchitt, Selwyn Muru, Selwyn Wilson, and Arnold Wilson.

A suite of photographs taken by Ans Westra for *Tē Ao Hou* magazine document the occasion. A subset of these photographs focus on children engaging with modernist art works that sit within the customary setting of the meeting house. It is a complex juxtaposition, and while it is easy to interpret this encounter as one of incompatibility (modern vs. traditional), for Māori audiences the continuity of medium (wood carving and painting both appear in the meeting house) and message (many modern artworks had Māori subjects as well as aesthetic connections to customary art) would have also been apparent.²

A couple of Westra's photographs show Schoon and his work in this context. In one, he is giving

Ans Westra *Theo Schoon at the First Māori Festival of the Arts* 1963



Ans Westra, Theo Schoon and Para Matchitt at the First Māori Festival of the Arts 1963



Theo Schoon Gourd Arrangement c.1965

a lecture on 'Maori Shelter Rock Paintings and Pu-Te-Hue or Gourd Carving'.³ Another shows Schoon, camera slung around his shoulder, showing off his collection of gourds to Matchitt under the watchful gaze of a large crowd. This blend of Māori and Pākehā, art and tourism, customary and modern, captures the complex cultural dynamics embodied within the *Festival*, and more widely in this cultural moment, when both Pākehā and Māori artists were vigorously exploring the opportunities and consequences of interpreting customary Māori art through the strategies of artistic modernism.

The *Festival* guide was clear why Schoon had been invited, and it was because of his carved gourds. His project to revive 'pu-te-hue' meant that 'it was deemed fitting and proper that he be invited to participate at this Festival'. Schoon, the guide continued, 'has identified himself so thoroughly with the mauri of our culture, that his niche as an exponent and an authority is undisputed'.⁴ Schoon was framed as a revivalist, an assessment he would not have agreed with. As with all of the Māori art forms he investigated, Schoon's gourds began with revival and then moved onto a process of transformation, generated by the synthesis of customary sources and modernist methods. This is what he was most proud of, and what he consistently believed was the gift he offered to Māori. As he wrote a few years after his appearance at the *Festival*, 'Having learned their technique of carving, I set out to explore new departures, from whatever elements I could detect in Maori art, for contact with the art of our time. I am the only European to have made this study at first hand, to establish that both European and native Maori art stand to gain a great deal, if education could bring the Bauhaus heritage of fundamentals in design.'⁵

At the same time that Schoon's carved gourds were being acknowledged in Ngāruawahia, his work was also being seen by a wider Māori audience in the pages of *Tē Ao Hou*. Published by the Department of Māori Affairs, this quarterly magazine attracted many of the best young Māori artists and writers, as well as Pākehā who were attuned to the wave of cultural experimentation

being fostered by the massive postwar migration of Māori to urban centres. In 1962, Margaret Orbell became the editor, and the pages of *Tē Ao Hou* began to fill up with artworks by Schoon and Walters, as well as Māori artists like Matchitt and Wilson.⁶

Schoon had turned to gourd carving after studying tā moko. Recognising that there was a link between patterns carved onto the human face and patterns carved onto the gourd fragments he was studying in museum collections, Schoon desired to test the design system he had developed on the surface of gourds. After struggling to find suitable specimens, he threw himself into the process of growing his own, which meant sourcing and propagating ancient and introduced varieties, learning how to grow them, and discovering the best way to prepare and carve them.⁷ Schoon eventually acquired the seeds of three varieties grown by Māori: a short-necked bottle gourd, a long-necked bottle gourd, and a pear-shaped gourd. He couldn't find the fourth, a giant gourd known as taha huahua, so he grew a similar shaped gourd from Africa to replace it.⁸

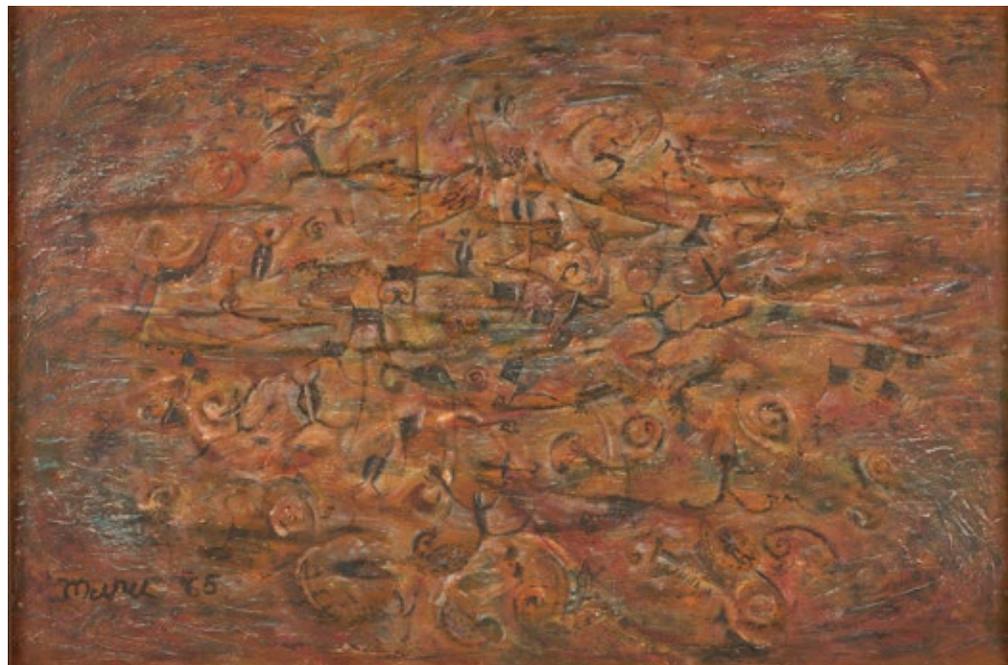
Gourd carving eventually led Schoon to the famous Ngāti Porou carver and cultural expert Pine Taiapa. In 1961, Schoon spent a week at Taiapa's farm in Tikitiki, discussing Māori art and watching Taiapa carve. Schoon later said he learned a great deal from this experience, but it was complicated by his ambivalence towards Māori art and artists, generated in large part by his awkward relationship to the idea of authenticity. Taiapa could be an expert craftsman ('his technique is so masterly that it makes you gasp'), but, in order to allow room for Schoon to be both authentic and the originator of a new direction in Māori art, Taiapa also needed to be artistically bankrupt ('he is dogmatic and extremely stubborn, unable to absorb or learn anything new').⁹

By 1963, when Schoon received his invitation to be part of the *First Māori Festival of the Arts*, his carved gourds ran the gamut: traditional-looking tattoo patterns that Schoon claimed were original but entirely authentic; kōwhaiwhai-type patterns based on koru designs; and patterns that

were closely aligned with Schoon's own modernist experimentation that could take anything as a starting point, including paper clips, geometric shapes, or natural forms. But while Schoon always talked about his gourds as a contemporary art form, there was a stubborn core of conservatism running through his practice, and a reliance on Māori sources that fits the notion of revival better than anything else. Schoon's gourds were an attempt to achieve a horticultural and artistic revival of practices that had become scarce, perhaps even died out. In some ways, Schoon's artistic project had much more in common with the artistically old-fashioned, realistic paintings of Goldie and Lindauer that were also included in the exhibition. These images of ancestors and their tā moko were, like Schoon's gourds, on show in the *Festival* as a representation of the past. Schoon's gourds with their references to tā moko were a comforting reminder of the rich heritage of Māori art and its ability to survive in the modern world, even if it did require the helping hand of an immigrant Dutch artist.

Despite his claims to originality and contemporaneity, Schoon's gourds were fundamentally different to the paintings and sculptures of Matchitt, Muru, and Wilson. In a subtle way, the *Festival* guide seems to recognise this. While emphasising Schoon's links to Māori art forms and cultural practices, the opposite approach went for the Māori artists. Iwi affiliations are indicated, but then the emphasis is entirely on their practices as modernist artists. Arnold Wilson, for example, 'leans towards a modern expression' and is only 'touched by a Polynesian influence', while Para Matchitt 'is developing individualism with a strong leaning towards contemporary interpretation of traditional Maori themes'.¹⁰

Māori artists were regular exhibitors in the late 1950s and 1960s, taking part in group exhibitions and holding solo shows at many of the leading public institutions and private galleries that supported and promoted modernist art in Aotearoa. Artists like Matchitt, Muru, and Walters didn't often show in customary spaces like marae. Selwyn Muru, for example, burst



Selwyn Muri *Kohatu* 1965



Paratene Matchitt *Whiti te Ra* 1962

into the New Zealand art world and public consciousness in 1963 after six of his paintings were selected for the *Autumn Exhibition* at the Auckland Society of Arts. The exhibition committee, led by Paul Beadle, an artist and lecturer at Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland, decided to restrict the exhibition of members' work to a grand total of sixteen paintings chosen from the 140 submitted. The selection of six paintings by Muri was thus a staggering vote of confidence in a twenty-three-year-old artist and prompted Dr. John Reid, who opened the exhibition, to ask 'where he had been hiding his talent for so long, that the public had never heard of him'.¹¹ Muri, a secondary school teacher who had no formal art training, quickly followed this achievement with other exhibitions, including *Painters and Sculptors of Promise* at Auckland Society of Arts in 1963, and solo exhibitions at Willeston Gallery in Wellington and Uptown Gallery in Auckland in 1964, Centre Gallery in Wellington in 1965, and Willeston Gallery in 1966.

While Muri and his colleagues were usually acknowledged as Māori, their work was not often described or positioned as Māori art. For example, in 1964 Mac Vincent wrote, 'Muri is one of the group of young Maori artists, all of strong individuality and with a personal vision, who within the past few years have come into public view. Hitherto the Maori race had lagged in the arts, and had produced no really good painter; now the men in this group are doing some of the best work among our contemporary artists.'¹² A 1963 profile in the *New Zealand Listener* talked at length about Muri's background in a small village in Northland and his family and cultural experiences.¹³ But while the artist is always identified as Māori, at no point is the work itself described as Māori art; rather it was called 'contemporary' or 'modern'. This suited Muri's diverse subject matter and approach, since he was an artist who might just as easily present an 'impressionistic landscape', or 'a painting which gave to a traditional Maori motif the jeweled richness of color which one associates with medieval stained glass', or talk about his work

in terms clearly related to European and Pākehā modernisms of the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁴ Muri was just as keen to place himself in a whakapapa that included Pablo Picasso as one that led back to his ancestors in Northland. As he put it in 1964, 'I feel the old masters have done an excellent job; therefore there's no point in trying to better what they did. But the creative avenues leading from traditional Maori art are still open for the artist to explore.'¹⁵

There were points in common between Schoon's artistic modernism and the modernism of the Māori artists he showed alongside at the *First Māori Festival of the Arts*, although it would take an understanding of more than just the gourds that he had on display in Ngāruawāhia to detect them. Muri completed a series of paintings in the mid-1960s based on the same Māori rock drawings that Schoon had made available to Pākehā artists in the 1940s, and which became the basis for his and Walters's modernist paintings. While Muri wouldn't have needed Schoon to know about this early form of Māori art, there are some suggestive parallels that reveal how much the two artists shared artistic values and points of reference. Muri's paintings often disperse the rock drawing-derived figures across a shallow picture space, handling them in a way that suggests the buff-coloured limestone walls on which they were made, not unlike Walters and Schoon's works. Muri also introduces pictorial elements with a clear debt to European artists such as Paul Klee and Joan Miró—again paralleling Walters and Schoon.

Kōwhaiwhai, and especially the koru, provide points of comparison and difference. Matchitt developed a complex visual language of elements derived from customary Māori art, including a geometric version of the koru design that Schoon and Walters had been experimenting with in the 1950s, and which became the main subject of Walters's painting in the 1960s. For Walters, writing at the time of his 1966 exhibition at New Vision Gallery, his optical paintings constructed from the repeated bar-and-circle were formal elements that weren't intended to have any visual or conceptual connection to Māori art.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
 Theo Schoon *Pendant* c.1970
 Theo Schoon *Pekapeka* 1969
 Theo Schoon *Pendant* c.1970
 Theo Schoon *Pendant* c.1970

In contrast, Matchitt used his geometric koru to quite different artistic effect in his 1967 series of paintings about the Māori prophet and leader Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Tūruki. ‘Until recently [Matchitt] has tried to combine the strength of the Maori tradition with a more individualised idiom of present-day art’, noted the New Vision Gallery exhibition catalogue. ‘His new TE KOOTI series represent a further break with the tradition; in his patterns of unusual strength and vibrancy one may find a link with some of the latest trends from overseas, as well as a revival of typical Polynesian rhythms.’¹⁶ That both of these approaches could play out in exhibitions staged within a year of each other in the same Auckland gallery, in front of the same audience, says a lot about the proximity of Pākehā primitivism and modernist Māori art at the time.

