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THE ART OF GORDON WALTERS

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Art History.  
University of Auckland, 1984.

THE ART OF GORDON WALTERS

Michael Dunn

Volume One: Text



Gordon Walters, 1944

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I have been helped by staff at the Auckland City Art Gallery, the National Gallery, Wellington, and the Hocken Library, Dunedin. I also owe a debt to private collectors who allowed me to study works in their homes and arrange photography. Kees Hos, formerly of the New Vision Gallery, Auckland, allowed me access to the gallery's Walters files. Mr Peter McLeavey also entrusted me with correspondence from his gallery's file in Wellington. Mervyn Williams discussed his collaboration with Walters in printmaking and allowed me to witness the printing of two works in 1983.

The printing of photographs was carried out at the Audio-Visual Department at the University of Auckland. In many instances I was able to borrow negatives from the artist and have fresh prints made. This was essential for recording the appearance of lost or destroyed works.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis documents and discusses the work of the New Zealand painter Gordon Walters. By a careful examination of his development in chronological sequence, the thesis traces the sources of his distinctive style of abstract painting. It shows that Walters was a major figure in the evolution of abstraction in New Zealand as early as the 1950s. His best-known works, the koru paintings, are the focus of the thesis. For the first time a large group of these paintings, including destroyed and lost works, has been catalogued and reproduced. This shows the range and quality of his achievement over a period of some thirty years.

Chapter One traces the origins of Walters' art by discussing his training at Wellington and his meeting with Theo Schoon in 1941, an event which changed his outlook and directed him towards contemporary developments in European painting. His Surrealist works are examined and placed in the context of this movement in New Zealand art.

Chapter Two is concerned mainly with the introduction of Maori and primitive art influences into Walters' work. It shows how his study of modern masters like Paul Klee and Joan Miro made him receptive to indigenous art sources. In particular, his study of Maori rock drawings is explored and related to his paintings of the late-1940s. It helped him to evolve a more abstract style. His trip to Europe in 1950 is also examined with reference to his development as a geometric abstractionist on his return to New Zealand.

Chapters Three and Four discuss for the first time the importance of Walters' paintings of the years 1953-1956. The thesis shows how Walters arrived at a distinctive style of abstraction by transforming motifs from schizophrenic and primitive art into something personal. The influence of European art theory, especially that of Mondrian and Herbin, is discussed in relation to Walters'

artistic practice. His increasing use of geometric forms is noted, and its importance shown.

Chapter Five is concerned with the evolution of his koru paintings. The thesis shows that Walters first used the Maori art motif in studies of 1956. The importance of the changes he made to the Maori motif are pointed out. He modified the motif to make it conform to a European style of hard-edge abstraction. In fact, his achievement represents a synthesis of two traditions, the European and the Polynesian. This was arrived at only after years of study and experiment.

Chapters Six and Seven show in detail the stages Walters went through before arriving at his first major exhibition of the koru paintings in 1966. The transformation of his original source motif into a geometrically-constructed band and circle is complete. The influence of Op art on his style is also discussed.

Chapters Eight to Ten study the work of Walters between 1966 and 1983. His refinements to the koru paintings are noted and his change of style to a larger scale and a more harmonic handling of tone and colour. His interest in systemic art in the Genealogy series and in paintings based on the Maori rauponga design is examined.

The final chapter discusses Walters' work as a print-maker. His collaboration with the printer and fellow-artist Mervyn Williams is explored in detail. The importance of his prints for making his work more widely known and accessible. The thesis shows the relative importance of printmaking in Walters' late career.

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INTRODUCTION

Among New Zealand painters Gordon Walters is an isolated figure. In a country noted more for its sporting than its artistic achievements he has pursued his career in the face of indifference and ignorance. His decision to become an abstract painter contributed to the solitariness of his life. The majority of his contemporaries continued to work with figurative art, especially landscape, long after Walters had lost interest in it. He became in the 1940s a pioneer of abstract painting in New Zealand. With the exception of the Auckland artist, Milan Mrkusich, Walters was the first New Zealander to evolve his own style of abstraction, and to pursue his interests in New Zealand.

Because of the limited dialogue between painters in the 1940s, Walters was not fully aware of contemporary developments in New Zealand painting. He did not know the work of Mrkusich until the 1960s and did not meet the artist until 1971. He became used to working in a near vacuum, sustained by the interest of a few friends, notably the artist Theo Schoon. There was little critical interest in his painting even after his major shows of the late-1960s. He did not even face the hostility from the public and critics in the way Colin McCahon, his exact contemporary, had in his early years. Abstract painting found few supporters at any period of his career, and was often ignored.

Despite these difficulties, Walters has persevered to produce one of the most sustained and authoritative oeuvres in the history of New Zealand art. A feature of his work is its uncompromising standards of quality in both conception and execution. It is unique in the depth of its reading of Oceanic art and of European abstract painting. Early in his development Walters saw the untapped potential of New Zealand's indigenous heritage in the visual arts. Instead of ignoring the traditional arts

and crafts of the Maori, he made a study of their formal language. This study helped to shape his style as a painter, and to compensate for his remoteness from the major centres of European art. A feature of this thesis is the study of his stylistic evolution paying careful attention to his visual sources in both European and Oceanic art. His painting can be seen as a synthesis of two cultural traditions - Polynesian and European - which are found in New Zealand. It is significant that Walters is one of the few New Zealand painters of his generation who drew on the rich resources of Oceanic art.

*7 years!*  
 At the time I began this study of Gordon Walters in 1977, he was a mature artist in his late fifties. But, he had only recently been able to devote himself full-time to his art. It is easy to forget that the possibility of making a living from serious painting only emerged as a reality for New Zealand artists in the 1970s. Walters is one of the painters who contributed to the enhanced status of art in the community by his unremitting concentration on raising standards and his refusal to accept the amateurism so rife in the arts during his early years as a painter.

Walters' painting is a provincial development. Although his work has been reproduced a few times in international magazines and books, it has not been accepted into the mainstream of post-war abstract painting. This is not because of lack of quality. Nor is it because the work is derivative. In fact, the art of Gordon Walters has its own identifiable style, something rare in geometric abstraction. That this has been achieved in part from its derivation from Maori art in no way detracts from its integrity. Simply, the work of Walters is not known outside New Zealand. It is my aim in writing this thesis to provide more information about Walters' paintings so that his achievement can be better understood.

In writing this thesis I have been fortunate in having the full co-operation of the artist. I first met him in 1965. My introduction was supplied by Theo Schoon,

his mentor and friend. I have been able to discuss many aspects of the work with Walters over the years and to form an idea of its evolution. This has been a slow process. Until I began my research in 1977 there was no existing archive on Walters and no reference collection of photographs. Since then I have compiled a long correspondence with the artist, touching on many facets of his art. This compilation of letters, on which I have drawn heavily in my text, provides a major resource for any future student of Walters' art. Thanks to the help of the artist, I have made an extensive collection of photographs of his work, many of which are included in the thesis. Because so much of his painting is in private collections, access to the originals is difficult. The photographs also record damaged or lost works essential to a full understanding of the artist's development.

Although I have been able to discuss many matters concerning his art with Walters, I have not felt any pressure to conform to his views. Errors of fact that might occur are my responsibility, even though every attempt has been made to eliminate them by having the artist read the manuscript in draft form. In choosing to write on the work of a living artist, I consider the advantages to outweigh the disadvantages. Walters is now in his late career as a painter. At the time of writing, 1983-1984, he had been painting for some forty-five years. That has provided more than enough work to study and document. Furthermore I believe that the long-term understanding between the artist and myself has a unique aspect to it. It is very unlikely that Walters will be prepared again to spend the time discussing and unravelling his career with a writer that he has expended on this project during the past eight years.

Until the retrospective exhibition in 1983, it did not seem possible to bring the thesis to the writing stage. The exhibition enabled works to be compared in the same room and Walters' overall status as an artist to be assessed fully for the first time.

The retrospective proved conclusively the quality and range of Gordon Walters' art. It was a critical if not a popular success. It endorsed my belief in the importance of Walters as a major New Zealand painter and justified the writing of this thesis.

I am aware of the many limitations of this account. It is a pioneering study which I hope will lead on to further writing and discussion.

Michael Dunn  
Auckland  
February, 1985.

THE EARLY YEARS: 1919-1946

Gordon Walters grew up in Wellington, the capital of New Zealand during the 1920s and 1930s. It was a period of economic austerity overshadowed by the Depression, when many New Zealanders were out of work and their families destitute. At the time Walters reached early manhood the Second World War began which placed an additional strain on the resources of the country. This environment was not conducive to the growth of the Fine Arts. When the extreme isolation of the country from the world's art centres is taken into account, it is understandable that few young men seriously contemplated a career as an artist. Unless you had private means there was little prospect of making an adequate living from painting in New Zealand. The few New Zealanders who had made careers as painters, such as Frances Hodgkins (1869-1947) and Sydney Thompson (1877-1973), had done so as expatriates living in Europe.(1)

Local artists were either part-time painters working at jobs during the day to support themselves or art teachers who took classes at the art schools or art societies. Among these were some painters, like Russell Clark (1905-1966), who made their living from commercial art, but maintained careers as painters in their free time.(2) In this period sales for paintings were few, prices low and patronage, either private or public, very limited. The systems for presenting painting or sculpture to the public were also under-developed. Even in the larger centres one-man shows were hard to stage and artists had to rely on the group exhibitions held by the art societies.(3)

Art criticism tended to be equally amateurish whether in the form of newspaper reviews or articles in the only art journal, the magazine Art in New Zealand.(4) Much of what was written was out of touch with contemporary developments in art overseas. Evidence of this conservatism is apparent in the cool reception given to the works

of Frances Hodgkins even as late as 1949.(5) The most important attempts to develop a more aware and critical attitude were made by English-trained painters like Christopher Perkins (1891-1968) and Roland Hipkins (1894-1951), who had come to New Zealand under the auspices of the La Trobe Scheme.(6) This scheme was designed to introduce professional standards to New Zealand art instruction by recruiting English-trained staff to teach at local art schools. The scheme was planned to help young artists gain a more informed and questioning attitude to the visual arts.

A definite problem for any young person wanting to become an artist, apart from the practical one of making an income, was the absence of any significant works of painting or sculpture in local art galleries. In Wellington the situation was especially bad because the city had not received substantial bequests of European works from early benefactors as had been the case in other centres. The National Art Gallery, first housed adequately in 1936, was then a repository of mainly English twentieth-century painting of the more conservative kind.(7) For many years even major modern British masters, like Paul Nash and Henry Moore, were not represented.