Matchitt, Muru, and Wilson were involved in a similar artistic project to Schoon’s. Like him, they were keen to reinterpret customary Māori art through the lens of European modernism, to produce a kind of modern art that would be relevant to their own time. In many ways, Schoon would have had sympathy with Wilson, who argued in 1965 that ‘carving works of the Maori tradition are reproductions of the work of years ago. Maori relief work has been thrashed, and to my mind is not “living”. It is time now to see the possibilities in a different environment, and thus to make the works “live” again.’¹⁷ Like Schoon, they were invested in originality and innovation, often taking patterns from customary sources and finding ways to align them with contemporary art movements. Their goal was not to make art that would be appreciated by Māori audiences in the same way as Māhinarangi, the meeting house in which their work was displayed at the *First Māori Festival of the Arts*. They wanted to make modern art that would be appreciated by the same audiences in which Schoon was interested.

Yet Schoon’s work always pulls back to customary forms no longer widely practiced. He later developed an obsession with jade carving, and, as with gourd carving before, he set himself the task of understanding what Māori artists working in pounamu had managed to achieve—

and then, as he claimed, finding ways to surpass these achievements by treating Māori art as a system-based visual language. As he told a reporter in 1970, ‘As an artist at what I feel is the tail end of my career, I am going to give to jade everything I’ve gathered and soaked up over the years.’¹⁸

The jade carvings did indeed pull together the various strands of Schoon’s prior artistic investigations. A strong awareness of Māori art was the basis, as he made variations of named designs such as the pekapeka, marakihau, or manaia, or created versions of types of worn ornaments, such as the fish hook or the ear pendant. Schoon would write that his biggest surprise as a jade carver was the prominent Māori figures who became his clientele—‘Chieftans and their wives compare their latest Theo Schoon pendants at inter tribal meetings’.¹⁹ Even allowing for classic Schoon embellishment, there are documented examples of Māori collectors of his jade work. He was commissioned to make a mere for Maata Hirini, National President of the Māori Women’s Welfare League. Schoon’s 1973 book *Jade Country* has a photographic portrait of Hirini, dressed in a kākahu, and holding the mere—which is described in the accompanying text on customary ceremonial terms.²⁰ It is an image of a powerful leader, and one which lends authority to Schoon’s project achieved through jade carving.

Quite often, it was obvious that Schoon’s jade designs were generated by playing around with the drill holes, using the system of design he claimed to have discovered or understood while making his first carving based on the pekapeka design. Every now and then a small detail, like the appearance of the bar-and-circle motif that caused a scuffle between Schoon and Walters in the pages of the *New Zealand Herald* in 1968, made an appearance; a reminder of how much these jade carvings are indebted to European modern art. Schoon’s jade carving was another demonstration of the argument he had been making since the early 1960s: that the fusion of Māori art and modern European art could result in a new and extraordinary contemporary New Zealand art.

Schoon's appearance at the 1963 *Festival* did not initiate a period of sustained contact with Māori artists like Matchitt. He remained interested in what was happening in their work, but his thoughts about what was being achieved veered between praise and scathing criticism. An exhibition of Matchitt's recent work was interesting, Schoon told Margaret Orbell in a letter. 'He is developing along his own lines, and making a genuine contribution to New Zealand art, while Ralph Hotere's work is blatantly derivative, shoddy and pointless.' The snobs of the art world loved it, griped Schoon, 'for it gives them the illusion of seeing the latest from abroad'.²¹

For Matchitt, the event only emphasised the gap between his and Schoon's approaches to Māori art, and his suspicions of Schoon's particular use of the customary forms of another culture—which pulled in an opposite direction to the forward thrust of his own work. While Schoon was surprised at the invitation to participate in the *Festival*, Matchitt's surprise at Schoon's invitation (and its acceptance) was even greater. In saying that, and in noting that Westra's photograph of the two artists suggests a far greater collegial or collaborative exchange than ever occurred, Matchitt recalls that Schoon's gourds still sat more comfortably in Māhinarangi than his own work, and that of his artistic colleagues.²² Schoon would later recreate some of these cultural dynamics in a series of photographs of gourds placed within or alongside various Māori carvings or art works. In one image, a carved gourd sits within the pataka at Whakarewarewa, encouraging the two modes of carving to be read against one another, and the viewer to consider his iteration in relation to what has gone before.

There is a coda to this story. In 1982, when he had moved back to Aotearoa, Schoon was commissioned to paint a mural for the wall of the philatelic centre in the Rotorua Post Office. The design was based on a much earlier painting from the 1950s owned by Wanda Bidois-Edwards, a Māori friend from Schoon's days at Home Street, Auckland. It was one of a number of panels painted on cheap fibre board that were

used as backdrops in displays and photographs of his carved gourds. They weren't intended to be serious artworks, and Schoon never signed them or treated them very well, which is why so many of them are in poor condition now.²³ Schoon was too ill to physically manage working on the scale required for the mural, so once he had finalised the design it was painted by Rotorua sign writer Teresa Jones. After the panels had been completed to his satisfaction, Schoon signed them.²⁴

There was a serious intent behind the mural. Back in Rotorua, where the New Zealand Institute of Māori Arts and Crafts was teaching customary art, Schoon was demonstrating the power and potential of his attitude to updating Māori art through contact with the legacy of modern European abstract art. The mural used the vocabulary of Māori art but in a way that was quite different from the typical patterns of *kōwhaiwhai*. 'My main concern in this mural was to preserve the Maori identity as much as possible', he told Michael Dunn in a letter. 'If an art is to develop or progress its new forms should be stronger more flexible and above all, have a "presence". If that "presence" is satisfying, a people can identify with it, and claim it, and the Pakeha can have second thoughts about its potential in a modern world.'²⁵

Schoon asserted that he was unlike other Pākehā or European artists who adapted non-western art and used it as a basis for abstract painting. He saw himself as making a form of art that spoke directly to the modern possibilities of Māori art—and, more awkwardly, to what he called the 'Maori cultural and artistic predicament', which was a polite name for what he saw as the degeneration and disruption of Māori art. As Schoon put it in his letter to Dunn, 'First and foremost, I had to convince a very demoralized and artistically impoverished Māori people. You have to meet them at some level of their comprehension.'²⁶

This mural embodies all of the contradictions surrounding Schoon's relationship to Māori art. It was far from the only mural made in this period. Since the 1970s, murals had been made by Māori artists, propelling the move from modernism to

more politically-charged and community-engaged modes of contemporary art. They often required a negotiation of the various spaces where this was all worked out: the gallery, the urban environment, and, especially, the marae. Seen next to Cliff Whiting and Para Matchitt's marae project at Whangaparāpoa in 1973, or John Walsh's *Portrait of Uawa Tolaga Bay*, made for, but not accepted by Hāiti Marae, in 1980, Schoon's mural feels less the instrument for cultural change than an illustration of outdated ideals. If comprehension, or lack of comprehension, is at stake in this work, the problem likely lies with Schoon.

Yet, the mural has, in fact, found a different place within Māori culture, one stripped of the moral and artistic crusade of its maker. Following the closure of the Post Office building in the early 1990s, the mural was relocated to the wharekai Whakatūria at Ohinemutu marae. There it has served as a backdrop to the daily activities and ceremonial occasions of a community and a culture who have indeed 'identified with' and 'claimed' the mural as Schoon prophesied—but on their terms, not his.

OVERLEAF
Theo Schoon *Untitled Mural* 1982
PHOTO Natascha Hartzuiker

- 1 Theo Schoon, letter to Virginia Umberger, 28 December 1963, 1. CA000216, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.
- 2 Conal McCarthy, *Exhibiting Māori: A History of Colonial Cultures of Display* (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2007), 124.
- 3 *Ngaruawahia Centennial Souvenir: The First Maori Festival of the Arts*, 1963 (Ngāruawahia: Ngāruawahia Centennial Māori Festival of the Arts Committee, 1963), 13, 15.
- 4 Ibid, 19.
- 5 Theo Schoon, letter to Francisca Mayer, undated, no.14, 1–2. CA000505, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.
- 6 Francis Pound, *The Space Between: Pakeha Use of Maori Motifs in Modernist New Zealand Art* (Auckland: Workshop Press, 1994), 124–41.
- 7 For an account of this process, see Damian Skinner, *Theo Schoon: A Biography* (Wellington: Massey University Press, 2018), 151–83.
- 8 Theo Schoon, letter to Virginia Umberger, 3 January 1963, 2.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 *Ngaruawahia Centennial Souvenir: The First Maori Festival of the Arts*, 20.
- 11 Rosemary Vincent, 'Selwyn Muri's Paintings Win Wide Acclaim', *Te Ao Hou*, no. 46, 1964: 25.
- 12 Mac Vincent, 'The Auckland's diary', *Auckland Star*, 3 May 1963: unpaginated.
- 13 M.J.A., 'The Art of S.F. Muri', *New Zealand Listener*, 12 July 1963: 11.
- 14 Vincent, 'Selwyn Muri's Paintings Win Wide Acclaim', 25.
- 15 Ibid, 26–7.
- 16 Kees Hos, *Para Matchitt: Exhibition of Paintings and Prints from Nov. 20 – Dec. 1, 1967* (Auckland: New Vision Gallery, 1967), unpaginated.
- 17 Ans Westra, 'The Sculpture of Arnold Wilson', *Te Ao Hou*, no. 52, 1965: 32–3.
- 18 Imlah Norman, 'Theo Schoon Gave His Heart to . . . a Jade!', *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, 20 April 1970: 35.
- 19 Theo Schoon, letter to Francisca Mayer, undated [1970], 1.
- 20 Theo Schoon, *Jade Country* (Sydney: Jade Arts, 1973), 96.
- 21 Theo Schoon, letter to Margaret Orbell, undated [c.1967], 1. CA000044/001/0001, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.
- 22 Para Matchitt, interview with Aaron Lister, 22 May 2019.
- 23 Damian Skinner, notes from a conversation with John Perry, 28 November 2005. Damian Skinner Archives.
- 24 John Perry, interview with Damian Skinner, 27 February 2018.
- 25 Theo Schoon, letter to Michael Dunn, 28 December 1982, 1, 6.
- 26 Ibid.



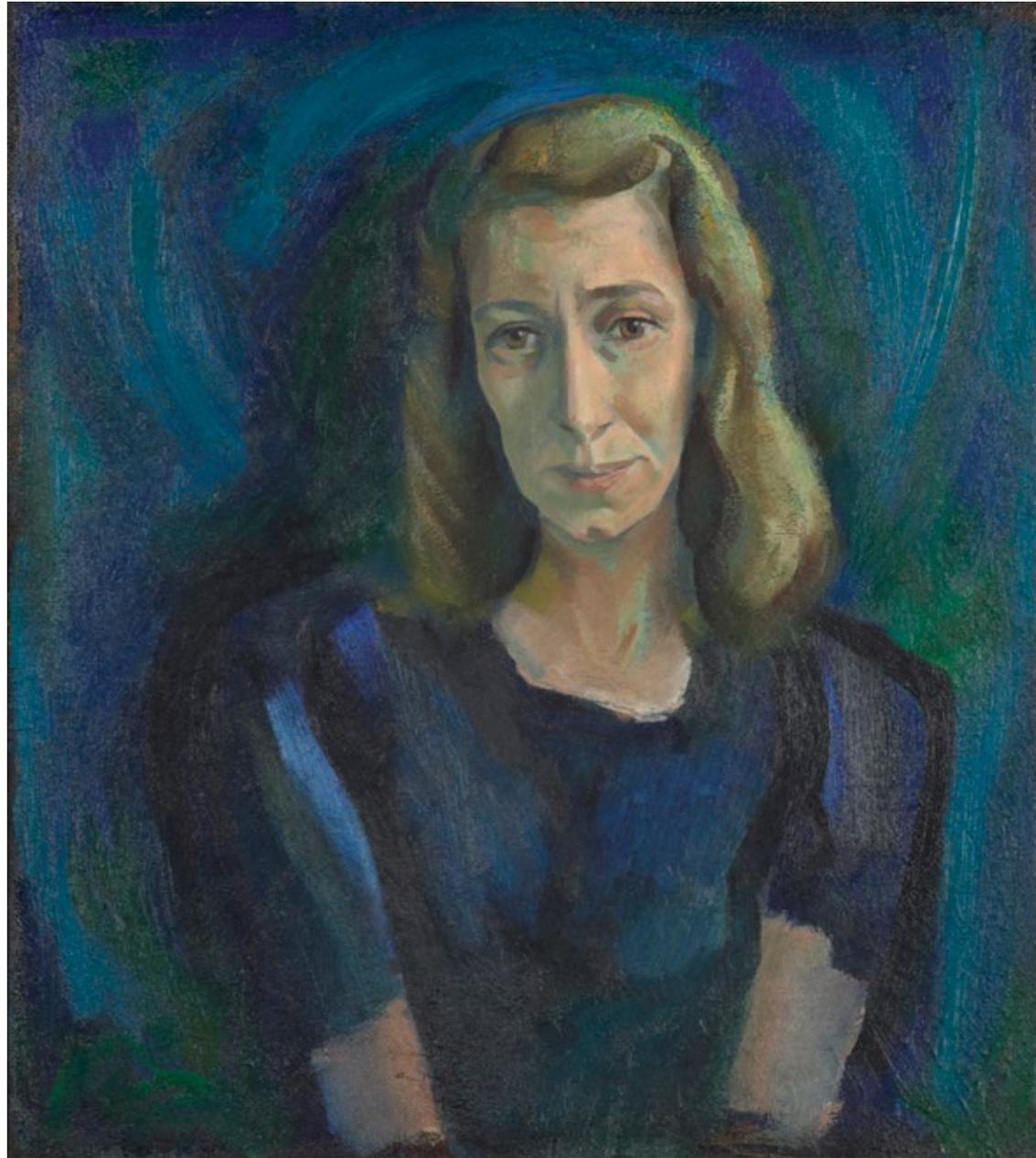


Rita Angus *Portrait of Theo Schoon* 1942

THEO SCHOON, RITA ANGUS, AND JOHN MONEY

Theo Schoon could be dismissive of women, and especially women artists. There were very few women he maintained close relationships with. One was the painter Rita Angus, seven years his senior, a more established artist, and someone who held strong feminist views that would seem to place the two firmly at odds. Yet Schoon and Angus became close allies. Both were outsiders: Schoon was a flamboyant, queer foreigner; Angus a fiercely independent single woman. Each saw the genius in the other. They developed a creative relationship based on a loosely shared vision of the role and potential of modern art as a liberating force necessary in monocultural, small-minded Aotearoa, and, more broadly, in a world at war.

This connection must have been clear at the time to psychologist and future world-famous sexologist John Money. Before he left New Zealand in 1947 to study and teach at Pittsburgh University, Harvard University, and eventually Johns Hopkins University, Money struck up supportive relationships with Schoon and Angus. Money wasn't a passive partner in this triangle. Fiercely intellectual, his cultural and research interests closely intersected with those of both artists. His letters reveal many details of the rich discussions and interactions that had an impact on all three individuals; indeed, we know a lot about these artists through Money and what he wrote about them to others and for publication.



Theo Schoon *Portrait of Rita Angus* 1942

In a letter to his mother, Money relayed Angus's concept for the ideal presentation of her work as 'a kind of temple of art'—which was realised in the 2008 Te Papa retrospective *Rita Angus: Life and Vision*.¹ More dramatically, Money ensured the survival of many of Schoon's artworks when he rescued a substantial collection of photographs, sketchbooks, and hand-written documents from Schoon's house in Home Street, Auckland, after Schoon abandoned it in 1965.² Without Money, our knowledge of Schoon's work would be significantly more skeletal. The question of what was saved—what he deemed important enough to take with him under his arm, and what could be left behind—provides an interesting insight into Money's understanding of Schoon's art and its cultural value.

Money was more than just a collector of Angus and Schoon's work. His collecting, which took the form of regular, often eccentric, purchases, made over decades as and when he could afford it, was friendship based. Andrew Paul Wood suggests the term 'patron' is a more appropriate way of characterising his relationship as a supporter or enabler of Schoon's art.³ The same goes for Angus, and others, including the writer Janet Frame. Money was instrumental in Frame's career. He encouraged her to keep writing in the face of indifference, collected her poems, and gave them to Denis Glover to be published for the first time in *Landfall*.⁴ Frame was with Money when he visited Schoon's abandoned Home Street residence, and helped him carry the archives out of the house and onto the bus.⁵ Schoon also rated Frame highly, describing her as 'one of the rare examples of true artistry he had come across in this philistine country'.⁶ Money, the future pioneer of gender reassignment treatment, was a central figure in this circle, and played a key role in the development of art and literature in Aotearoa.

Schoon and Angus had met in Christchurch in the late 1930s, but they developed a closer relationship when both were living in Wellington during the war years. Schoon was an active part of the émigré European population based in the capital. He worked as a commercial photographer, and taught art in his basement studio in the

YMCA. After delivering a lecture on modern art to a local sketch club, he befriended Gordon Walters who would become a regular visitor to the studio and a protégé of sorts, eager to learn from Schoon's academic training, as well as his first-hand knowledge of European modernism. During this time, Schoon also renewed his friendship with Rita Angus, who was living first in the Bolton Street flats, then in her father's house in Waikanae.

John Money arrived in the picture a few years later. He was introduced to Schoon in Christchurch in June 1946 by the painter Douglas MacDiarmid. Schoon struck Money as 'an artist of exceptionally rare character', who was about to embark on a remarkable project of copying the Māori rock drawings.⁷ Money also met Angus later that year; he described immediately falling into a discussion about 'psychology and art'.⁸ He would later visit Angus on his yearly trips to see his mother in Wellington, and he would sometimes buy work, and even commissioned Angus to make a portrait of his mother, Ruth.

The decision, in 1942, of Schoon and Angus to paint portraits of each other not only indicates their friendship but also provides a glimpse as to what each artist valued in the other—and, in turn, in themselves. Angus's portrait of Schoon is a study in artistic swagger. His casual pose, nonchalant demeanour, and smart, colourful dress, all suggest European sophistication. The whole portrait is a vibrant wash of form, texture, and colour that presents Schoon as out of place and marooned in this country. Signs of difference surround him: the pot of brushes in the foreground, the biomorphic, surreal artwork hanging on the wall (possibly Schoon's own work, or maybe even one of Angus's paintings), and a Qing Dynasty *blanc de chine* porcelain vase on the side table that indicates his interest in Asian art and culture.⁹ A black cat stretches across his lap. The portrait is a close cousin to Angus's more famous *Portrait of Betty Curnow*, of another mutual friend, also painted in 1942. Curnow, like Schoon, is surrounded by and wears signs and objects locating her in the physical world, but at the same time in an immaterial realm of personal, imaginative, and symbolic relationships that define her character and interests.

Schoon's portrait of Angus (once owned by Doris Lusk) goes in the opposite direction to create the same effect. Angus is presented in a straightforward manner, staring directly out at the viewer and stripped of any signs of culture or context. She is not necessarily depicted as an artist; she is without the brushes that she grants Schoon, and that she wields almost as weapons in many of her own self-portraits. A similar Angus appears in the more famous photograph that Schoon took of her leaning on the verandah in the house in Sumner, Christchurch, in 1946. Here, she looks past us. Both portraits are prosaic and unembellished (especially considered in relation to Angus's elaborate presentation of Schoon). There is a suggestion that there is something more to Angus than can be seen; she has an inner strength, individuality, and a deeper, different way of being in, understanding, seeing, and painting the world.

It is not surprising that Schoon celebrates the vision or creative spirit of the artist, rather than her practice or tools of the trade. This is what he prioritised in his own work and valued in others—especially in Angus, who was far more than just a painter to him. Schoon also made photographic and painted portraits of Walters at this time, which share the same economy of means and absence of overt signs of artistic endeavour. Michael Dunn argues that Schoon ultimately presents Angus 'as an equal'.¹⁰

It is equally unsurprising that Angus would paint Schoon as an artist. She credited his knowledge of European modernism as a key influence on the development of her own work. 'My years of study in art history had been through reproductions & not through seeing originals', she wrote in 1954. 'Theo showed me with patience, this difference & the effect of time on painting. I came to see slowly & enjoy more, especially originals from overseas in later years—and work freely, in my own way.'¹¹ Angus's willingness to learn, and Schoon's willingness to impart or even impel such knowledge—even to a senior, more established artist—sits behind this exchange of portraits.

Both artists looked to eastern art and philosophies as a source for their work and world

views. Schoon's self-professed 'double vision' was a product of his perceived dual cultural inheritance, and the strong influence of 'the east'. Angus's portrait, like that made by Douglas MacDiarmid a decade earlier, stresses this cultural difference. In both, Schoon is given Indonesian features, extending his self-identification into representation. The portraits suggest Schoon's appeal to the circle of New Zealand artists was as an exotic, cultural other. They reveal the strong transferral of his self-fashioning, which was later defined by Francis Pound as 'a kind of cultural cross dressing'.¹²

Schoon's connection to Indonesian culture was an integral part of his art, much of which revolved around the trance. Dance and art making were both ways of accessing a trance state and thereby initiating an encounter with the subconscious mind. That, for Schoon, was where the power of modernist art resided, and what propelled its capacity to transcend decadent European modes of rationalism and naturalism. Like his dancing, the paintings in his 1965 exhibition at New Vision Gallery in Auckland were made by giving himself over to a trance state. 'In the trance (subconscious, if you like) we meet the secrets of life and the universe, the meaning of our existence', Schoon wrote in his 1944 article. It is the key to a world 'which is a constant source of inspiration and where we may receive impressions which are beyond the range of words or names'.¹³ Now we would call this type of practice 'performative', and, also appropriative. Schoon believed that growing up in Java had opened this pathway and consciousness. In turn, this knowledge gave him the confidence or the audacity to claim he could understand the secrets of Māori art and make his own version that was as good as anything done by the ancient *tohunga*.

It is often said that Schoon introduced Angus to Buddhism, which became a strong force in her work.¹⁴ There is a lost, presumably destroyed, Schoon portrait of Angus sitting in the lotus position, which perhaps supports the assertion. Where Schoon was working from lived experience—represented by his photographs of the Buddha in Java's Chandi Mendut temple,



Theo Schoon *Untitled (Crouching Dancer) 1947*



Rita Angus *Self Portrait in Oriental Costume* 1946

or his paintings of Javanese dancers completed in the 1930s—Angus worked symbolically. Her allegorical ‘Goddess’ paintings of the mid-1940s were based on Kyan Yin, the Buddhist goddess of Mercy. She sought another form of ‘double vision’, suggesting that the Goddesses belonged to both East and West: ‘You will find her in the paintings on the walls of the Temple Caves of India, where wandering Yogi Priests sheltered, in the Bodhisattvas of the Buddhist shrines where the Chinese worshipped, in the flower and tea ceremonies of the Samurai, the Geisha, and the Priestess of the Shinto shrines of Japan.’¹⁵ As with all the portraits discussed in this essay, this double vision is played out through a set of Eastern-derived symbols, movements, and gestures. The goddess *Rutu* (1951), for example, holds a white lotus flower, a Buddhist symbol of enlightenment and illumination. Betty Curnow claimed that Angus ‘had a Chinese way of looking, absorbing, and remembering’—values that Curnow found in the artist’s small drawing *Willow Tree* (1940), made using Chinese brush-drawing techniques. (The willow reappears as a halo in Angus’s 1945 painting *Goddess of Mercy*.) Curnow purchased the drawing and Schoon coveted it, but Curnow refused to part with it.¹⁶

Angus performed her own take on ‘double-vision’. There is a self portrait ‘in Oriental costume’. *Rutu* is conventionally read as a thinly veiled self-portrait in which Angus depicts herself as multicultural, in this case European and Polynesian. Like Schoon’s dance, *Rutu* is a cross-cultural performance, set in the local landscape—those Christchurch hills in the background of the Goddess paintings are part of the same region where Schoon would search for Māori rock drawings. Even if not taken as self portraits, *Rutu* and the other Goddess paintings look forward to a more enlightened, culturally hybrid, peaceful, and prosperous future for humanity by understanding and taking on the qualities of the other.