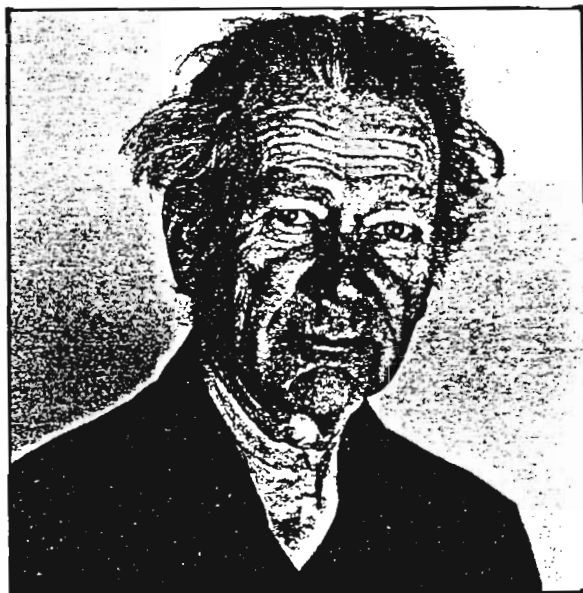


Figure 1. Gordon Walters, 1983.

New Zealand painters had to gain their knowledge of modern European art from the limited number of books and periodicals which entered the country. These were almost exclusively of British origin. Fortunately for Gordon Walters and other young painters like Colin McCahon, the period between 1920 and 1940 was a good one for art publications. The writings of Roger Fry, of Clive Bell and Herbert Read became available as well as the first Phaidon monographs. These publications provided reproductions and commentary on developments in European art after Cubism. For Walters such writings were indispensable tools for self-education in modern art. These publications revealed a world not suggested in local art collections or exhibitions. Significantly, too, such books indicated the importance of alternative art forms to the European. Fry's championing of Negro art, for example, was catalytic in directing Walters' attention to New Zealand's great source of artistic masterpieces - the museums with their collections of Maori and Oceanic art.

In Wellington the Art Gallery and Museum were housed in the same building, but there was virtually no link between them. Separated by different floor levels, they were even more divided by the attitudes of staff and the public. The staff of the Museum viewed and presented its collections not as works of art but as cultural artefacts. No attempts were made to introduce the public to any qualities of design or form that might suggest such works had any values other than their significance as products of Polynesian or Melanesian society. Students of art bypassed the museum collections on their way to look at works of British painters housed in the Art Gallery on the second floor. Walters began to see that the most important works of art were in the Museum not the Art Gallery, and that they could provide a valuable resource for a young painter to study.

From an early age Walters was interested in drawing and was supported by his parents. In 1969 he recalled: "My parents encouraged me to draw and to continue on



to study art (drawing and painting) because this was what I liked to do. However, my immediate environment offered little direction or encouragement for this study."

(8) But his father helped to develop his interest in drawing. "When I was a small child my father entertained me by making hundreds of small coloured drawings for me, and I feel that this is very relevant for my subsequent interest in art."(9)

He did not have art training while a student at Rongotai College. As was often the case at that time, art was not part of the curriculum. However, he was able to look at copies of the magazine Art in New Zealand in the school library. That helped him to gain some awareness of art in New Zealand and to deepen his developing interest in painting.

When he left secondary school in 1935, he had decided to make a career in art. From October that year he began work as a trainee commercial artist. The same year he enrolled part-time at the Wellington Technical College School of Art. He studied there part-time from 1935 to 1939. The training he received at the School of Art provided him with his first serious introduction to the materials and processes of drawing and painting.

His teachers at Wellington were Frederick V. Ellis, Roland Hipkins and Thomas Arthur McCormack (1883-1969) (10). Both Ellis and Hipkins were British painters who had come to New Zealand to teach at the art schools under the La Trobe Scheme. At this period Ellis was the Head of the Art School and Hipkins a staff member. By contrast, McCormack was a New Zealand painter, born in Napier, who had little formal art training but was noted for his attractive watercolour landscapes and still-life studies. Both Ellis and Hipkins were graduates of the Royal College of Art, London, and represented the professional standards of training La Trobe was looking for in his staff recruitments. None of these men was especially knowledgeable about recent developments in European painting. All three were figurative painters who worked on

a small scale, painting rather conventional works. Of the three McCormack today has the greatest reputation as a painter. This rests on his stylish and fresh water-colours in which the influence of Japanese painting contributes to the calligraphic quality of his brushwork.

At first Walters found the instruction useful. He acknowledged his debt to Hipkins and McCormack in 1969: "I received encouragement and help at this stage from Roland Hipkins who taught design at art school. I also studied painting with T.A.McCormack whose work I much admired at this time."(11) From these teachers Walters acquired basic technical skills in drawing and painting.

He supplemented his experience with different media and techniques at the Art School by his work as a trainee commercial artist. He notes: "Don't forget I was drawing at work every day of the week and designing all kinds of printed material. I had a good bit of time off work to study art."(12) He spent much of his free time at the library reading about painting.(13) At this stage he was still unsure of his direction. It was only after several years of hard work and serious thinking that he began to see himself as " a serious painter".(14)

In 1939 and 1940 he felt confident enough in his work to exhibit paintings at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts in Wellington. Judging by the titles, such as Houses on a Hill, and Boats under Repair, these watercolours were typical of plein-air landscapes painted by students of T.A.McCormack.(15) Subjects of this type were to be found in all the New Zealand art society shows of the time. These early works attracted no critical attention. Several paintings sold from the exhibitions though the artist can no longer recall who bought them. Unsold works of the period remained in the artist's collection. Over the years he destroyed most of them because he felt they were student works of no real value.

One surviving example of those years is a still-life in the artist's collection, painted to show the modelling

of forms in space, to indicate texture and the play of light. By 1940 when he was twenty-one, despite occasional experiments with modernism, there was nothing to suggest that Walters would depart from the mainstream of representational painting. Abstract painting was not encouraged by his teachers at the Art School nor by the Academy of Fine Arts.

He was already taking an interest in Oceanic Art housed at the Museum. Because of his reading, he saw the importance placed on tribal art by leading contemporary artists in Europe, especially by Picasso and Paul Klee. At this stage his study was rather superficial compared with what it later became.

Roland Hipkins was one of the teachers at the School of Art who had some awareness of the decorative aspects of Maori design.(16) He had used spirals in prints and drawings made in the 1930s. Other local artists, including Margaret Butler (1883-1947) and Robert Nettleton Field (b. 1899) had looked at Maori art for ideas and subject-matter.(17) At the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition of 1940 there was considerable use made of Maori patterns in the decoration of the display halls. Most of this work was illustrative and nationalistic in character. Walters pursued his studies of Maori art independently, and with more insight.

If the Second World War had not broken out in 1939 Walters would have travelled to Europe. He intended to broaden his knowledge of contemporary art there. Instead, after having been rejected for military service, he was given work as an illustrator and lay-out artist for the Ministry of Supply. This was hack work drawing diagrams or sketches of items such as military hardware and uniforms. At least it gave him an outlet for his interests in drawing and design when opportunities were few.

Fortunately the war years did not prove as barren as might have been expected. Walters was able to meet other artists who were in the city during this period, including the official war artist Russell Clark. However,

his most important encounter was not with a New Zealand or British painter but with a lively young Dutch artist, Theo Schoon, who was a war refugee from Indonesia.(18) Schoon had arrived in New Zealand with his mother and brother to escape from the Japanese offensive they feared in the Pacific. At first they settled in Christchurch, but Schoon moved to Wellington in 1941. Walters met him there in July or August of that year.

For Walters this was a turning point in his development as an artist. He recalled in 1969: "In 1941 my meeting and subsequent friendship with Theo Schoon was perhaps the decisive factor in my development. For the first time I had contact with an artist with ideas, trained in European art schools. From Schoon I had my first real art training and began for the first time to work methodically and to think of myself as a painter."(19)

Born in Java in 1915, Theo Schoon was six years older than Walters. In character he was totally different. Extroverted and well-travelled he found New Zealand both attractive and repellent. He was responsive to the country itself, to the Maori culture, and to New Zealand's remoteness and newness. For most of the inhabitants, for their narrow-mindedness, for their repressive prudery and morals he had nothing but contempt. He soon found the local art scene rather ridiculous, but useful at first as a vehicle for projecting his opinions and creating shock-waves. Schoon had grown up at close quarters to Balinese culture for which he had a deep respect. As a youth he had been taught how to dance in the traditional Balinese manner and to play a variety of musical instruments. These skills, as well as his freshness and enthusiasm made him popular in Wellington social circles. Although unlike in character, Walters and Schoon became friends who exchanged ideas about art practice and theory.

Schoon enjoyed the teacher's role, encouraging Walters to work hard at developing his painting skills. Under Schoon's direction Walters stopped showing works at the Academy of Fine Arts. Instead he began to re-think his

artistic approach. Schoon spoke easily of contemporary European art, especially of Dutch movements like de Stijl. Although he had no training in abstract art, Schoon had an enormous respect for the Bauhaus. He was able to introduce Walters to some of the principles of the Preliminary Course, in particular ideas about the use of line, shape, tone and colour. Schoon was also conversant with European Surrealist art, then barely known in New Zealand. He was a trained photographer who encouraged Walters to consider the potential of photography in his artistic processes. Photography was then looked down upon in New Zealand art schools as a dangerous tool for serious painters to use.

His friendship with Schoon had an almost immediate effect on Walters' style of work. In the years between 1942 and 1945 he directed his painting towards a more experimental approach based on an increased awareness of recent European art and the ideas informing it. In this period he was to produce his first serious drawings and paintings and was to introduce a brand of Surrealism to New Zealand art. In particular he was impressed by reproductions of works by Yves Tanguy and Salvador Dali that he was able to see in copies of the magazine Minotaure. (20) About this time, too, he had seen a copy of the book entitled The Painter's Object, edited by Myfanwy Evans. (21) It had essays contributed by artists associated with the Surrealist movement. He was able to see the use made of organic forms like driftwood, worn stones and bones by Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Paul Nash.

His own works of the years from 1942 to 1944 were based on similar objects derived from his own environment. In 1942-1943 he visited Waikanae on the coast north of Wellington to take photographs of sand-dunes, driftwood and dead trees. In doing so he was not breaking new ground in New Zealand art, though he was one of the few local artists to investigate the potential of such motifs with other than illustrative or superficial intent. Eric Lee-Johnson (b. 1908), in particular, made a series of water-

colours using these subjects in the mid-1940s. His most well-known painting of this type, The Slain Tree, 1945, was an oil based on a photograph of a dead tree on the beach at Mahurangi. The tree's shape suggested to the artist associations with the dead Christ on the cross.

Walters later became aware of Lee-Johnson's works through the reproductions that were published in the war issues of the magazine Art in New Zealand.<sup>(22)</sup> But he had not met Lee-Johnson, and like him was following interests derived from European examples. Subsequently, in the late-1940s, sculptors Molly MacAllister (1920-1979) and Alison Duff (b. 1914), adapted found objects like driftwood to wood sculptures in which the hollowings and grain were made to suggest the human figure. In doing so they were following the example of British artists like Henry Moore, whose art in the 1930s suggested this approach.