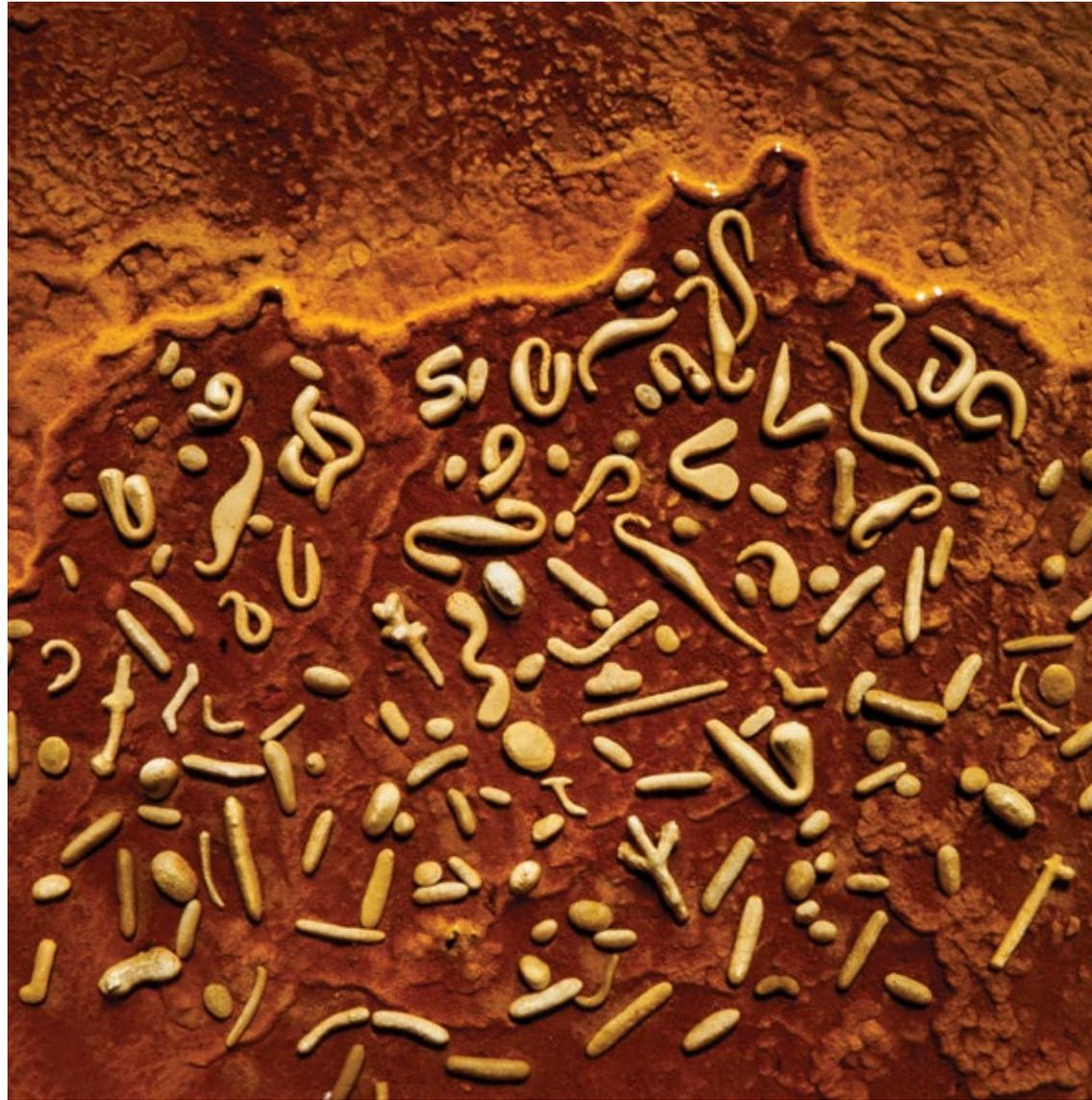
Schoon and Angus also searched for and channelled preternatural forces in their work. This was done individually, and alongside each other on the visits that Schoon (at least once in

the company of Walters) made to Angus’s beach house in Waikanae in the early 1940s. Angus made watercolours of the local sand dunes and cloud formations. She was fascinated by Schoon’s process of making sculptures with found natural forms (rocks, boulders, driftwood) which would then take on another life through the black-and-white photographs he took of them.¹⁷ For his part, Schoon used the camera as an alternative mode of vision that extended what the eye could perceive, and broke through accepted ways of seeing. His highly aestheticised photographs of the forms and patterns of nature would extend to the rock drawing sites, and later the famous images of geothermal activity in and around Rotorua, which he described as ‘a dream landscape. Something more beautiful than Dalí ever thought of. Or any artist had ever thought up.’¹⁸

Wherever he travelled, the forms Schoon found and made were often highly eroticised, carrying an almost school-boy glee in the presentation of ‘nature’s own’ range of pulsating, phallic bodily shapes and orifices. This was no doubt intended to scandalise a conservative art establishment, and also separated him from the machine-like objectivity of much modernist photography.

Schoon believed that ‘when nature shows itself as an artist then it is an important material for artists’.¹⁹ This statement could also be seen as a driver for the nature mysticism of Angus’s work, which seeks a more spiritual entanglement with the nature world; something observed, transformed, and energised through art making. Her description of paintings like *Autumn* (1963) and *Fungi* (1956–7) as ‘imaginative works ... seen through the eyes of a caterpillar’ echoes Schoon’s use of the camera as another eye which sits in and perceives the natural world from a different vantage point—apart from human awareness.²⁰ The work of both artists at this time is surreal and unsettling, designed not to sit on the surface of the world, but to break through the illusion of nature created through conventional experience, and even more by conventional art.

John Money’s part in this creative relationship is difficult to ascertain. At times he was brought



Theo Schoon *Configuration* date unknown



Theo Schoon *Geothermal Study* date unknown



inside, as when he accompanied and was photographed by Schoon on a trek to South Canterbury rock art sites in January 1947. In other moments, he was kept out, as in his thwarted attempts to purchase the Goddess paintings, which Angus always insisted were destined for public institutions.²¹ The collection Money built and lived with in America—now the heart of the Eastern Southland Gallery collection in Gore—has Schoon and Angus as its twin pillars, around which everything else seems to coalesce. It includes 114 Schoons: paintings, drawings, photographs, and a carved gourd. It is one of the largest holdings of his work outside the Schoon estate material in Te Papa. It was Schoon who fostered Money's interest in indigenous art, leading to the collection of African sculptures and artefacts, including two larger-than-life 'wedding figures' from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the establishment of a long-term patronage relationship with the Aboriginal artists Peter Wadaymu and George Liwukan from the Warramirri region. A similar line of interest may be drawn from Angus to contemporary Baltimore artist Lowell Nesbitt, best known for his verging-on-psychedelic pop paintings of flowers as consciousness-shifting devices.

Like Money himself, this collection can be read in many different ways from contemporary perspectives, often problematically. It is, however, testament to a unique three-way creative partnership that not only impacted those intimately involved, but has left a significant trace on the culture of Aotearoa.

Rita Angus *Fungi* 1956-7

OVERLEAF
Installation shots of Schoon's exhibition at
New Vision Gallery, Auckland, 1965. PHOTO Theo Schoon

- 1 John Money, letter to Anne Kirker, 25 May 1982. Anne Kirker research notes, MU-6-14/13, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.
- 2 See Damian Skinner, *Theo Schoon: A Biography* (Wellington: Massey University Press, 2018), 3-4.
- 3 Andrew Paul Wood, 'Double Vision: Redressing Theo Schoon's Absence from New Zealand Art History' (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2003), 68.
- 4 Michael King, 'John Money: Scientist, Eccentric, Patron of the Arts', in Jim Geddes (ed.), *Splendours of Civilisation: The John Money Collection at the Eastern Southland Gallery* (Gore: Eastern Southland Gallery and Longacre Press, 2006), 31.
- 5 Damian Skinner, *Theo Schoon: A Biography*, 3.
- 6 Michael King, *Wrestling with the Angel: A Life of Janet Frame* (London: Viking, 2000), 92.
- 7 John Money, letter to Ruth Money, 2 June 1945. John Money Papers, Hocken Library, Dunedin.
- 8 John Money, letter to Ruth Money, 8 January 1946. John Money Papers, Hocken Library, Dunedin.
- 9 Andrew Paul Wood, 'Double Vision: Redressing Theo Schoon's Absence from New Zealand Art History' (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2003), 70.
- 10 Michael Dunn, 'Rita Angus and Theo Schoon: An Unlikely Friendship', *Art New Zealand*, no. 107, 2003: 86.
- 11 Rita Angus, letter to Douglas Lilburn, 20 March 1954. MS-Papers-7623-077, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
- 12 Francis Pound, *The Space Between: Pakeha Use of Maori Motifs in Modernist New Zealand Art* (Auckland: Workshop Press, 1994), 79.
- 13 Theo Schoon, 'Oriental Dancing and the Trance', *The Arts in New Zealand*, vol. 17, no.1, December 1944-January 1945: 42.
- 14 Michael Dunn, 'The Art of Theo Schoon', *Art New Zealand*, no. 25, Summer 1982: 22.
- 15 Jill Trevelyan, *Rita Angus: An Artist's Life* (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2008), 168.
- 16 *Ibid*, 159.
- 17 *Ibid*.
- 18 'Theo Schoon Transcripts: Tapes 1-3, Rotorua 1982'. Martin Rumsby Collection, Auckland.
- 19 *Ibid*.
- 20 Draft biographical notes for Gil Docking, not dated, Alexander Turnbull Library, quoted in Jill Trevelyan, *Rita Angus: An Artist's Life* (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2008), 307.
- 21 Money, letter to Anne Kirker, 1982.





Theo Schoon *One Man's Picture Is Another Man's Rorschach Test* 1964

THEO SCHOON AT NEW VISION GALLERY, 1965

Theo Schoon was indifferent or even hostile to exhibition making. He valued process over product, didn't want to waste his energy and scarce resources by making large numbers of finished artworks, and he doubted the ability of audiences to grasp or appreciate the ideas he was grappling with. Challenged by gallery owner Kees Hos essentially to put up or shut up, Schoon held his first and most significant solo exhibition at Auckland's New Vision Gallery in April 1965. It was an artistic manifesto in exhibition form. Featuring sixteen paintings, seventeen relief prints, and a number of gourds, the exhibition was a cumulation of everything Schoon had been working on over the past two decades: the synthesis of east and west, modernist and historical, art and craft.

Hos's essay in the modest catalogue and the substantial press coverage all stressed that these elements travelled with Schoon to Aotearoa. He proposed that Schoon's 'first contact with art was at the abandoned temples of the ancient Hindu Empire', and that this discovery was given fresh impetus through his liberating encounter with Māori art.¹ Schoon's engagement with Javanese and then Māori art was described as a process of 'working Europe out of his system'.² Hos argued that these discoveries made Schoon's art distinctive, but that his trajectory also ran 'parallel with the dilemma of New Zealand painting'.³



Theo Schoon *Meringue* 1963

In other words, he was an outsider, but one who had a lot to offer to local artists and traditions. For his part, Schoon made the most of the pulpit that his exhibition provided, even giving the speech at his opening. As the *New Zealand Herald* reported, Schoon told the audience, 'I know I am breaking the code that says an artist should keep his mouth shut. But it is my work and I know more about it than anyone else.'⁴

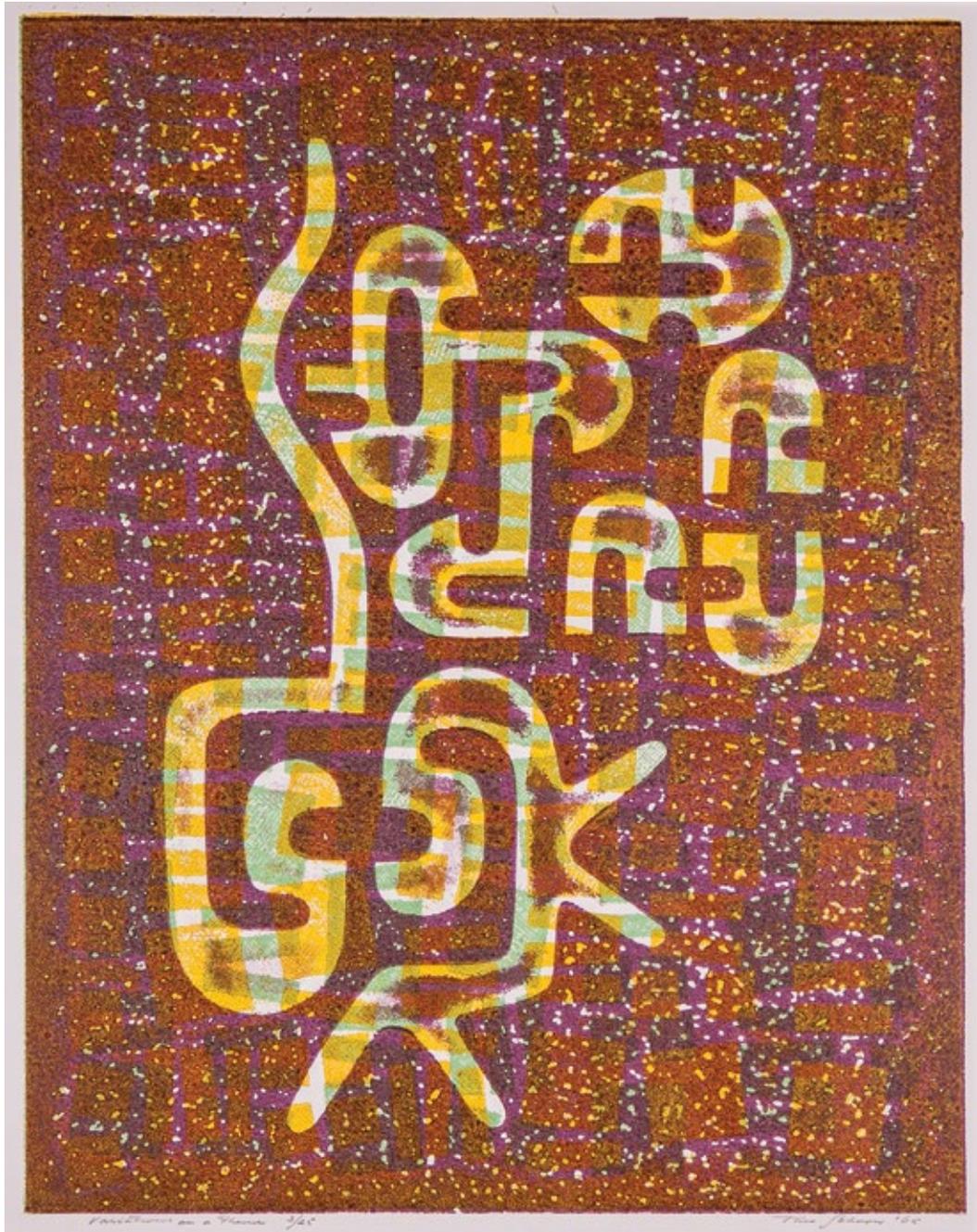
Despite the promotion of Schoon as a pioneering trans-cultural, trans-historical artist, the exhibition was distinctly modernist, and its unifying language was one of organic, process-orientated abstraction. Overt references to Māori or Javanese art were minimal, but the connections existed and were noted by critics; the paintings, said one reviewer, were a product of 'a discipline he learnt while tracing the [Māori] rock carvings'.⁵ The almost luminous red, blue, and green lines that run rhythmically across what Schoon described as 'a blinding white surface', and which are sometimes divided by armature of rigid black lines, creates a constant pull between positive and negative, figure and ground—the formal language that he and Walters extracted from their encounter with the Māori rock drawings in the South Island.⁶ Schoon's paintings relate to the rock drawings, yet his purpose is not to speak directly back to or for their source as he does in other work.

The carved and decorated gourds arranged on low tables in front of the paintings operated on similar terms. Unlike the painted surface, the gourd form conjured for the audience an immediate relationship to Māori art, but this was a connection Schoon didn't over emphasise. Schoon's interest in gourds was initially driven by his interest in tā moko. The surface of a gourd mirrors the complex curves of the human face, and Schoon believed that many of the fragments of carved gourds he was studying in museum collections had been incised with patterns from tā moko. He grew gourds so he could apply his own tattoo patterns onto their surfaces. In the late 1950s, Schoon designed and intended his gourds to be read as intimately related to Māori art. His intentions were realised when, in 1963, his gourds

were featured in *The First Māori Festival of the Arts* at Tūrangawaewae marae in Ngāruawāhia.

The gourds that Schoon showed two years later at New Vision, in contrast, carried few references to Māori art beyond the gourd as an object, and whatever familiarity with Schoon's own history that viewers might carry with them. Where the gourds were carved, most of the designs were not related to tā moko or kōwhaiwhai—the forms of customary Māori art that Schoon had earlier connected to. Instead, they shared the biomorphic lines and abstract language of the paintings. Some designs would move between these different forms—or at least hold that potential. There is a drawing, not included in the New Vision exhibition, that floats the wavering pattern of the painting *Meringue* (1963) onto a gourd form. The bisecting lines that serve to flatten the picture plane in the painting here wrap its spherical surface.⁷ Most of the gourds were, in fact, undecorated and presented as sculptures, whose formal properties had been manipulated in the growing process. By growing the gourds in wooden box frames or suspending them from wires or enclosing them in nets, Schoon could alter their shapes. Schoon boasted to the press that his plan here was 'to introduce a new type of sculpture to the world'.⁸ Just like the paintings, the gourds were a kind of 'synthesis', that began in a close observation of and interaction with Māori art, but was then re-presented (and, as Schoon firmly believed, improved) by combining what he learned with European modernist modes of art making.

A few of the paintings have roughly textured, gessoed surfaces, similar to those Schoon had used in the 1950s to refer to the limestone surfaces of the shelters on which the Māori rock drawings are found. But most of the paintings have flat surfaces. In recalling the empty page and the marks that can be made on paper, a connection is evoked to the drawings of Rolfe Hattaway, the patient who Schoon had provided with drawing materials at Avondale Mental Hospital in 1949 before collecting and copying the results. Schoon's paintings, made fifteen years later, share with Hattaway's drawings the use of limited colours,



Theo Schoon *Variations on a Theme* 1965



Theo Schoon *Untitled (Lollipop Time)* 1965



Theo Schoon, New Vision Gallery, 1965.

and the combination of organic, wobbly lines with strong geometric forms that often enclose and frame free patterns. Schoon perhaps publicly nods to Hattaway with one title, *One Man's Picture Is Another Man's Rorschach Test* (1964). This reference to the pattern-based form of psychological evaluation may acknowledge Hattaway for those in the know, and it almost certainly makes a joke about the inability of almost everyone else but Schoon to see Hattaway as an artistic genius. One of those who did understand the potential of Hattaway's drawings was Gordon Walters, and to him Schoon made clear his debt: 'The key of course, was Hattaway', he told him in a letter written in 1965.⁹ Also at stake here are the realms of creativity that Schoon believed these sources opened up in his own work. The paintings are largely improvisational, made through a kind of automatic drawing technique. After loosely working out the design with pencil on paper, Schoon would begin working on a prepared ground or white surface. First came the armature of rigid black lines against which the improvised coloured lines would move and push, then the lines in red, blue, and green. Where these lines intersected and created an enclosed space, it was filled in with a block of colour. Each painting was completed in a single session lasting around an hour.¹⁰ The process left no opportunity for revision or alteration, no way to correct mistakes. Schoon saw it as a kind of trance state, a way of painting that bypassed consciousness and the intellect, allowing all of his ideas to spring forth in an unexpected and semi-uncontrolled way. He described the process as similar to 'taking a shit', in the sense that he had fully digested all the different inspirations that led to the paintings and that it all came out at once. Despite the crude if apt simile, these paintings are some of the most elegant and beautiful works Schoon ever produced.¹¹

The relief prints came out of an intensive period of working alongside Hos. During a studio visit, Schoon observed Hos working on printing plates built up from layers of cardboard and other found detritus, all held together with the acrylic glues that had recently become available.

It was a rough-and-ready mode of printing as assemblage, an alternative to established and laborious printing processes which demanded blocks of metal or stone, and a greater investment of time. Schoon quickly adopted the process, transforming household materials such as pieces of string and patches of cloth into sinewy, organic patterns. His large pile of cardboard blocks were printed in a range of colours on Hos's printing press. The improvisational potential of this process was pushed further as different blocks were printed over each other, creating elaborate patterns and richer colours as the inks overlapped. Like the paintings and gourds in the exhibition, the prints were process-based and hybrid. Their titles reveal the range of artistic and cultural forms Schoon was synthesising in his blueprint for the future of modernist art. The prints were central to the genesis of the exhibition. It was through the evidence of this collaboration that Hos was able to convince Schoon to make the paintings that would join the prints and gourds in an exhibition that would chart Schoon's—and also Hos's—interest in alternative, syncretic forms of modernist art.

The exhibition ran for two weeks. While positively reviewed, it didn't sell well. Schoon later recalled he only sold one work—a print, to friends. Speaking of the exhibition in 1982, Schoon said, 'As it turned out the exhibition was a failure and it was obvious that the public was not ready for my art.'¹² Schoon's disappointment with this response seemed to have driven his decision to leave Aotearoa, which, after a brief return to Rotorua, he soon did—bitter and disillusioned.

The New Vision show was Schoon's most important exhibition, crystallising his philosophies and ambitions. *Split Level View Finder* attempts to reconstruct this exhibition as accurately as possible fifty-four years later. Over the intervening years, most of the paintings have made their way to major public and private collections. The prints are all drawn from the large Schoon collection at Rotorua Museum. The gourds have largely disappeared. They weren't added to stock by the Gallery, which might have enabled them to enter collections in the 1970s and 1980s when interest

in Schoon's art began to grow. They might have been sent overseas, to Schoon's extensive network of gourd growers and collectors; or perhaps they didn't survive Schoon's ramshackle personal arrangements, which led to a great deal of his art being destroyed or ruined through neglect. Their absence even has its own myth. Schoon would tell the story of how one confounded critic ran amok in the show, smashing a number of the gourds; the bulbous and pulsating shapes had, apparently, aroused unresolved sexual feelings. The story is almost certainly apocryphal, but, as an expression of Schoon's feelings about the response towards the exhibition, it holds a piercing truth.¹³

The exhibition was not a failure. It succeeded exactly on the terms that Schoon set for it as a synthesis of all of his preoccupations, sources, and experiments to this point. These were expressed in new and strange forms that were entirely the product of processes and investigations that only he was in charge of. Even then, control itself is at stake in these works. The access of a trance state, and use of automatic drawing modes and chance-based processes made conscious decision making subservient to intuition and the process itself. This is all registered through the rhythmical movement of the hand across various surfaces and materials—the guiding force of the works.

The paintings especially were a complex synthesis of Bauhaus design principles, modernist abstraction, the 'frozen music' of the rock drawings, and the 'unlearnings' of Hattaway, brought together and reconstituted through the blurring of different modes and processes. Schoon intended them to be read as part of the same tranche of work as the prints, and certainly as related to the bodily gourds-as-sculptures (on their own terms, an ambitious hybrid form). Schoon's various modes gather on and contest the surfaces of the paintings. The rhythmic rather than systematic movement of their coloured lines was also part of an ongoing quest to channel the effects of percussive music and even dance into visual form. They also recall Schoon's photography—especially his radically cropped and flattened imagery of natural phenomena. He saw this flow across media going both ways, and



Theo Schoon *Untitled Gourd* date unknown

demanded that, as constructed images, his own photographs should naturally bear ‘an uncanny resemblance to very good abstract paintings’.¹⁴

The paintings hold Schoon’s entire universe. His frustration was not with the work, but the responses to it; the inability of his audience to grasp the grand proposition the paintings laid out. He would write that ‘the artists are frustrated. Squinting with their noses, on the lines, it yields no secrets or technique, and the rest remains a nagging mystery’.¹⁵ The paintings were strange and unsettling then, and remain a nagging mystery now.

One year later, in March 1966, Gordon Walters held his first one-person exhibition at New Vision Gallery. Consisting of twelve paintings and six works on paper, it was Walters’s breakthrough exhibition, the major presentation of his abstractions based on the koru form, but framed solely as an investigation of positive and negative formal relationships.¹⁶ These two series of abstract paintings—one made by Schoon, one by Walters—exhibited on the same walls within a year of each other, both sprung from the call-and-response working relationship played out over the koru motif a decade earlier. Walters’s paintings continued the conversation by pushing that language in a more rigorous formal direction. Schoon’s paintings had totally jettisoned the koru and any overt reference to Māori motifs in the search for a more syncretic, universal mode of expression where each and every referent was turned into something other. The two bodies of work look a world apart, yet actually share a lot more than just an origin story.

As Hos indicated in his exhibition notes, Schoon’s work comes from elsewhere and, at best, ‘runs parallel’ to developments in New Zealand painting. His paintings did not fit into the emerging vocabulary of a bicultural modernism—for which Walters’s koru paintings became the spearhead. They also did not fit within the prevailing ideas of abstraction that were being marked out at this time, and which Walters’s work would also come to embody. They were too porous, too provisional, too open to outside forces and possibilities. Walters knew where he was

taking his abstraction, and the culture was starting to work out how and where it fitted within a local tradition of painting. Schoon’s abstract paintings were yet another fleeting experiment he would quickly leave behind in his return to the explicit use of Māori motifs and forms. He was yet to ‘discover’ jade carving, and the mural he made for the Rotorua Post Office in the early 1980s would explicitly recall his and Walters’s earlier investigations into the koru (his looser, more rhythmical treatment of the form perhaps influenced by this body of paintings). It would be these more explicit encounters with local art forms or traditions, rather than the radically inventive modernism these paintings represented, where Schoon’s contribution to art and culture in Aotearoa would be assessed, then contested.