Figure 2. Eric Lee-Johnson, The Slain Tree, 1945.

Walters combined an interest in the formal qualities of the natural objects and their textures with arrangements designed to suggest associations with living forms. Unexpected juxtapositions and ambiguities gave rise to imagery which could be related to the world of dreams and the subconscious. This area was explored initially by the Surrealists, among them artists like Breton and Lautréamont. The plates in the book The Painter's Object provided Walters with specific models for the approach he was now taking.

He made both drawings and paintings in this period. In many cases he used black conté on paper as his medium which allowed him to concentrate on the forms and the modelling. These were his primary concerns. With conté he could make changes as he went along by rubbing out. Some of the 1943 works were still-life studies of found objects. They are different from the conventional groups of bottles and fruit he had been taught to portray at the School of Art. An example of these is Beach Still-Life: Stones and Dried Seaweed, 1943 (Plate 2). Instead of setting the objects inside on a table, Walters drew them on an expanse of wind-furrowed sand. Because the sand extends across the entire area defined by the paper, there is no horizon line or other clear gauge of scale. This group was set up on the beach by Schoon and both artists photographed it.

Walters drew the objects close-up and from above in a sharp clear light with shadows cast onto the sand. This presentation is deliberately disorienting and downplays the familiar side of the subject. Walters emphasized the organic and ambiguous aspect of the imagery. For example, he showed the seaweed erect and in a state of sinuous movement. This suggests change and associations with living rather than inanimate forms. He painted the stones arranged like eggs in a nest, clustered together in an ordered fashion, not as scattered by the tide or wind. The strong diagonal movement of the sand-furrows, the placement of the stones and the long, mysterious shadows

add to the Surrealistic effect of the work.

None of the features in this conté are original. The debt to the English artist Paul Nash is very clear, especially to his photographs of found objects, some of which were reproduced in The Painter's Object. Walters also readily acknowledges the influence of the American photographer Edward Weston. Weston's photographs featuring sand-dunes, driftwood and the like were often reproduced in the late 1930s. Walters had collected reproductions of them for his own reference. Seeing such works in black and white may well have contributed to his choice of monochrome in his own conté studies. The emphasis in Beach Still-Life is on the arrangement and structuring of natural forms which have an already high level of abstract interest. By comparison Surrealist concerns are still limited and confined to the associative overtones of the stones and seaweed with animate forms.

A later still-life, dated January 1944, Still-Life with Driftwood and Pelvic Bone (Plate 11), carries over the interest of the conté drawings to an oil painting of somewhat larger size. In the process he has introduced a bright decorative colouring, in this case pastel blue and yellow, applied thickly to suggest textures. This reduces any strangeness or ambiguity in the imagery and makes its formal character quite clear. The driftwood and bone are placed against a plain background so that the picture space is made shallow and the silhouettes of the objects are brought out against it. Walters is interested in the curving rhythmic forms of the driftwood. To emphasize the twisting movements he painted the contours in impastoed off-white.

As in Beach Still-Life (Plate 2), shadows cast by the objects are an important part of the work. It was painted under artificial light. The shadows are so emphatic that they take on a prominence almost equal to the objects themselves. The ultimate source of such shadows is the work of Giorgio de Chirico whose paintings were influential on the Surrealists.(23) But the resemblance is superficial.



In de Chirico's work the shadows do not relate to a consistent lighting and are often cast by an unseen source outside the picture. De Chirico's paintings present images suggestive of dreams and the world of the subconscious more than is the case with Walters' still-life. In Walters' painting it is possible to relate the cast shadows to specific objects in the work. Nevertheless the driftwood and its shadows are designed to suggest animate forms.

The curving shapes of the driftwood and the bone are contrasted with the two rectangular divisions of the picture surface - one the background wall, the other the surface on which they stand. It is possible to see here the beginnings of an essentially formal kind of painting. Compared with Eric Lee-Johnson in his beach still-life paintings of comparable date, Walters has reduced the naturalistic and illustrative content.(24)

Still-life compositions of this kind show Walters placing objects in juxtapositions, arranging and studying them in combinations. Then he would analyze the grouping of objects selecting what to leave in and what to take out. This procedure anticipates in some respects his later working method when he was dealing with more abstract imagery. There, too, analysis and selection of what to leave in the final composition was of critical importance. To an extent, his early drawings and paintings already point to his central interests as an artist in later years and are less surrealist and more formal than a superficial viewing might suggest. Compared with the Surrealists he was already less interested in the content and meaning of the subject-matter, though it still plays a role in his art of this period.

To the same period belong the landscape paintings based on driftwood, dead trees and sand-dunes. As with the still-life works, Walters used conté a lot, but he also made oil paintings. By making use of photographs he was able to isolate interesting shapes and juxtapositions of forms from the landscape without being slowed down by the necessity to make sketches. Surviving film, some

taken at Waikanae, shows that he made a sequence of shots of trees (Plate 5). He would move around a motif, such as a dead tree, photographing it from various directions and angles. Like Paul Nash and Edward Weston, he looked for dramatic silhouettes as well as tonal and textural interest. In New Zealand at that time dead trees and driftwood were a very noticeable aspect of the landscape. Walters recalled in 1976: "To get back to the trees, though, they (huge dead ones) were a prominent feature of the North Island bush landscapes and one did not have to go far to be confronted with them. I used them as subject-matter often and for reference used photographs which I took from time to time."(25)

The dead trees were victims of massive bush clearings carried out in New Zealand throughout the 1920s and 1930s. An English artist, Christopher Perkins, who was resident in New Zealand between 1929-1933, painted a symbolic image of the bush clearing entitled Frozen Flame, circa 1931. In this work Perkins anticipated much of what Walters was to do a decade later.

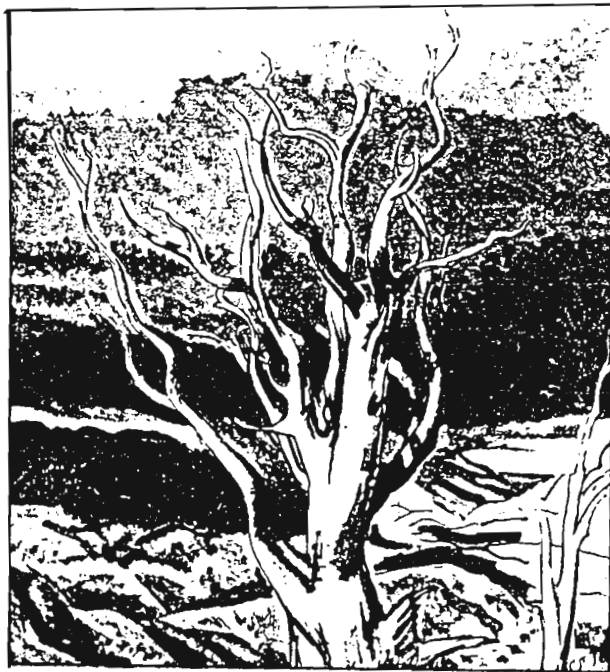


Figure 3. Christopher Perkins, Frozen Flame, c. 1931.

Dead Tree, 1943 (Plate 3) shows Walters' treatment of a similar subject. Compared with Perkins, Walters gave his tree a more organic quality. He deliberately made the inanimate tree appear to be alive. He associated its trunk and branches with the human figure, going so far as to make the short twigs appear like fingers of a hand clutching at the air around them. He admits that he was then interested in this quality of the subject: "Dead tree forms were also often strongly anthropomorphic and this aspect of them appealed to me also." (26) Walters outlined the knarled and twisting shapes of the hollow trunk and its branches. The undulating shapes of the volcanic hills behind the tree carry a restless movement throughout the picture. This extends even to the sky with its stylised clouds.

In his related work Dead Trees, Waikanae, 1943-1944 (Plate 6), based on a photograph (Plate 5), the same emphasis is apparent. Compared with the photograph the tree forms have become more pliant and organic. Walters has made the trunks appear to move in rhythm, and the branches to writhe like tentacles. The growths on the tree trunks look like hair or plumage of some mysterious creature.

He had seen many paintings and photographs of dead trees where anthropomorphic associations had been made. Paul Nash's famous war painting We Are Making a New World, 1918 (Imperial War Museum, London) had been reproduced many times. His photographs of uprooted trees were also known to Walters. But it was a painting by Diego Rivera, entitled Copelli Trees, that he remembers as an influence on his dead tree works. (27)

Already in Dead Tree, 1943 (Plate 3), the trunk and branches take on a rubbery and pliant appearance. This reflects the influence of the soft forms favoured by the European Surrealists Salvador Dali and Yves Tanguy, whose paintings Walters knew from reproductions in the magazine Minotaure and elsewhere. The softness helped to make the forms ambiguous and mysterious so that they

cannot be explained in naturalistic terms.

Composition Waikanae, 1943-1944 (Plate 9), goes a little further in terms of its dependence on surrealistic sources. Based on drawings and photographs of the beach and sand-dunes, this conté departs from a realistic reading of the subject. Walters made the Waikanae beach appear like a vast plain, reminiscent of Tanguy, stretching away into a remote distance. He gave an impression of immensity by an exaggerated perspectival recession. This is aided by a transition from the dark foreground to a light middle and far distance. By choosing a low viewpoint and by contrasting close-up foreground forms with the distant sand-dunes Walters achieved a degree of spatial disorientation reminiscent of Tanguy and Dali, but retained a specific landscape reference which they avoided.

In the foreground of Composition Waikanae (Plate 9) Walters drew a variety of pliant, entwined and twisting biomorphic forms. Although still recognisable as driftwood and branches, they have been adapted by the artist to suggest other associations. Openings are like orifices, erect phallic-like forms interpenetrate and arm-like forms intertwine. As Walters observed in 1979: "A flat, sandy beach with a little imagination easily becomes the setting for a Tanguy painting." (28)



Figure 4. Yves Tanguy, A Large Painting Which Is a Landscape

The overt sexual references in Composition Waikanae find many parallels in Surrealist art, and relate to the Freudian view of the role of sexual imagery in dreams and the subconscious. In this conté Walters came his closest to Tanguy in his imaginative approach to form.

Waikanae Landscape, 1944 (Plate 8), was the last in this series of works. In some ways it is the most personal. A surviving pencil study (Plate 7), shows the care Walters took in its preparation. In the pencil the design is essentially linear. Here the artist searched for a clear and economical structure in the simplified shapes of three dead trees. The linear interest emerges even in the early works as a feature of Walters' style. He was concerned with the tree shapes on the paper surface but also with the spaces left between them. In the background he plotted out sand-dune profiles and sketched several cloud forms.