Walters’s exhibition at New Vision in 1966 announced his arrival in the art scene of Aotearoa, signalling a whole new possibility for modernism here. Schoon’s exhibition in the same gallery a year earlier confirmed his distance and departure from those traditions. Schoon seemed to take the ‘failure’ of his exhibition hard. But, in his frequent retelling of the story, it is clear that, for him, it also served as a vital affirmation.

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- 3 Kees Hos, *Theo Schoon: Exhibition of Paintings and Relief Prints*, unpaginated.
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- 6 Theo Schoon, letter to Gordon Walters, 1965: 1. CA000044/001/0001, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.
- 7 Theo Schoon, *Gourd with Meringue Design*, undated, photocopy, Steve Rumsey collection, Wellington.
- 8 Peter Simon, ‘From Gourds to Sculpture’, *Daily Post*, 7 February 1966: 8.
- 9 Theo Schoon, letter to Gordon Walters, 1965, 1.
- 10 Michael Dunn, interview with Damian Skinner, 20 August 2017.
- 11 Gerald Moonen, interview with Damian Skinner, 12 December 1998.
- 12 ‘Theodorus Johannes Schoon Testimony, Letters and Documents Concerning the Vuletic Case, 1982’, 18 December 1982. CA00978/001/0013, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.
- 13 Theo Schoon, interview with Ron Brownson, 14 April 1982. The story is repeated at least twice in obituaries published after Schoon’s death in 1985. ‘Theo Schoon 1915–1985’, *New Zealand Art News*, vol. 12, no. 4, 1985: 2; Martin Rumsby, ‘Influential NZ Artist Dies’, *Auckland Star*, 20 August 1985: B5.
- 14 Theo Schoon, interview with Martin Rumsby.
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- 16 Lucy Hammonds, ‘Gordon Walters: An Expanding Horizon’, in *Gordon Walters: New Vision* (Dunedin and Auckland: Dunedin Public Gallery and Auckland Art Gallery, 2018), 27.



Maerewhenua site, 13 October 2018.
PHOTO Nathan Pohio

THEO SCHOON, A NGĀI TAHU PERSPECTIVE

Rapaki is a small kāinga (village) nestled into Whakaraupō Lyttelton Harbour, under the gaze of Te Poho o Tamatea Pokai Whenua, our ancestral mountain. At four years of age, I was living with my mother and grandparents at Taua Kitty's house, just a few minutes' walk up from the marae. It was late 1974 and I was being prepared to start school. My grandparents bought me a leather satchel and a pair of shiny black school shoes. Being fitted for the shoes was interesting as the salesman presented a pair with hei-tiki designs incised into their soles. I quite liked them and enjoyed running my finger across the familiar relief pattern. However, my oohhs and ahhs quickly subsided as another pair, with animal paws on the soles, were offered. I felt a tough decision lay ahead for me. Meanwhile, beyond my attention, my grandparents held a small hui. The tiki shoes somehow disappeared and the ones with the paws—a design much praised by my grandmother—remained.

The hui in the shop is my earliest recollection of the conundrum of contemporary Māori experience, where modern daily life and te ao Māori (the Māori world view) converge and one has to determine a way forward. Neither party—the Pākehā salesman nor the Pohio whanau—particularly enjoyed the experience. The salesman probably wondered

why Māori customers would not want shoes with a Māori design, while my grandparents would have been perplexed as to why someone would put hei tiki on the soles of shoes.

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Traditionally, the natural limestone lean-tos and caves of the central kapakihiwakatekateka o Waitaha Canterbury region were important for Ngāi Tahu. They were places of shelter, rest, and reprieve on inland travel routes for mahinga kai (food gathering) and for the transport and trade of precious materials, particularly pounamu. Some sites were also reserved for tapu (sacred) purposes. Many still contain drawings (made with charcoal) and paintings (in ochre pigment and shark oil) with imagery ranging from the representational to what might be called the abstract. Due to the loss of cultural memory caused by our colonial history, it is difficult to be definitive as to what they represent. There are people, kuri (dogs), and manu (birds); manaia and taniwha (river and sea guardians). The famous twenty-five metre long taniwha at Ōpihi River is a national treasure. Then, there are geometric forms, made with adjacent or interlacing lines—possibly pure mark making. Most of the drawings date from before the arrival of Pākehā, but there are post-contact images: men in hats on horseback, sailing ships, and an extraordinary flag-laden building thought to represent a church. The drawings are priceless taonga (treasures) left by our tūpuna (ancestors). The identities of these tūpuna are not known to me, but the tribes in order of arrival to Te Waipounamu are Rapuwai, Waitaha, Kāti Māmoe, and Ngāi Tahu. They left us drawings and paintings across several hundred sites. These beautiful forms of expression linger in the mind of the viewer long after leaving the sites where they can still be found.

In 1945, Canterbury Museum Director Roger Duff carried out a week's survey of rock-drawing sites at the behest of the South Canterbury Historical Society. Although not convinced of their artistic merit, the ethnologist believed the sites and the art they contained should be

protected and preserved—especially in light of proposed hydro developments (which would cause the flooding of significant sites around the Waitake River). In 1946, financed by the Department of Internal Affairs, he commissioned Theo Schoon to record the sites over an eight-week period. At first, Schoon's progress was slow. Suffering discomfort and risking his health, he continued this work for two-to-three years, getting to know the landscape and developing a keen sense of how the sites interrelated.

Schoon copied the rock drawings onto sheets of card as paintings. He also photographed them. Sometimes, he touched up the rock drawings using crayon to improve their clarity and contrast for photography. Schoon's copies were not as accurate as Duff might have expected. He bypassed standard documentary conventions, often not calculating and recording scale or maintaining accurate relationships between images. For that information, we can look to others, including Thomas Shelby Cousins (1840–97), who took several trips through Central Otago in the 1870s and 1880s, and Tony Fomison, with his later and more disciplined acetate tracings made in the Waitaki caves in the 1960s. Schoon's copies are not so much records as reinterpretations or reimaginings. In bringing information to the sites as much as extracting it from them, he leaves us a culturally problematic legacy.

Neither Schoon nor the Museum sought Ngāi Tahu's advice or support when undertaking the project, and were likely unaware that they should. Schoon would have worked in both noa (neutral) and tapu sites. The tapu sites are traditionally governed by tikanga (protocols) that should have constrained his access and informed his behaviour there. However, to Schoon, it seems, one cave looked like another, and he was searching solely for what served his artistic needs. The importance of the sites and drawings was determined by his assessments as an outsider based on his assumptions of artistic merit, devoid of cultural knowledge or context.

Korero (conversation) with Ngāi Tahu would have identified tapu sites, providing Ngāi Tahu the opportunity to clear a way forward or to advise

Schoon not to enter, thereby engaging with the project on their own cultural terms. In 1848, over a century before Schoon's work, Ngāi Tahu chiefs had been pressed to sign the Kemp Deed or risk losing mana over the land. This saw 13,551,400 acres sold for £2,000. Promises—of schools, hospitals, ongoing access to traditional travel routes, and an allocation of ten acres to every Ngāi Tahu member—were never honoured. The Deed ended Ngāi Tahu's access to the mahinga kai routes, the noa and tapu sites, and the traditional art practice of drawing and painting within the caves. It devastated Ngāi Tahu's economy and separated them from their whenua (lands). Many traditions and korero of those places faded over the following eight generations.

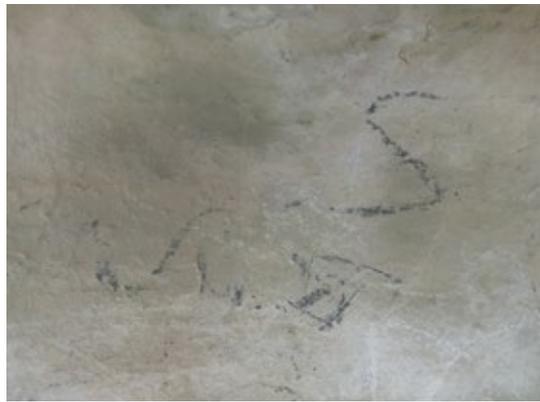
The sites were incorporated into large farms (indeed, Schoon would turn to Pākehā farmers for access and information) and left to be 'rediscovered' by Schoon, on his terms. It was not until the Ngāi Tahu Treaty Settlement Act in 1998 that the Kemp Deed could finally be addressed for settlement under the Treaty of Waitangi, although the first formal grievance against the Crown on this matter had been filed by the high-ranking rangatira Matiaha Tiramōrehu in 1849.

Schoon acknowledged traditional Māori art as the highest form of art to come from Aotearoa New Zealand. He bought attention to the need to care for the sites and his work left useful records—almost in spite of himself. But the fact that the world has come to know Ngāi Tahu's rock art through his stylised appropriations is for me cold comfort. Since the mid-1990s, Ngāi Tahu have worked alongside landowners to locate several hundred sites that include drawings, developing more meaningful relationships and further knowledge along the way. The drawings are now like a pēhanga kōhatu (stone ballast) for many Ngāi Tahu artists.

Schoon's presumptuous attitude towards Māori art and culture is revealed in a 1982 *Kaleidoscope* television documentary. Then aged sixty-four, Schoon approaches Tama Te Kapua, a prestigious Te Arawa whare tupuna at Ōhinemutu. The voiceover explains: 'His interests lead him to a detailed study of moko patterns. He decoded the



Douglas Haig Te Hau Nui Tapu Nui o Tu Korako Pohio and Nathan Kahupatiti Pohio, Christchurch International Airport, 1974.



Takiroa site, 13 October 2018.
PHOTOS Nathan Pohio

Māori design system, and learned how to create his own authentic designs. He was the first ever European artist to do this.’ Calling Schoon’s art ‘authentic’ is illogical from a Māori perspective. He could not be ‘authentic’ without whakapapa (Māori genealogy), the principal cultural value required to stake such a claim.

The film cuts to inside the whare, where Schoon shares his experiences and insights into Māori art. He is asked, ‘How long did it take you, that study? Was it merely academic or did you go round to places? Did you speak to people?’ Schoon replies, ‘No, no, it is simply by line-for-line study.’ In other words, Schoon obtained his understanding of Māori art through European-style formal study and observation, even if it did take him to the rock-art sites.

Schoon’s comments—‘What to use from Māori art for a modern age? Can traditional Māori art be used in another age like this one, in another century? Can the modern Māori still have any use for it?’—highlight his distance from Māori knowledge, will, and self determination. His belief that traditional Māori art needed to change (or be changed) in the face of modernity differs strongly from that of his contemporaries, the Māori modernists, for whom Māori art had always necessarily existed within te ao Māori. Māori art has always required more than just formal analysis. It is cloaked and protected within the oral traditions of specific places and those people who whakapapa to that whenua. Whakapapa, narrative, and meaning are always combined and best understood through korero—konohi te konohi (face to face). Schoon did not pursue this type of engagement.

In the *Kaleidoscope* documentary, Schoon betrays his ignorance by resting an arm on the head of Tama Te Kapua, the central ancestor of the whare tūpuna. In te ao Māori, representations are not just images of people, but *are* those people. The whare tūpuna is a reflection of Māori spirituality, and the central ancestor is to be approached and acknowledged with dignity, understood and respected as being present.

The question of if or how a Pākehā artist might operate in te ao Māori on Māori terms has not

got any less complex since Schoon’s time, but significant Pākehā artists have offered their respect and willingness to be supported by Māori and many great works have come of it. Mark Adams has a long history of engagement with Māori and Polynesian communities, and has gained the respect of Ngāi Tahu for his commitment to working within the cultural parameters provided to him. He is married to Areta Wilkinson, a significant artist in both Ngāi Tahu and Pākehā worlds. Adams and Alex Monteith have also worked both together and separately on projects requiring Ngāi Tahu support. Recently, Billy Apple has entered te ao Māori on the invitation of Tame Iti. In terms of such recent cross-cultural projects, Schoon seems less a vital predecessor than a cautionary tale.

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My grandparents did not cry foul at the sight of a hei tiki on the sole of a shoe. They recognised what was going on, had a quiet korero, and proceeded accordingly on their own terms. That memory inspires me.

In 1999, I made the video work *Sleeper*, in which my young nephew sleeps to the lullaby, ‘Dream Baby Dream’. The lullaby is a form of protection, encouragement, nurturing, and reassurance, indicating that his whanau have him in their care, as all adults are obliged to protect future generations. That sleeping child is like an ever-shrinking part of New Zealand unaware of a world that waits.

So, here we are. Mō tātou, ā, mō kā uri ā muri ake nei. For us and our children after us.

Nathan Pohio (Waitaha, Ngāti Māmoe, Ngāi Tahu) is an artist and a curator. His work was included in *Documenta 14* in 2017, in Athens and Kassel, and was nominated for the Walters Prize in 2016. He is Curator at Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, Chair of The Physics Room, and a founding member of Paemanu, the Ngāi Tahu artists collective.



Café de Unie, Rotterdam, c.1933.

THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Theo Schoon's broader relationship with international art has frequently been downplayed. European art, traditional and modernist both, were accessible to him to a degree rare in New Zealand at the time. This begins with his formal training. Like most scions of the colonial bourgeoisie in the Dutch East Indies, Schoon was sent back to the Netherlands for his higher education; in his case at Rotterdam's Academie van Beeldende Kunsten en Technische Wetenschappen (Academy of Visual Arts and Technical Sciences), since rebranded the Willem de Kooning Academy, after its most famous alumnus.

Schoon probably enrolled around 1931. He wrote to art historian Michael Dunn about the main influences on his process: "The first was a training in Holland in graphic design, the second was a strong influence by the legacy of the Bauhaus. All arts and crafts of any consequence of the last fifty years owe a debt to this legacy."¹ The two threads are intertwined. Although the fine-art training Schoon received at the Academy was traditional, the Academy's applied-arts department was one of the most progressive in Europe. It had been radically reorganised by Jacob Jongert (1883–1942), a Dutch graphic designer who joined the faculty in 1918.

Early in his career, Jongert had been a member of the Social Democrat party and active in left-wing politics. This led to an interest in the

typography and design of Soviet constructivism and the German Bauhaus school. Bauhaus influence drew Jongert to a belief in a strong practical relationship between art and industry. He went on to redesign the Academy curriculum along the lines of the *Vorkurs* (the Bauhaus's famous intensive foundation course), and appointed like-minded educators like Piet Zwart, Dick Elffers, Gerrit Kiljan, and Paul Schuitema—all passionate modernists with commercial experience. Although the fine-arts department was considered more prestigious, its students were often jealous of the contemporary teaching received in applied arts. In terms of Schoon's development, Jongert's most important act was to put texts on the Bauhaus, De Stijl, and other modernist movements in the Academy library. These Schoon voraciously devoured.²

Outside the walls of the Academy, opportunities also abounded. While Rotterdam lacked Amsterdam's sophistication and the Hague's cultural resources, even in the grip of the Great Depression, as Europe's main *entrepôt* and an ambitious commercial city on the make, it boasted magnificent modernist architecture, shops full of the latest products, new ideas, new politics, and new money. Rotterdam's galleries were often more open to exhibiting the contemporary, and, among the circles of its younger artists, there was a heady mix of radical politics and avantgarde practice. In Rotterdam, Schoon read Paul Klee's and Wassily Kandinsky's theories, Carl Einstein's 1915 *Negerplastik* (Negro Sculpture), and German ethno-archaeologist Leo Frobenius's writing on cave art in Africa and elsewhere.

Schoon's early paintings and drawings, as exhibited in Wellington's French Maid Coffee House in 1942 and published in *Art in New Zealand*, included caricatures, social vignettes, and 'Beautiful Indies'-style touristic Balinese and Javanese themes. So, there is good reason to assume that when Schoon's modernist sensibilities blossomed on contact with stimuli like Māori art and Rotorua mud pools, the underpinning ideas likely came directly from these experiences, rather than, say, from what he might have picked up

from Frederick Ost at the Wellington Sketch and Studio Club or Kees Hos in Auckland.

Modernist aesthetics were already discernible in Schoon's photographs of the 1930s,³ although they reached their apotheosis in his near-abstract photographs of Rotorua mud pools and mineral formations in the 1950s and after. One of the closest art-historical matches that can be found for these geothermal images is in the work of an influential Dutch left-wing workers, writers, and artists collective *Links Richten* (Left Focus). The group had strong Rotterdam associations, having published its first manifesto following a rental strike there, but also through its members, Piet Zwart and Paul Schuitema, who both taught at the Academy, and the photographer and lithographer Wally Elenbaas. The collective was one of the first groups of artists to embrace phototypography as a creative medium in the Netherlands. Zwart's Bauhaus-influenced, near-abstract photographs of industrial sites and architecture, with their tight close-ups and dramatic angles and cropping, are uncannily like Schoon's geothermal photography in style and intent. And then there is Schoon's friend and protégé Gordon Walters travelling to Europe in 1950, going to Rotterdam (not exactly an obvious destination for a curious young antipodean artist seeking inspiration), and meeting Elenbaas, who showed him a work by Piet Mondrian in his possession.⁴ This seems an unlikely coincidence were we to exclude the possibility that Walters was acting on Schoon's advice.

Of course, Schoon's greatest significance is as a mentor to other artists, most famously in the New Zealand context with his Braque/Picasso-like relationship with Walters. What is less well understood, however, is Schoon's impact on Australian art, quite independently of him moving there later in life.

The most prominent figure Schoon influenced was Ross Crothall (b. 1934). They knew one another in Auckland in the 1950s. Crothall relocated to Sydney, where along with Colin Lanceley (1934–2015) and Mike Brown (1938–97), he founded the Annandale Imitation Realists (1961–4). These mixed-media avantgarde artists

worked collaboratively with *objet trouvé*, collage, and assemblage, finding particular inspiration in outsider art and the indigenous art of Australia and Papua New Guinea, in rejection of more conservative values of Australian modernism at the time.

Schoon's effect on the Imitation Realists was not fully appreciated until much later. The artist Leonora Howlett (b. 1940), an associate of the group, recalled that Schoon was 'a distinct presence by word of mouth in our lives in the late 50s and early 60s through the medium of Ross Crothall', and that Crothall possessed a piece of Schoon's pottery that he habitually kept with him, 'in the manner that someone might carry a prayer rug'.⁵ Brown also spoke positively of Schoon's influence on Crothall, and, by extension, himself, particularly in the exploration of non-western art: 'Probably there was no Sydney equivalent to Theo Schoon, Crothall's main mentor, who, despite his Bauhaus links, had put modernism on the back burner, where he believed it belonged, to devote his life to the study and analysis of Māori art.'⁶ None of the group were aware of Schoon's relocation to Sydney later in life.

Another prominent Australian art figure to acknowledge Schoon's role as a mentor is George Johnson (1926–), brother to the poet and author Louis Johnson. Both knew Schoon in Wellington in the 1940s. Schoon's influence led George Johnson to commit to abstract modernism. Johnson eventually moved to Melbourne in 1951, falling in with leading Victorian modernists, particularly the non-objective artists Roger Kemp (1908–87) and Leonard French (1928–2017), with whom he shared a studio. French would go on to create the breathtaking stained-glass ceiling of the Great Hall in the National Gallery of Victoria. Within the Melbourne art world, Johnson and French tended to exist at odds with prominent groups like the Heide Circle and the Antipodeans, but eventually Johnson would establish himself as one of Australia's preeminent geometric abstract painters, inspired by the example of the Russian constructivists.⁷ Johnson retained the highest regard for Schoon, writing: 'Theo's influence on Gordon [Walters] and myself I'd say was considerable and

mainly through use of language and philosophical approach, an Artist in the best sense of the word, one who could change others through the use of words alone was a great gift'.⁸

Schoon's sporadic influence on Australian art continued after his death. In 2003, prominent Dutch-born Sydney artist Matthys Gerber (b. 1956) painted *Mr. Theo Schoon* in homage to Schoon, having seen a 1950s work by the artist reproduced in a catalogue. It has little resemblance to Schoon's work, being brightly coloured with the words 'Mr. Theo Schoon' blazoned across the canvas in lettering reminiscent of a theatre hoarding, this showbiz-style 'revisionism' giving Schoon his neglected due as an art-historical star.⁹

Schoon remains a point of fascination for Gerber. In 2005, he produced a series of prints, *Nerve Garden*, titled after a painting by Australian surrealist James Gleeson (1915–2008). The series contained several Schoon homages identified by title: *Schoon 1*, *Schoon 2*, etc. These take as their starting point Schoon's ink-on-paper deconstructions and elaborations of Māori kowhaiwhai patterns filtered through psychedelic morphs and Rorschach inkblot distortions. Naturally this invites some concerns about cultural appropriation, paralleling the way Latvian-Australian artist Imants Tillers (b. 1950) incorporated visual quotations from Colin McCahon and Walters using Māori imagery. Gerber continued to make Schoon-inspired works into 2008, although increasingly Schoon was more of a touchstone than something to paraphrase. Art historian Ann Elias attributes Schoon's allure for Gerber to a number of commonalities: Dutch origins, a connection to Indonesia (in Gerber's case through his mother), a deliberately fluid, playful, hybrid approach to cultural identity (like Schoon, Gerber has produced self-portraits in acts of 'cultural crossdressing'), and restlessness.¹⁰

Those connections make Schoon a person of interest to Australian art historians, but how would his native Europe, source of his most potent ideas, see him in relation to European art history? Schoon cannot be dismissed as a gifted provincial modernist at the bottom of the world, dabbling in primitivism—the work's



Matthys Gerber *Mr. Theo Schoon* 2003

sophistication speaks for itself. In particular, it would be interesting to see what the Netherlands might make of him. The 2002 exhibition *Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam put New Zealand modernism on the Dutch art world's radar. The De Kooning Academy were sufficiently intrigued to acknowledge Schoon, once he was brought to their attention in 2008,¹¹ and his geothermal and assemblage photography easily would place him as an artist of international significance were it to become more widely known. Perhaps one day there will be a homecoming.

Andrew Paul Wood is an art historian, writer, and freelance curator based in Ōtautahi, Christchurch. He has written for *The Press*, *Art New Zealand*, *Urbis* and *The New Zealand Listener*.

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- 1 Theo Schoon, 'My Work with Plaster Stamps', *New Zealand Potter*, no. 2, 1985: 20.
 - 2 Kees Hos, interview with Damian Skinner, 17 February 2000, Tape 1, Side A, 12.40 and 13.00, Theo Schoon Oral History Project, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington; email correspondence with Gerald Moonen, a Dutch-trained artist and Schoon's friend, 26 January 2005.
 - 3 Auckland Art Gallery's E.H. McCormack Library holds albums and loose photographs of this period.
 - 4 Francis Pound, *The Invention of New Zealand: Art and National Identity 1930–1970* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009), 256. Pound cites a conversation he had with Walters at an unspecified date.
 - 5 Leonora Howlett, email to Andrew Paul Wood, 26 May 2003.
 - 6 Mike Brown, 'Kite II: Part 1: What on Earth Are You Saying, Colin?', *Art Monthly Australia*, September 1994: 5–6.
 - 7 Jenny Zimmer, 'George Johnson and Ineluctable Abstraction', *Art and Australia*, vol. 24, no. 2, Summer 1986.
 - 8 George Johnson, letter to Andrew Paul Wood, 8 July 2003.
 - 9 Ann Elias, 'Intimate Relations: On the Fascination of Matthys Gerber for Theo Schoon', *Eyeline*, no. 60, 2006, <https://www.eyelinepublishing.com/eyeline-60/article/intimate-relations> accessed 6 February 2019.
 - 10 Ibid.
 - 11 Archived on the old Willem De Kooning website, http://old.wdka.nl/index.php?mid=WDK_ACTUAL&iid=489&cid=1&act=oh&lang=EN, accessed 15 March 2019.