Comparatively the conté is more three-dimensional. Walters achieved an exaggerated effect of spatial recession by an abrupt transition between foreground and distance marked by tonal contrast. He reduced the tree trunks to cylindrical forms with harsh outlines. He used maximum tonal contrast - white on black, black on white. By internal modelling he gave the trees a three-dimensional quality which is contradicted and neutralized by the outlining and the way the trees appear to float above the beach rather than be rooted in it. To add to the mystery of the work Walters introduced the skull of an animal in the foreground, absent from the study, and an egg-shaped rock on one of the sand-dunes in the background. These imaginative or fantastic additions imply presences in an otherwise barren and desolate scene. Depopulation was used by the Surrealists and de Chirico to enhance the metaphysical overtones of their work. In Walters, too, it has an enigmatic and disorienting effect which is surreal in character.

A related work, Waikanae Landscape, 1944 (Plate 10) is more descriptive than the conté and lacks its interest.

Although Walters simplified the trees and outlined them, his colouring and paint application brings the painting into a more conventional landscape genre. The spiky leaves of the trees at the left are not dissimilar to the mannerisms of Russell Clark in his paintings of cabbage trees made in the late-1940s. It was in his conté drawings and photographs rather than in his oils that Walters achieved his best works with this subject-matter. Even so he was far from satisfied. He recalled in 1976 that the subject-matter of dead trees, driftwood and the like "rapidly became a cliché and impossible to use..."(29)

Between 1945 and 1950 many New Zealand artists, both painters and sculptors, re-worked the material in a superficial way. The dead tree became synonymous with a dead end in New Zealand art. Looking back on his work of 1943-1945 Walters saw it as a false start. He wrote in 1976: "I think that my most meaningful work begins in late 1945 after the surrealist-inspired period which I feel did not really lead anywhere. My interest passed from the work of people like Tanguy, Dali etc., to Klee, Arp, Miro and the abstractionists, and on these interests I commenced to build."(30)

This realisation came slowly. While he was still re-working the dead tree and beach drawings and paintings, Walters began to experiment with different approaches in his painting. Several still-life paintings of 1944-1945 show him trying to reduce the realistic basis of his drawing and replace it with a freer, more inventive style.

Still-Life (Plate 16), painted circa 1945, returns to conventional studio motifs, a plant in a vase, fruit and a knife on a table. Now Walters drew the objects with a degree of vigour and freedom. He used broad outlines to define the plant and its leaves and flattened out the background, the table and the fruit. He made little attempt at illusionistic modelling; instead he made the imagery more surface-oriented and two-dimensional. His stylistic debt was in the direction of synthetic Cubism

then being popularised by artists like the Aucklander John Weeks(1888-1965).(31)

This was a passing phase. Chrysanthemum (Plate 12) is a more advanced work in stylistic terms. Compared with his earlier paintings it marks a considered change of direction. The image, though based originally on a pencil drawing made from a flower, is highly abstracted. Walters made no attempt at three-dimensional modelling of the forms as in his previous work. Instead he painted the flower in coloured lines against a blue ground which extends across the picture plane cutting off specific references to a physical environment. Only at the lower right is there an indication of a setting - and that is so abstracted as to be consistent with the treatment of the flower itself. The shape of the chrysanthemum becomes a starting point for an image based on lines and bands of colour. These echo and recall one another without any two being the same.

With this painting, inspired by the work of Paul Klee, Walters made a dramatic move from his previous style. The significance of this development was not lost on the artist. He recorded some of his feelings about the work in 1974:"When I painted Chrysanthemum...I was struggling to develop a more personal direction in my work than the highly finished realism which had occupied me for the previous three years. It made a break with my earlier work as a student and reached out towards current concerns in painting. At this time the legacy of Paul Klee was becoming better known, and being gripped by his work as I was, I had no option but to work my way through it."(32)

Although Walters had seen very few reproductions of Klee's painting in 1944, he was able to discern its potential for freeing his work from the literal and descriptive nature of his Wellington art training. In his response to Klee Walters was unique among New Zealand painters at that time. Walters had a sense that he was progressing as an artist. He continues: "In painting Chrysanthemum

I managed for the first time to exploit my feeling for line freely and directly, without being tied down too much by the subject-matter. The linear pattern of the drawing was established in a pencil drawing from nature, a free interpretation of the form of the flower. Later came the effort to fit this design to a colour structure. I must have worked on the canvas on and off for a couple of weeks, scarping it down from time to time and making radical changes to form and colour. Finally the linear pattern imposed itself afresh, and the work was finished." (33) Chrysanthemum marks an important change of direction for Walters. This becomes apparent in looking at the works of 1945.

An example of these works is the small oil entitled The Lovers, 1945 (Plate 17). It is more abstract than his earlier works. Walters formed the imagery out of the swirling coloured lines of different thicknesses and densities. He used the lines themselves to give an organic quality to the work and to suggest a state of being. The subject can no longer be seen in representational terms. Walters organized the lines, as Paul Klee sometimes did, around a number of vortices which are located in different parts of the canvas. This spreads the interest over the surface fairly evenly. The use of line here, as in Chrysanthemum of the preceding year, also recalls Klee whose works remained influential. Space is shallow and non-illusionistic.

The Lovers showed for the first time Walters' interest in strong colour. Colour takes on a symbolic rather than a representational role. The artist painted the perimeter of the work in cool greens and blue, whereas he used strong yellows and ochres in the areas suggestive of figures. Walters applied the paint in layers so that there is a tactile quality to the medium as well as a feeling of its application.

He painted the lighter tones thickly with a gestural quality new to his work. While the title recalls works by Magritte and Miro, the method resembles that André



Masson used in his automatic drawings.(34) Klee employed a similar approach in some of his works. There are indications that Walters was now interested in the idea of probing the subconscious by means of spontaneous, uncorrected movements of the brush. It was this aspect of Surrealism that continued to exert some influence on him in his new works.

By this time, thanks to the help and encouragement of Theo Schoon as well as to his study of contemporary European art through reproductions, Walters was ready to make the most of the greater freedom and opportunities that the end of the Second World War offered.

In 1945 he had a part-time teaching position at the Wellington School of Art which helped him to save money for a trip to Australia. He was able to travel to Sydney in January 1946 for three months. He also went to Melbourne. While in Australia he visited art galleries, met painters and bought art books and catalogues unavailable in Wellington. He acquired some publications from the Museum of Modern Art in New York. One of these was a catalogue on the work of Miro. He was able to buy Mondrian's Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art and Other Essays published in the Documents of Modern Art series.(35) He also made the most of his opportunities to read books and magazines about art in Sydney Libraries.

His trip to Australia marks the end of his first phase as a young painter finding his way. On his return to Wellington in April 1946, he was ready to begin new work with a greater degree of confidence and sense of direction. His path was set. But the way to achieving his own style was to be long and arduous. Yet even by 1946 he had made his mark as a New Zealand painter. His surrealist works are among the few significant manifestations of this movement in New Zealand art. His abstract paintings of 1944-1945 also broke new ground. At twenty-seven he could look with satisfaction at what he had achieved against the odds in war-time Wellington.

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Footnotes:Chapter One

1 Frances Hodgkins was born and trained in Dunedin but made her career as a painter in France and Britain. See E.H.McCormick, The Expatriate: A Study of Frances Hodgkins and New Zealand, Wellington, 1954, for an account of her struggle to give up family ties and establish herself in Europe. Sydney Thompson was born in Canterbury and first studied art in Christchurch. Like Hodgkins, he was compelled to go to Europe where he based himself at Concarneau, a fishing village in Brittany. Despite attempts to return and live in New Zealand, he remained an expatriate and died in France. See the Sydney Thompson issue of Survey, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, February 1976, for biographical details and a short study of his career.

2 Russell Stuart Clark worked for advertising agencies in Dunedin and Wellington and was later official War Artist in the Pacific from 1944-1945. He was appointed Lecturer in Painting at the Canterbury College School of Art in 1947. For further details see M.Dunn, The Drawings of Russell Clark, Auckland, 1976.

3 For background to this period, see G.H.Brown, New Zealand Painting 1920-1940: Adaptation and Nationalism, Wellington, 1975.

4 Art in New Zealand was a popular journal published between 1928 and 1946. It dealt almost exclusively with New Zealand art; few of the writers had any knowledge of European painting after Cubism.

5 See T.H.Scott, "The Frances Hodgkins' Controversy", Landfall, December 1949, pp. 360-74; also, "The Pleasure Garden: A Postscript", Landfall, December 1951, pp. 311-13. The Christchurch City Council was reluctant to accept as a gift a painting by Hodgkins called The Pleasure Garden. It was then thought to be modernist and a hoax.

6 The Scheme was named after William Sanderson La Trobe (1870-1943), who was appointed Superintendent of Technical Education for New Zealand in 1919. See Noel Harrison, The School that Riley Built, Wellington, 1961, pp. 61-79; also, John Nicol, The Technical Schools of New Zealand, Wellington, 1940; and A.E.Campbell, Educating New Zealand, Wellington, 1941, pp. 124-126.

7 For example, the Auckland City Art Gallery benefited from gifts of Old Master paintings collected by Sir George Grey. The National Art Gallery was founded only in 1936, and the nucleus of its collection came from the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts which had rooms and galleries in the Buckle Street building. See R.Kay and A.Eden, Portrait of a Century: The History of the New Zealand Academy

7 cont. of Fine Arts 1882-1982, Wellington, 1983, pp. 46-118. This book gives an account of relations between the Academy and the National Art Gallery, and also discusses the collections.

8 Gordon Walters, Salient, Wellington, May 7, 1969, p. 8.

9 *ibid.*

10 Ellis came to New Zealand in 1921. He had trained at the Halifax School of Art and the Royal College of Art, London. See A.H. McLintock, New Zealand Art: A Centennial Exhibition, Wellington, 1940, p. 32.

11 Salient, *op. cit.* p. 8.

12 Walters to the author, December 4, 1982.

13 *ibid.*, p. 2.

14 Salient, *op. cit.* p. 8.

15 Houses on a Hill and Boat Under Repair were numbers 119 and 120 in the 1940 exhibition catalogue. The present location of these watercolours is unknown.

16 Walters was unaware of this aspect of Hipkins' work. He notes: "With regard to Hipkins all I ever saw of his was naturalistic landscape and portrait work including the odd Maori portrait. I did not know that he ever used Maori decorative art himself. He was a pretty conservative character." In a letter to the author, dated March 2, 1984.

17 Both Butler and Field made sculptures depicting Maoris in the 1930s. For a fuller discussion of this material see L. Bell, The Maori in European Art, Wellington, 1980, pp. 118-125. For Field, see the catalogue of the retrospective exhibition, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 1979. For Butler, see Kay and Eden, 1983, *op. cit.* p. 117.

18 As yet there is no published account of Schoon's life and work. There is a file of clippings and tapes housed at the Auckland City Art Gallery. Schoon published a book Jade Country, Sydney, 1973, which gives the best insight into his ideas and art. Over his long career, Schoon published articles on Maori rock art, gourd carving, jade, thermal photography and Balinese art. Much of the material in this thesis relating to Schoon derives from correspondence and conversations with him since 1964.

19 Salient, *op. cit.* p. 8. See, also, the statement about Schoon by Walters in the retrospective catalogue, Gordon Walters, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983, pp. 123-124.

20 Walters to the author, October 12, 1976. Minotaure was a French periodical published by Skira between June 1933 and October 1938. There were thirteen issues in total. Walters recalls the impression made by the works of Dali and Tanguy. He also remembers some Surrealist photographs - probably those of Man Ray and Brassai. Walters had a limited knowledge of French so that the texts about subjects like automatism and dream imagery would not have been fully accessible to him.

21 Editor, Myfanwy Evans, The Painter's Object, London, 1937. Walters appears to have been most influenced by the approach of Nash and Moore who used found objects for their compositions. Both artists emphasized formal and textural interests. These were surreal in the sense of unusual combinations of objects designed to suggest associations with organic forms.

22 See E.H.McCormick, Eric Lee-Johnson, Hamilton, 1956; also M.Dunn, "Frozen Flame and Slain Tree", Art New Zealand, 13, 1979, pp. 40-45.

23 For de Chirico's use of shadows see W.Rubin, Dada and Surrealist Art, New York; also Marianne W. Martin, "Reflections on de Chirico and Arte Metafisica", Art Bulletin, 40, 1978, pp. 342-353.

24 For example, his watercolour Highwater Mark: Out of the Swing of the Sea, 1945, Auckland City Art Gallery.

25 Walters to the author, November 11, 1976, p. 2.

26 *ibid.*

27 See Bertram B. Wolfe, Diego Rivera: His Life and Times, New York, 1939.

28 Walters to the author, July 28, 1979.

29 Walters to the author, November 11, 1976, p. 2.

30 Walters to the author, October 12, 1976, p. 2.

31 For John Weeks see the unpublished Masters thesis by Joan Mackie, "Some Aspects of the Art of John Weeks", Auckland University, 1973.

32 Walters in the article "19 Painters and their Favourite Works", Islands, 10, 1974, p. 375.

33 *ibid.*

34 Walters was well aware of the central surrealist interest in probing the subconscious by allowing automatism and chance to have a role in the creative process, In The Painter's Object, Max Ernst had published an article

34 cont. entitled "Inspiration to Order", pp. 74-79, that dealt with 'frottage' and his attempts to reduce the conscious control of the artist over his work. Subsequently Walters had seen reproductions of Masson's drawings and sand paintings. For the role played by automatic drawing in Surrealist art, see F.Smejkal, Surrealist Drawings, London, 1974.

35 Walters to the author, November 11, 1983.

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THE YEARS 1946-1953

The works Walters made on his return to Wellington in 1946 show some changes of approach. Undoubtedly contact with the Australian art scene, though brief, had been stimulating. He began to change the emphasis in his working process. Avoiding commitment to elaborate drawings or to finished oil paintings, he turned to making numerous small drawings in pencil or in ink.(1)

He was able to execute these drawings quickly on cheap paper because he did not intend them for exhibition. They were working drawings designed to test out ideas quickly. A sample of these drawings dated 1946 (Plates 18-20) shows him moving further towards abstraction. Under the influence of Miro, Masson and Klee he made drawings that have an improvised inventive quality. For the first time instead of beginning with a natural form, he allowed the movement of pen or pencil to suggest an image. He wanted the drawing to develop spontaneously on the paper until he was satisfied with the outcome. His approach depended on the Surrealist concept of automatic drawing as a means of probing the subconscious. Walters liked the works of Masson and Miro made this way.(2) Masson's early works and sand paintings appealed to Walters for a time. So did the drawings of Miro because of their inventive freedom.

While he was in Sydney, Walters based one of his drawings on Miro's painting The Lasso.(3) This work is Untitled Drawing, 1946 (Plate 19). Walters drew the lines directly onto the paper without a pencil underdrawing. He approximated the random scattering of lines and tonal areas found in the Miro. He allowed the lines to twist in and out and around one another so that there is an effect of three dimensions, even though the drawing is not illusionist in character. By allowing the paper surface to extend freely through and around the drawing Walters integrated image and surface in a way new to his art. There is a lightness and directness that contrasts markedly with

the careful shading effects he used in the early conté drawings. The change of medium relates to his change of attitude to drawing and its function.

A pencil drawing, dated 1946 (Plate 20), was sketched in freely over the bare paper with broken, tentative lines and darker hatchings. Walters made curving lines that are composed of sweeps of the pencil which overlap, wobble and give an impression of approximation rather than finality. The lines are faint and seem to float across the surface. Attached to them are the darker hatched areas. These make pointy shapes so that there is a formal as well as tonal contrast. Like the lines that tie them together, they have been drawn loosely, without sharp edges. The whole effect, while still derivative in style, shows Walters reacting to and assimilating ideas.

A problem with these drawings is their lack of originality as images. Walters knew that they functioned only as investigative works. They were the research on which he would later base more individual creations. In the absence of a teacher in this field of work, Walters had to find things out for himself by imitation. By making his own Miro's and Klee's he gained a better idea of their achievement. In Walters' case it was a matter of learning a new language.

He had to unlearn much of what he had acquired in his early art training. He discarded the illusionistic drawing, perspective and shading. Following the example set by Klee and Miro, he began to look at primitive art for systems of presentation free from the conventions of Western art. Gradually, by the use of drawing, he began to move away from the shallow box space of late Cubism towards a less specific method of picture construction. In his drawings he was finding new freedom. He felt able to invent pictorial forms with no regard for illusionistic modelling and mass. He wanted a more intuitive method of working, the quality Klee prized in both primitive and child art. Achieving a change of style was no easy task. He was helped by the stimulus of Maori rock art.

Again it was Schoon who helped him further these interests. In 1946 Schoon had moved from Wellington to the South Island where he had chanced upon crude copies of Maori rock art in the Otago Museum.(4) After the war, Schoon had turned his attention to a serious study of Maori art which he had come to value as the unique and valid art form of New Zealand. He soon realized that there was much to learn. Until this fortuitous encounter with the rock art copies, he had not been aware that there was any indigenous rock art in New Zealand.

Intrigued by the designs, he decided to make a study of the originals in the limestone shelters of South Canterbury and North Otago. There he found a range and quality of work far beyond his expectations. In remote river gorges and gullies there were seemingly an infinite number of drawings and paintings made wherever the rock surface was smooth and accessible. His enthusiasm for these works was enormous. They came as a revelation.

At the same time, Schoon saw the dangerous state of neglect of the drawings. The majority were located on farmland and were accessible to stock. By rubbing against the drawings sheep and cattle were gradually erasing them. Schoon felt something had to be done to record them and quickly. Fortunately he was able to persuade the Department of Internal Affairs to pay him a small fee in return for copying the major drawings.(5) While he was engaged in this task he invited Walters to visit him on location. For Walters this was to be a turning point in his development as a painter.

He recalled in a letter of 1979 that he had visited the rock art sites not once but twice. "I visited the rock drawing sites twice. Firstly in August 1946 when I spent about a week near Pleasant Point on the Opihi river and at Cave, Limestone Valley and thereabouts. Then at Xmas holiday time 1946/47 I went back together with Deetje Andriessse and spent about 10 days or so in the vicinity of Raincliffs and somewhere further south, I can't quite remember the exact location now. On both



occasions we moved about a lot as Theo had a string of acquaintances in the district with plenty of places to stay."(6)

Walters' study of Miro and Klee had already prepared him for the technical simplicity of the rock art. But its brutal frankness and economy of means were a revelation. Drawn outside in a landscape setting of sublime beauty, the rock drawings had to be bold enough to stand out on the irregular granular surface of the limestone. Only the simplest and most direct style of drawing could endure in this environment. Unrevised and uncontrived in technique, the drawings seemed to present a formidable integrity, free from any artifice, any pretence and egotism. Their anonymity itself was a strength. These works seemed to mock the framed and signed canvas as a conceit of an over-refined and debased culture.

By studying these designs Walters soon recognised a consistent method of construction. A majority of the drawings were of humanoid figures - some drawn in isolation, others in groups. But there was little sense of composition. Figures could be drawn at different angles on the same rock; they could be superimposed, juxtaposed or held together by a skein of faint lines. In most instances only one colour and one tone were used. Black or red were the main colours. In combination with the ochre colouring of the rock surface these colours were all that the rock artists needed for their work. With such basic resources they had produced figures ranging in size from a few centimetres to six metres or more in length. All showed the figures, or bird and animal forms, in a flat diagrammatic way, often drawn in a combination of full-frontal and profile views. Illusionism and spatial effects were totally ignored.

Walters made sketches, took photographs and discussed the works with Schoon. In addition he was intrigued by the landscape itself and its warm ochre colours. Back in Wellington, he began to think of ways of using the sketches and photographs he had compiled on his trip.

Undoubtedly his interest in Klee predisposed Walters to appreciate the Maori rock art, and helped him with a group of small oils based on sketches made at the rock art sites. South Canterbury Landscape, 1947 (Plate 27), and an oil study for it (Plate 26) show a debt to Klee's pictographic paintings as well as to the rock art. Instead of making a landscape of naturalistic forms set back in space, Walters concentrated on painting simplified, pictographic signs that stand for trees, grass and rocks. He eliminated horizon lines and transitions between near and far. The whole painting is made on the surface of the canvas, rather like chalk marks on a blackboard. Walters painted the background surface in warm, light colours reminiscent of the honey-coloured limestone. Against this background he painted the pictographic trees in a muted range of purples, greens and yellows. The pictographic trees are consistently dark forms against the light background colours, like the rock art figures on the limestone.

By extending the imagery across the canvas without any emphasis on the centre, Walters gave a flatness to the work. As in rock art, there is no hierarchical structure. In some places, at the top and sides of the painting, the imagery is cut off by the literal sides of the canvas. This helps to give a more casual, unplanned effect to the painting as well as to generate an expansive feeling.

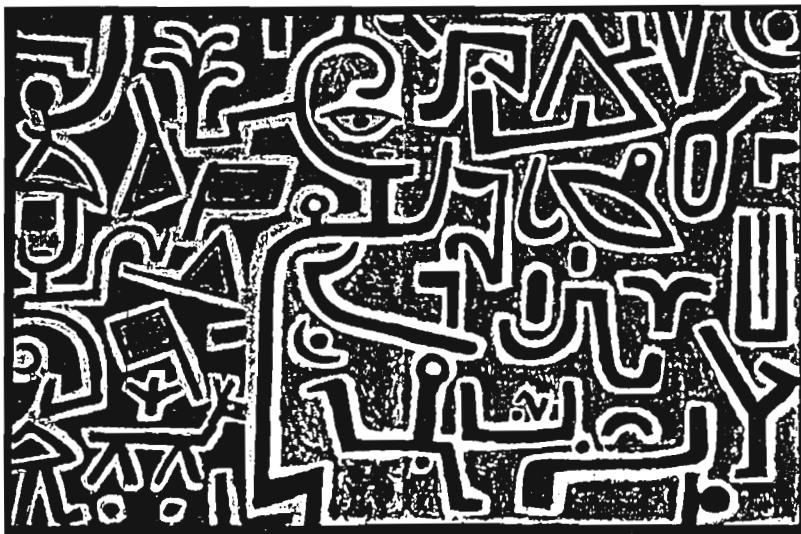


Figure 5. Paul Klee, Project, 1938.