WORKS LIST

Theo Schoon and the Rock Art of Te Wai Pounamu

A.R.D. Fairburn
Untitled c.1949
fabric print
620 x 885mm
private collection, Auckland

Dennis Knight Turner
Abstract Painting with Polynesian Motifs 1953
oil on hardboard
300 x 400mm
BNZ Collection, Wellington

Dennis Knight Turner
Untitled (Fish and Figures) 1952
oil on canvas and hardboard
445 x 393mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Theo Schoon
Painting: Maori Rock Drawing, Hanging Rock, Opihi, Part I c.1947
oil on board
503 x 760mm
collection Canterbury Museum,
Christchurch

Theo Schoon
Painting: Maori Rock Drawing, Hanging Rock, Opihi, Part II c.1947
oil on board
503 x 760mm
collection Canterbury Museum,
Christchurch

Theo Schoon
Painting: Maori Rock Drawing, Hanging Rock, Opihi, Part III c.1947
oil on board
503 x 760mm
collection Canterbury Museum,
Christchurch

Theo Schoon
Painting: Maori Rock Drawing, Hanging Rock, Opihi, Part IV c.1947
oil on board
503 x 760mm
collection Canterbury Museum,
Christchurch

Theo Schoon
Basic Arawa Pattern with Bird Motif 1957
oil on hardboard
1425 x 1728 mm
BNZ Collection, Wellington

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Dancing Figure) c.1946
oil on cardboard
430 x 572mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Untitled c.1955
oil, sand, and glue on cardboard
650 x 520mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Dunroon Detail 1947
two black-and-white photographs
each 214 x 163mm
Christine Fernyhough Collection,
Auckland

Theo Schoon
Untitled c.1965
black-and-white photograph
477 x 474mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Untitled c.1965
black-and-white photograph
477 x 474mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Maori Gate Figures) c.1965
black-and-white photograph
242 x 195mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Drawings from the Ohuriri Shelter, Ohuriri River 1947
black-and-white photograph
235 x 288mm
private collection, Auckland

Theo Schoon
Weka Pass, North of Christchurch c.1947
black-and-white photograph
205 x 255mm
private collection, Auckland

Gordon Walters
Untitled 1945
acrylic on canvas
795 x 615mm
Walters Estate Collection,
Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Gordon Walters
Untitled 1955
gouache on paper
220 x 295mm
BNZ Collection, Wellington

Theo Schoon, Rolfe Hattaway, and Gordon Walters

Rolfe Hattaway
12 drawings, 1949
coloured pencil on paper
various sizes
collection E.H. McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o
Tāmaki, gift of Peter Sauerbier in memory
of Theo Schoon, 2006

Theo Schoon
Wanderings in an Exhibition 1965
oil on board
1215 x 1068mm
Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2007

Theo Schoon
Manchu Diadem 1965
oil on hardboard
777 x 964mm
Fletcher Trust Collection, Auckland

Theo Schoon
Done Up in Pins and Curlers c.1965
oil and ink on paper
610 x 480mm
Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2013

Theo Schoon
Untitled 1964
coloured pencil on paper
310 x 240mm
collection Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1983

Theo Schoon
Abstract 1964
oil on board
775 x 522mm
Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2016

Theo Schoon
Untitled 1965
acrylic on board
900 x 700mm
collection Michael Dunn, Auckland

Gordon Walters
Untitled c.1955
gouache on paper
640 x 760mm
collection Michael Dunn, Auckland

Gordon Walters
Untitled 1954
acrylic on paper
250 x 325mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Theo Schoon, Gordon Walters, and the Koru

Theo Schoon
Untitled 1950–60
ink and pencil on paper
258 x 202mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Theo Schoon
Untitled 1960
ink on paper
258 x 202mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Theo Schoon
Untitled 1960
ink on paper
205 x 260mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Theo Schoon
Untitled 1960
ink on paper
203 x 260mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Theo Schoon
Untitled 1960
ink on paper
258 x 201mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Theo Schoon
Koru Study date unknown
ink on paper
240 x 192mm
Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2012

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Maori Design) 1960
coloured pencil and felt-tip pen on paper
160 x 144mm
collection Auckland Art Gallery Toi o
Tāmaki, gift of Mr Ronald Brownson, 1983

Theo Schoon
Untitled date unknown
ink and watercolour on paper
174 x 218mm
collection Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1983

Theo Schoon
Untitled date unknown
oil on hardboard
810 x 607mm
collection Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1990

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Carving 1) date unknown
black-and-white photograph
231 x 238mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki,
gift of the artist, 1983

Theo Schoon
Untitled c.1959
tempera on board
1215 x 912mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Photographs: Tattoo Designs 1960–70
six photographs with notes
various sizes
collection Canterbury Museum,
Christchurch

Theo Schoon
Modernist Head Studies with Korus
date unknown
pastel on paper
444 x 330mm
Christine Fernyhough Collection,
Auckland

Theo Schoon
Modernist Head Studies with Korus
date unknown
pastel on paper
444 x 330mm
Christine Fernyhough Collection, Auckland

Theo Schoon
Study of a Detail of a Maori Carving from a Canoe, Canterbury Museum
date unknown
black-and-white photograph
350 x 280mm
Christine Fernyhough Collection, Auckland

Theo Schoon
Untitled date unknown
tempera on hardboard
810 x 608mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Koru Painting) date unknown
gouache and ink on paper
550 x 545mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Pukaki date unknown
black-and-white photograph
345 x 290mm
private collection, Auckland

Theo Schoon
Rubbings of Moko and Tattoo Designs
date unknown
graphite rubbings on paper
various sizes
private collection, Auckland

Gordon Walters
Ranui 1956
ink on paper
282 x 200mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Gordon Walters
Untitled date unknown
graphite pencil on paper
302 x 248mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Gordon Walters
Untitled 1960
collage
305 x 377mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Gordon Walters
Koru 1952
ink and coloured pencil on paper
370 x 260mm
collection Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, gift of J.B. Gibbs Trust, 2015

Gordon Walters
Untitled 1969
polyvinyl acetate and acrylic on canvas
457 x 457mm
Stevenson Collection, Picton

Gordon Walters
Untitled 1960
gouache on paper
350 x 257mm
private collection, Auckland

Theo Schoon and Māori Modernism

Paratene Matchitt
Ngaa Pou and Invictus c.1965
wood and stone
Pou 1: 2400 x 300 x 300mm
Pou 2: 2800 x 300 x 300mm
Invictus: 630 x 630 x 300mm
collection Waikato Museum
Te Whare Taonga o Waikato, Hamilton

Paratene Matchitt
Untitled date unknown
acrylic on hardboard with painted
plywood frame
1353 x 2325mm
collection Waikato Museum
Te Whare Taonga o Waikato, Hamilton

Selwyn Muru
Untitled (Taupiri Mountain) 1965
oil on board
540 x 640mm
collection Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2011

Selywn Muru
Kohatu 1965
oil on hardboard
795 x 1203mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Theo Schoon
Untitled Mural c.1980
oil on board
1600 x 4780 x 29mm
courtesy Whakaturia Marae, Rotorua

Theo Schoon
Incised Gourd 1955–65
gourd and ink
300 x 210 x 200mm
Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1995

Theo Schoon
Pendant c.1970
pounamu
47 x 115mm
collection Okains Bay Maori and Colonial
Museum, Christchurch

Theo Schoon
Incised Gourd c.1969
gourd and ink
381 x 241mm
Christine Fernyhough Collection, Auckland

Theo Schoon
Gourd c.1963–5
gourd and ink
275 x 207mm
private collection, Ngaruawahia

Theo Schoon
Pekapeka c.1969
pounamu
90 x 130mm
Christine Fernyhough Collection, Auckland

Theo Schoon
Pendant c.1970
pounamu
360 x 250mm
Christine Fernyhough Collection, Auckland

Theo Schoon
Pendant c.1970
pounamu
95 x 60 x 5mm
Tim Curnow Collection, Australia

Theo Schoon
Pendant c.1960
pounamu
61 x 58mm
Kees and Tine Hos Estate, Auckland

Theo Schoon
Pendant c.1970
pounamu
105 x 50mm
private collection, Wellington

Theo Schoon
Pendant c.1970
pounamu
150 x 40mm
private collection, Wellington

Theo Schoon
Pendant c.1970
pounamu
100 x 65mm
private collection, Wellington

Ans Westra
*Photographs from the First Maori Festival
of the Arts* 1963
four black-and-white photographs
each 380 x 380mm
courtesy Suite Gallery, Wellington

Arnold Wilson
Mihaia te Tuatahi 1965
wood
208 x 748 x 140mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Arnold Wilson
Woman Towelling Herself Dry 1964
wood
1120 x 315 x 218mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Theo Schoon, Rita Angus, and John Money

Rita Angus
Autumn 1963
oil on board
340 x 390mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Rita Angus
A Goddess of Mercy 1945
oil on canvas
866 x 611mm
collection Christchurch Art Gallery
Te Puna o Waiwhetū

Rita Angus
Fungi 1956–7
oil on board
445 x 315mm
Hocken Collections Uare Taoka Io
Hākēna, University of Otago, Dunedin

Rita Angus
Portrait of Theo Schoon 1942
oil on canvas
814 x 737mm
private collection, USA

Douglas MacDiarmid
Portrait of Theo Schoon 1946
oil on canvas
354 x 283mm
collection Christchurch Art Gallery
Te Puna o Waiwhetū

Theo Schoon
Geothermal Study c.1950
black-and-white photograph
248 x 248mm
collection Rotorua Museum
Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa

Theo Schoon
Configuration c.1950
black-and-white photograph
234 x 232mm
collection Rotorua Museum
Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa

Theo Schoon
Portrait of John Money at Opihi 1947
black-and-white photograph
160 x 110mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Rita Angus 1964
black-and-white photograph
248 x 193mm
collection Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the artist, 1982

Theo Schoon
Portrait of Rita Angus 1942
oil on board
658 x 580mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Stones) c.1943
black-and-white photograph
251 x 251mm
collection Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the artist, 1983

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Cave and Tree) c.1943
black-and-white photograph
252 x 255mm
collection Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the artist, 1983

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Limestone) c.1943
black-and-white photograph
245 x 244mm
collection Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the artist, 1983

Theo Schoon
Buddha and Chandī Mendut, Java c.1938
two black-and-white photographs
each 255 x 205mm
Christine Fernyhough Collection, Auckland

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Crouching Dancer) 1947
pen and wash on paper
207 x 247mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Balinese Figure) 1947
pen and wash on paper
207 x 247mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Pattern of Dried Mud c.1966
black-and-white photograph
189 x 188mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Untitled c.1966
black-and-white photograph
156 x 205mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Mud Pool Patterns—Dark)
c.1966
black-and-white photograph
153 x 202mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Orifice Pattern) c.1966
black-and-white photograph
202 x 153mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Concentric Mudpool Patterns)
c.1966
black-and-white photograph
292 x 240mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Two Mud Bubbles) c.1966
black-and-white photograph
204 x 153mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon at New Vision Gallery, 1965

Theo Schoon
Split Level View Finder 1965
PVA on board
1570 x 1215mm
Fletcher Trust Collection, Auckland

Theo Schoon
Hue (Uncarved) c.1963–5
gourd, linseed oil, varnish
410mm (h)
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Theo Schoon
Untitled Gourd c.1963–5
gourd and ink
260 x 410mm
collection Okains Bay Māori and Colonial
Museum, Christchurch

Theo Schoon
Parade c.1967
ink marker on board
525 x 1220mm
Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2010

Theo Schoon
Stalagmites—Stalactites 1964
oil on board
1217 x 1123mm
collection Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1989

Theo Schoon
Electrical Discharge 1965
ink and acrylic
830 x 575mm
Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2012

Theo Schoon
Meringue 1963
acrylic on board
1576 x 1218mm
collection Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Theo Schoon
Variations on a Theme 1965
relief print
585 x 460mm
collection Rotorua Museum
Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa

Theo Schoon
Microscope Microscope 1965
relief print
565 x 410mm
collection Rotorua Museum
Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa

Theo Schoon
Patches 1965
relief print
490 x 595mm
collection Rotorua Museum
Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa

Theo Schoon
In and Out Again 1965
relief print
490 x 595mm
collection Rotorua Museum
Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa

Theo Schoon
Rotorua Mud 1965
relief print
465 x 585mm
collection Rotorua Museum
Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa

Theo Schoon
Dancer's Notation 1965
relief print
410 x 560mm
collection Rotorua Museum
Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa

Theo Schoon
Rotoiti Memory 1965
relief print
465 x 595mm
collection Rotorua Museum
Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa

Theo Schoon
Tribute to Dr Milligan 1965
relief print
460 x 585mm
collection Rotorua Museum
Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa

Theo Schoon
Untitled 1965
relief print
460 x 585mm
collection Rotorua Museum
Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa

Theo Schoon
Untitled (Lollipop Time) 1965
relief print
585 x 465mm
collection Rotorua Museum
Te Whare Taonga o Te Arawa

Theo Schoon
Electrical Discharge 1965
oil on board
838 x 1130mm
Christine Fernyhough Collection, Auckland

Theo Schoon
*One Man's Picture Is Another Man's
Rorschach Test* 1964
PVA and paint on board
1470 x 1220mm
collection J.B. Gibbs Trust, Auckland

Theo Schoon
Carved Gourd c.1963–5
gourd and ink
260 x 236mm
collection Rotorua Museum Te Whare
Taonga o Te Arawa

Theo Schoon
Gourd c.1960
gourd and ink
200 x 230mm
collection Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore

Theo Schoon
Gourd c.1963–5
gourd and ink
268 x 185mm
collection Forrester Gallery, Oamaru



T. Schouw



SPLIT LEVEL VIEW FINDER

Theo Schoon and New Zealand Art

City Gallery Wellington

27 July–3 November 2019

Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery

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FRONT COVER Theo Schoon *Untitled* 1950s

PREVIOUS Theo Schoon *Untitled Mural* c.1980

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