Compared with his earlier Waikanae Landscape, 1944 (Plate 10), South Canterbury Landscape was painted in a seemingly crude and direct manner. There was no concern with refinement. Instead Walters left the brush marks visible and the edges of the forms rough and irregular. All the same, the painting is a long way from the brutal technical economy of the rock art. Obviously Walters was still interested in painterly effects, though they were now secondary to his concern for simplicity and directness. This is evident in the overlays of colour he used to give richness and variety to the background. He also accentuated parts of the imagery, for example, the spiral-like shape formed by one of the branches of the right-hand tree. In these aspects of the work Walters showed his continuing interest in the works of Paul Klee, who used colouristic and textural effects of this kind.(7) The study for the final painting, which is of comparable size, indicates the care and thought the artist put into the preparation of South Canterbury Landscape. Each curving stroke of the pictographic trees was premeditated and designed to give an organic quality of growth and movement to the work.

New Zealand Landscape, 1947 (Plate 29) is a related work which carries the pictographic presentation a step further. Retaining the idea of scattering signs across a warm ochre surface, Walters made the imagery more varied and symbolic in character. Instead of recognisable tree forms with branches and leaves, New Zealand Landscape has several symbols derived directly from rock art. In the upper right of the painting there is an undulating line, rather like a chevron, which in primitive art signifies moving water. Below it are radiating lines, often associated with the rays of the sun. In addition, in the lower centre, Walters used the spiral form, a motif common in Maori art. In this example, the pictographs are separate from one another and require reading one by one as in Klee's pictographic works. They do not have

the representational basis of the imagery in South Canterbury Landscape.

Each of the pictographic signs in New Zealand Landscape is distinctive and different from the others. Compared with South Canterbury Landscape, each sign is more simplified and legible. Because none of the pictographs has a clear vertical or horizontal alignment, and none is sufficiently legible in figurative terms to have a top and bottom, it is possible to turn the painting around and still make sense of it from different viewpoints. To that extent it has a more random quality than the previous example discussed. But this exercise goes to show how much Walters still thought in terms of conventional picture making. The upper part of the background is lighter in tone than the lower. Also, the pictographs are not evenly scattered. A heavy horizontal motif lies across the bottom of the work giving it a definite base towards which several other curving forms gravitate. Comparatively the upper forms are lighter and more fragmented. There is really only one way to view the painting.

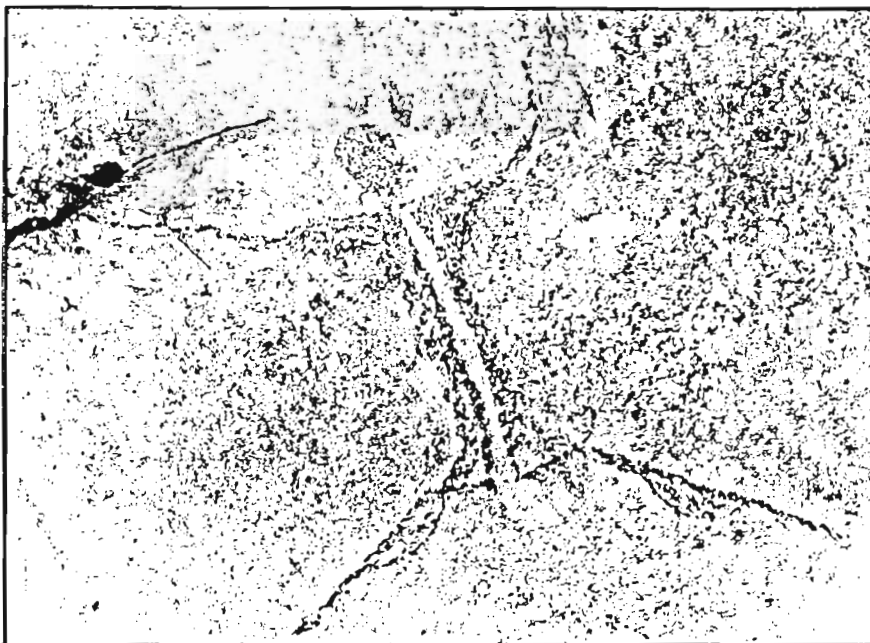


Figure 6. Maori Rock Drawing.

Although at first sight New Zealand Landscape appears to have been directly, even crudely painted, this is a false impression. Walters planned the work with care to give that impression. He worked over the background and the pictographic signs several times to give a layering of paint and colours. He mixed all the colours to some degree with white to give opacity and consistency to the paint surface. This gives a tactile feeling to the painting which unifies it and binds the whole image tightly together, despite its apparently random composition.

These paintings show Walters for the first time drawing upon indigenous sources as well as European models for his work. Undoubtedly he saw a compatibility between the style of the South Island rock art and the work of Klee, Masson and Miro whose paintings were influenced by primitive art to varying degrees. The connection had, of course, been made by Schoon whose copies of the rock drawings were heavily conditioned by their work.

Schoon's retouchings and reconstructions of the original rock drawings tended to make the connections with these artists more obvious. In his writings, letters and articles, Schoon championed the qualities of the rock drawings as works of fine art. To authorities like Roger Duff, ethnologist at the Canterbury Museum, Schoon's claims seemed far-fetched. Like many of his contemporaries he saw the rock art as childish doodlings, totally lacking in artistic quality.(8) Similar attitudes prevailed among artists. By using these drawings as an example to emulate, Walters was able to produce works of a novel and individual kind. For him it was important that there was some local connection to his art. It suddenly seemed that there might be advantages as well as drawbacks about being a painter in New Zealand.

The landscapes were not the only works made after Walters' trips to the rock art sites. He also made several figure drawings and paintings which, in some respects, carry the stylistic implications of the rock drawings a little further. Of these paintings the best known is

a small work on canvas entitled The Poet, 1947 (Plate 30). The Poet is a work of the greatest economy in style and technique. Although Walters painted the canvas a light colour as in the landscapes, he made it an unmodulated background for the figure. Walters dispensed with the brushstrokes, the impasto and the overlays of colour. This change at once introduced a more primitive quality to the work. Walters carried this over into the figure itself.

Imitating the rock artists' approach, Walters drew the figure in one tone onto the oil background colour in pencil. By using pencil he was able to reinforce the graphic quality of his image, and to dispense with the density of oil paint and with brushstrokes. The image becomes very spare. There is no crutch to lean on in this kind of drawing. Everything depends on the integrity of the design. In adopting this approach, Walters was consciously purging his art of acquired habits of working with paint, which still prevailed to some extent in the 1947 landscapes. At this point he was closing the gap between his drawings and his paintings, after he had realised that his paintings were less radical in approach than the drawings. There was precedent for the use of pencil with oils in works by Miro and Klee.(9) Klee often used mixed media to escape from fine art conventions.

In conception The Poet is unlike the 1945-1946 figure studies Walters made from the life at the Wellington School of Art. An example dated 1945 (Plate 15) shows him trying to reduce the figure to a system of angular and curved lines. In this drawing the naturalistic modelling and detailing of his life studies made while he was still a student gave way to a simplified rendering of form. In places he drew the contours firmly so that the shape of the figure registers as a two-dimensional shape.

Comparatively The Poet (Plate 30) shows a more extreme reduction of the figure to lines of even width and tonal intensity. Walters eliminated the modelling of the 1945 study and the descriptive drawing of muscles, feet and

hands. He reduced the figure of the poet to a series of parallel lines and circles. He no longer based the drawing on an actual life model but invented his own pictographic symbol for a figure. This removed The Poet from the particularity which still adhered to the 1945 works and gave it the generalized anonymity of the pre-historic rock drawings. As with those drawings there is no indication of sex.

For the first time Walters introduced stylistic features that foreshadow his later mature paintings. On looking at works of this type in 1979, he was surprised to discover the connection: "I have been astonished to find the ingredients of my present style are already present in these works. I refer to the systems of parallel lines and circles."(10)

The Poet is built from parallel lines which form the arms, legs and body of the figure. Openings between the lines allow the light background to enter into the figure and become part of it. There is a resulting integration of figure and ground comparable to that found in the South Island rock drawings, where many of the figures have hollow centres. (See figure 6, page 31.) This system of construction introduces the limestone colour into the structure of the works. Of course, similar effects were achieved by Klee and Miro who, in turn, had both been influenced by the formal aspects of primitive art.

The pose of the figure in The Poet is dependent on primitive art. For example, the upraised legs which meet the arms forming a chevron pattern is found in rock art and also in Polynesian carving. The construction of the figure around a central axis to form a bilateral image with similar but not identical sides was also derived from rock art prototypes. In this instance there is an ambiguous reading of the image as either two figures back to back, seen in profile; or one figure seen front on. This ambiguity contributes to the charm of the figure and to its light-hearted quality. The curving line drawn near the head, signifying inspiration, is an additional

flourish of this type which recalls the wit and playfulness of Paul Klee's works.

It would be incorrect to see The Poet as an isolated work. There are surviving drawings of a similar type. One of these, Untitled Drawing, 1947 (Plate 31), was executed in pencil on paper. Like The Poet it is based on a system of parallel, curving lines drawn in one tone of pencil on white paper. Walters used the convention of two circles to indicate eyes, though the head, in this example, is not separated from the structure of parallel lines forming the body and arms, but is formed from them. Walters drew the image on the paper assymetrically to suggest random placement. The figure is closer to the upper edge of the paper than the lower. As in The Poet, this shows Walters trying to achieve something compositionally novel to match the radical stylistic nature of his new works.

Most of the paintings and drawings of 1947 have been lost. Otherwise Walters destroyed works he was no longer satisfied with. Among the destroyed paintings was a small work on canvas executed in a combination of oil and pencil. Judging by a photograph (Plate 32), Walters used the trapezoid body shape commonly found in South Island rock drawings. Over the top of the figure he introduced two curving lines that twisted and entwined across the figure. Often in the rock art sites meandering lines occur near the figures and sometimes overlay them. Here Walters seems to have recalled this juxtaposition and used it to contribute an informality to his painting. He later felt that this was one of the better works of 1947.

Obviously 1947 was a highly productive and important period in Walters' early career. In July or August of that year he held a small one-man show at the French Maid Coffee Shop in Wellington. This venue was used by a number of artists, for example Howard Wadman, as an alternative to the Academy exhibitions. Paintings could be hung on the shop walls where patrons would see them while drinking their coffee. It was an informal arrangement



and quite helpful for painters of a more experimental kind. Schoon also showed there at about this period. Walters recalled in 1979 that his show had received some success: "A few of them (the 1947 dwgs & ptgs) were shown in a one-man show I had in Wellington at the French Maid Coffee Shop in 1947. I sold a few works from this show and some more were stolen when the show was taken down and I never saw them again."(11)

One of his paintings, The Poet, was reproduced in the 1947 Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand.(12) Despite the radical nature of his new works, Walters was not totally rejected in art circles. In fact, he had made some impact on a few fellow painters and critics. His former teacher Roland Hipkins chose one of his Waikanae works for reproduction in an article on New Zealand painting published in The Studio in 1948.(13) It looked as though he might have been able to achieve further recognition if he had been content to stay in Wellington and follow his current direction.

But Walters was far from satisfied with his work. He could see the dangers and limitations of using imagery derived from indigenous Maori sources if there was an inadequate input of his own ideas. What survives of his 1947 work seems to achieve a degree of individuality. The dangers of simply exploiting ethnic motifs can be seen in the crude prints and fabric designs of A.R.D. Fairburn (1904-1957). Fairburn used Maori rock art designs in the period 1948-1950.(14)

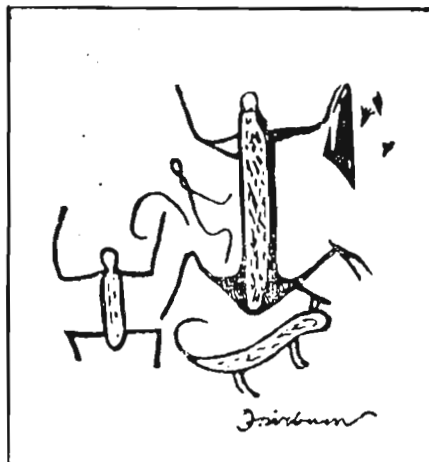


Figure 7. A.R.D. Fairburn, Rock Art Design.

Fairburn had been introduced to the rock art designs by Schoon who wanted his help to get protection for the rock art shelters. Seeing a commercial opening, Fairburn became the first to debase and exploit the rock art by using the novelty of the designs to sell prints and wall-hangings. Fairburn made no attempt to understand the formal nature of the originals as Walters had done.

In 1948 Walters returned to Australia. He was to remain there for the entire year. During that time he tried hard to enlarge his knowledge of modern painting by reading in the Sydney Public Library and by attending classes at East Sydney Technical College. In the Sydney libraries he was able to find copies of magazines like Cahiers d'Art. This magazine dealt extensively with European abstraction and although the reproductions were in black and white they were enough to give Walters some idea of the originals. From this magazine he deepened his knowledge of painters such as Jean Helion and Auguste Herbin. He also made friendships with several Australian painters the best-known of whom is Charles Blackman. To support himself at this period he had to take a job at a glass factory.

At first he felt that he was making progress. What remains of his painting of this year, however, suggests experimentation rather than a definite progression. Painters in Sydney had not advanced their work any further in the direction of abstraction than Walters had done in 1947. In fact, abstract painting was to have a slow and tentative development in both Sydney and Melbourne.

One of the early figures in the Australian abstract movement was an expatriate New Zealander, George Johnson, (1926-) who was a friend of Walters and Schoon. There was a strong trend in Australian art at that time to retain a figurative interest. This was promoted by the leading Australian painters like Russell Drysdale and Sydney Nolan. They received influential critical support from Bernard Smith, a leading writer and art historian. Work at East Sydney Technical College was very much influenced by Cubism in painting and by the work of Henry

Moore in sculpture. Lyndon Dadswell (1908-), one of the more progressive artists stylistically, never moved to a geometric or non-figurative style of abstraction.(16)

Old Houses, Sydney, 1948 (Plate 34), indicates one direction in Walters' work at this period. It shows a stylised tree in the foreground and houses in the background. Of a generally warm colouration, the painting has an all-over quality due to the absence of illusionistic space and modelling. Walters reduced the houses to shapes on the picture surface some of which are roughly rectangular in appearance. Further surface design is generated by a modular brushstroke which he has used to fill in the surface planes with a thick layer of paint. Both the colouration and composition are redolent of Braque's Houses at L'Estaque, though Walters did not use Cubist techniques such as fragmentation or passage. Old Houses Sydney, cannot be seen as a progression for Walters.

Another surviving painting of 1948, Black Figure, (Plate 33) is quite different in style. Like The Poet and some of his other figure compositions of 1947, it is a work based on life-drawing studies. In this case the figure is very flattened like a rock drawing, and is painted in black on a light background. Walters made no attempt at modelling or depth. He simplified the head into a wedge shape and made the body a trapezoid. He also drew the lower part of the figure to a smaller scale than the upper torso. The effect is deliberately more primitive than that in Old Houses, Sydney.

Undoubtedly Walters was trying to explore a number of possibilities. A drawing on paper, done in watercolour and greasy crayon using the resist technique, shows him making a study of Aboriginal art. (Plate 35) He made copies of Melanesian art at the Sydney Museum. This drawing depicts three crocodiles seen from above so that their characteristic shape is explained. The legs are splayed out diagrammatically. Walters used pen to draw out the patterns on their backs and to indicate details like eyes. This drawing proves that Walters was still continuing

his study of Oceanic art. The crocodiles and related subjects of kangaroos were derived from drawings of Aboriginal bark paintings. He was able to see these in museum collections. Like New Zealand rock art, the bark paintings were executed in the most direct way, with little attempt at elaboration or illusionistic effects. Their severe, two-dimensional character undoubtedly appealed to Walters, especially now that he had the background of studying and using related material in New Zealand.

By 1949 Walters decided to leave Sydney and return to New Zealand. He wrote in 1976: "At the end of 1947 I went back to Sydney where I stayed until Feb. or March 1949. I worked steadily during this time, my work becoming increasingly abstract. I was dissatisfied with most of it however, and increasingly felt that the Australian thing was not much use to me. I wanted to go to Europe and come back to New Zealand where I could save more money and get a job on a ship to take me there. Most of the work I did in 1949 I subsequently destroyed."(17)

Although he had to work full-time to save money for his trip to Europe, Walters was able to do some painting during 1949. In November he had sufficient new works to hold a small one-man show at the Wellington Public Library. No record or review of this show has survived. However, the exhibition was not a success. In fact, there was considerable hostility towards Walters' style of painting. By this stage his work was becoming inaccessible to a public who had looked with some interest at his earlier development as a painter.

Fortunately a few works on paper and several paintings survive from 1949. They are sufficient to show his direction at that period. One series of works was based on the subject of a jug and leaves; other paintings were more abstract in character, with no recognizable subject.

Walters painted the Jug and Leaves works in September 1949. Three surviving examples (Plates 36-38) show him using basically the same composition, then varying the imagery by introducing changes of colour and technique.

His later practice of working in a series is anticipated here as it had been to some extent in his Waikanae drawings and paintings of a few years earlier. After 1950 this was to become a consistent method of working. Instead of searching for novelty of subject, he already preferred to experiment with a controlled and limited range of forms. He was aware of the precedent for this kind of approach both in primitive art and in some types of contemporary European painting.

Each of the three works was divided into two zones, an upper one and a lower one. In the upper and smaller zone Walters drew a leaf; in the lower one he drew a jug. In each zone the background is flat and closes off any deep spatial effect. He drew the jug form in profile but the leaf from above. It is possible to imagine the two objects in some kind of a relationship on a table-top only by making allowance for the use of multiple viewpoints and an extreme flattening and tilting of the table. Walters aimed at making generalized images that stand for the idea of a jug and leaf rather than concerning himself with particularity. In doing so he was probably again reflecting his study of Klee and primitive art.

In these pictures Walters used a scraper technique. By applying a coat of one colour, for example the black in Jug and Leaves, 1949 (Plate 37), he was able to use a sharp instrument to draw out the jug by scraping through the black to reveal the underlying white paper. This technique has obvious limitations and works best with a simplified line drawing. It allows a broad unrevised line that lies in the paper surface not on top of it. Walters was well aware of the use made of this technique by English artists, notably Ben Nicholson and Henry Moore. (18) By using the scraper technique, he matched the simplicity of the drawing with its method of execution. He used black and white to contrast man-made and organic aspects of his image. There is also an inversion between the upper and lower zones, with white as the ground in the upper zone and black in the lower. This anticipates the

use of polarities he was to make in his later paintings.

He employed colours in other works of this series. He also used a variety of techniques. For example, Jug and Leaf, 1949 (Plate 36), has greasy crayon as well as scraper technique applied to the jug. While the work gains in colouristic and textural effects, it does not have the economy of the black and white version.

There are some stylistic aspects of these works which are worth noting because they recur later in Walters' mature paintings. One is the move towards a sharp delineation of form; another is the contrast between curving lines and straight, seen in the rectangular division of the picture surface. Also, the use of zones is seen here for the first time. The economy of means and flatness of the imagery were also enduring features of his style.

In his oil paintings of 1949 Walters used a somewhat similar technique. Two small canvases, dated June 1949 (Plates 39-40), are divided into two zones. Walters drew the imagery by scraping back to an underlying ground colour. In one work (Plate 40), the artist made the symbolic nature of the division clear by inscribing 'air' in the upper and 'earth' on the lower zone. He used a blue/grey colouration in the upper zone to reinforce the association with the sky, and brown in the lower one to relate it to the earth.

These paintings continued Walters' interest in polarities. In Air and Earth (Plate 40) he drew forms which further the colouristic and written symbolism. In the upper zone the form is open and expansive to suggest flight or growth; though the artist made sure that the shape was not representational. The form in the lower zone folds in on itself, is embryonic and contrasting in shape to the one above.

Variation on Plant Forms (Plate 39) is related in type. In this case the upper zone is black, the lower one red. The contrast of lines and forms between the zones is comparable with Air and Earth, though there are no inscribed words to give clues to symbolic meaning.

Walters made the lines in the upper zone expand outwards, the lower ones to close in on one another. As in his Klee-inspired drawings of 1946-1947, Walters freed line to suggest organic form without tying it to representation. He was also relating the imagery closely to the format so that there was a clearer sense of structure and of the symbolic content.

The basic ideas in these works were not original, although they had no parallel in other New Zealand painting of the period. Paul Klee made many works with lines to suggest plant growth and life forces. Images of organic growth were very much part of English art of the 1930s and 1940s.(19) Artists connected with what is known as the Vitalist movement emphasized such ideas in their studies of natural forms and structures, like seeds or eggs. Related work by American artists was unknown to Walters at that time.(20) His procedure of abstracting from natural forms was based on the example of European painters, especially Klee but also the early Mondrian.(21) Study of Leaves, 1949 (Plate 41), also shows the starting point in his observation of nature, which Walters then freely abstracted and interpreted. As yet, he did not consider making abstract paintings constructed from geometric forms, although he was familiar with work of this sort in reproduction.

In March 1950 he had saved enough money to travel to Europe. He wanted to see contemporary art in Britain, France and Holland at first hand. He recalls:"Reproductions of contemporary art nourished me and with my interests growing in abstract art I felt impelled to go overseas to see what I felt was the only art I could relate to."(22)

The provincial context was no longer enough. Even Australia now seemed a limited and unsatisfactory alternative to New Zealand. Walters worked his passage to Britain on a ship to help defray expenses. Once in London he was still unable to study art full-time and had to take casual jobs. Despite these inconveniences he was able to see a number of important works by leading European

abstract painters.

London itself was not an important centre of abstract painting in 1950. One of the shows Walters recalls seeing there was of works by the Italian still-life painter Morandi. It was in Amsterdam and Paris that he was to find painting more in tune with his own interests. He remembers that it was difficult to see works by Mondrian at that period: "It was hard to see Mondrian in Europe in 1950. None in London or Paris, and in many quarters he was not appreciated." (23)

In Holland, however, the situation was better. He saw works by Mondrian in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, at the State Museum in the Hague and in private collection in Rotterdam. A Mondrian owned by Wally Elenbaas, a painter and printmaker he met in Rotterdam, had special significance. Walters was able to handle it and examine the way it was painted at close range. (24) He also looked at paintings by Bart van der Leek and Theo van Doesburg. Also in Holland, at the Stedelijk Museum, he saw his first exhibition of recent American painting. Included were three works by Jackson Pollock. (25) These were the only American paintings he saw until the late-1960s. It was European abstraction that he responded to at this period and which formed the basis of his own style of abstraction.

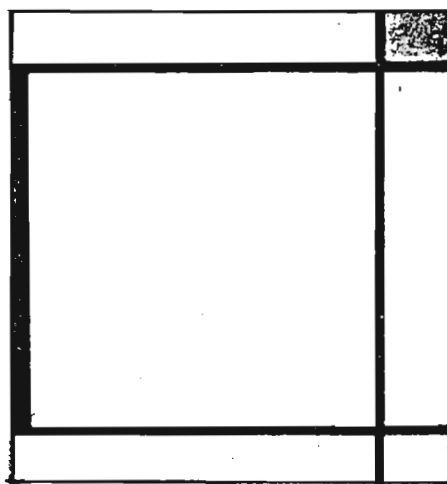


Figure 8. Mondrian, Composition 111, with Red, Yellow and Blue, 1927.



In Holland he also looked at works by the Bauhaus painters Klee, Kandinsky, Albers and Moholy Nagy. He saw examples of their works in private collections. In Paris he was drawn most to the painters who exhibited at the Denise René Gallery. This gallery specialised in French abstraction. There Walters saw the geometric abstract paintings of Auguste Herbin and Victor Vasarely which made a lasting impression on him. They painted hard-edge works with sharp, unmodulated colour. They used a few formal elements, such as circles, rectangles and triangles to generate a varied and powerful imagery. From his study of their works Walters was able to shape the way his own future painting would develop. Another painter whose works he studied in Paris was Alberto Mag-nelli. To his surprise Walters found that not all the painting he wanted to see was available. He could see works by Hans Arp whose reliefs interested him, but not the paintings of Sophie Taeuber-Arp which he admired. The same applied to the paintings of Malevich: "I tried but could not see works of Malevich and Sophie Taeuber-Arp both of whom I was interested in, but in 1950 they were invisible."(26)

Walters made only short visits to the Continent. The rest of the time he was restricted to London. He recalls; "I did'nt see much in London. It was pretty barren when I was there but I remember a show of Kandinsky gouaches at the Mayor Gallery and a retrospective show of Schwitters at the old London Gallery."(27)

In early 1951 Walters returned to Australia. He had stayed in Europe barely a year. Initially he had no intention of returning to New Zealand except to see his parents. He settled in Melbourne where he was to remain until August 1953. Again he took a job during the day and continued with his own painting in his spare time. Much of his work of the Melbourne period has been lost because the artist left it behind when he finally shifted back to New Zealand. It is possible to gain some idea of its nature from recollections of the artist and also from

surviving paintings. Walters recollects of this period: "...until I returned to N.Z. in August 1953 I tried out ideas and styles I had picked up in Europe, finally settling into a more or less geometric style."(28)

While at Melbourne, Walters began to use gouache to make small paintings on paper. Gouache was quick-drying and opaque which made it suitable for working out ideas in the time he had after work. He followed examples of European abstraction in the first gouaches some of which borrow heavily from the work of van der Leek and from Hans Arp. He purchased copies of the magazine Art d'Aujourd'hui which illustrated works by contemporary European abstract painters. These illustrations were in black and white. Because he had a limited grasp of French Walters had limited access to the written commentaries. He depended on his own analysis of the reproductions for his interpretation. There were articles on painters he admired like Vasarely and Herbin. In addition to buying magazines in Melbourne, Walters also made a collection of colour reproductions from various periodicals by cutting them out. These cuttings included works of South American, especially Peruvian decorative art as well as Oceanic works.

His own painting quickly changed in character. Several small oil paintings of the period survive to give an idea of this development. Untitled Painting, 1952 (Plate 42), shows a change to geometric abstraction. There is no longer a basis in natural forms. Instead Walters has divided the work into two halves by making a vertical division on the central axis. The bilateral organization of the picture surface occurs here in an emphatic way. It is noteworthy because of its importance in much of his later work. Not only is the vertical axis demarcated but Walters has also emphasized horizontal divisions of the surface. The vertical/horizontal division lies at the basis of the imagery which is made up of related but not identical forms. These forms are of a geometric not an organic nature. Straight lines have replaced the

curving ones he favoured earlier. Although the forms are two-dimensional, Walters allowed ambiguities of interpretation because the distinction between figure and ground has become blurred.

In this painting Walters applied the paint in small dabs with a palette-knife - a technique he copied from Albers. He related colour closely to the drawn forms which gives the work a precise, sharp appearance. The colour, too, is thought of differently. It is bright and clear. Both black and white are used to give maximum tonal contrast. The yellow and red are unmodulated. Walters conceived of the painting as a flat image extending evenly to the perimeter of the canvas. In conception Untitled Painting recalls the early works of Vasarely which were an obvious model for Walters at that time. Like Vasarely, Walters approached the picture analytically using a few forms which he varied and related by tonal and colour contrasts, by inversion and ambiguities. This kind of geometric abstraction had not been seen previously in Australia or New Zealand.

Obviously Walters' trip to Europe had a profound effect on his style. It confirmed his direction as an artist working with abstraction. But it enabled him to gain a understanding of European geometric abstraction which he had not been able to obtain from reproductions alone. His admiration for Mondrian existed before he went to Europe. Only after his trip did he feel able to follow the direction taken by Mondrian in his later work. He felt an affinity with the style of younger artists like Magnelli and Vasarely. Seeing their work and reading about the theory behind it enabled him to move away from an abstraction based on nature to one constructed from geometric forms. This stylistic change is highly significant in his evolution as a painter and could only take place after his European trip.

Painting Number Two, 1953, (Plate 43), a slightly later oil on canvas is now in the National Art Gallery Wellington. Walters was still working on it when he returned

to New Zealand. Like Untitled Painting, 1952, it is vertical in format, is divided vertically into two parts and is constructed of flat, geometrical forms. In this case the paint surface is smoother and the colouring deeper. A dark green and brown are predominant. Walters used red colour accents to direct the spectator's attention away from the centre. He was developing a type of picture construction which requires comparisons between different parts of the imagery, especially a left/right comparison across the central axis. By such means he integrated the peripheral areas of the picture into the composition so that the image is homogeneous.

In August 1953 Walters returned to New Zealand. At first he was based in Auckland where he met Schoon again. Subsequently he obtained a job at the Government Printing Office in Wellington. Having this good job was a factor in his decision to remain in New Zealand and to pursue his painting career there rather than in Australia. His return to Wellington gave him the settled conditions he needed to develop his new paintings.

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Footnotes:Chapter Two

1 For a further discussion of these works, see M.Dunn, "Gordon Walters: Some Drawings from the 1940", Bulletin of New Zealand Art History, 8, 1980, pp. 2-11.

2 See F.Smejkal, Surrealist Drawings, London, 1974, for a general discussion. See also M.Leiris, Les Dessins d'André Masson, Paris, 1971.

3 Gordon Walters to the author, November 26, 1979. He first saw this work reproduced in the publication by the Museum of Modern Art, Joan Miro, with a text by J. Sweeney, New York, 1941, p. 44. He bought his copy in Sydney in January 1946.

4 For an account of New Zealand rock art see M.Trotter and B.McCulloch, Prehistoric Rock Art of New Zealand, Wellington, 1971. See also, M.Dunn and G.Kreuzer, Die Felsbilder Neuseelands, Weisbaden, 1982. For Schoon's own views see his article, "New Zealand's Oldest Art Galleries", New Zealand Listener, September 12, 1947, pp. 6-7.

5 Schoon's copies are housed in the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch. Correspondence between Schoon and Fairburn dates from 1947 when Schoon was working in the rock art shelters in North Otago. It includes references by Schoon to his concern about damage to the drawings by stock. This correspondence is held at the University of Auckland Library.

6 Walters to the author, November 26, 1979, p.2.

7 For a discussion of relevant aspects of Klee's art see J.S.Pierce, Paul Klee and Primitive Art, New York, 1976; also W.Grohman, Paul Klee, New York, 1954, with catalogue; and also C.Giedion-Welcher, Paul Klee, New York, 1952.

8 For Roger Duff's attitude, see his article "Maori Art in Rock Drawings", Arts Year Book, 6, 1950, pp. 6-11. See also his book, The Moa-Hunter Period of Maori Culture, third edition, Wellington, 1977.

9 Walters' knowledge of Miro derived from the Museum of Modern Art publication of 1941, op. cit. note 3. Klee had begun to use rock art motifs and techniques in his works of the 1930s. See Pierce, 1976, op. cit. pp. 135-150.

10 Walters to the author, June 6, 1979, p. 1. This system owes something to Klee and was already present in Untitled Drawing, 1946 (Plate 18). For a discussion of related works by Klee see C.Geelhaar, Paul Klee and the Bauhaus, Geneva, 1973, pp. 98-109.

11 Walters to the author, June 30, 1979, p. 1. The French Maid was a useful alternative to the Art Society shows also because there was no selection committee to impose conservative tastes on the works chosen for display.

12 See Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand, 3, 1947, p. 44.

13 See R.Hipkins, "Contemporary Art in New Zealand", The Studio, 135, 1948, pp. 103-120.

14 Fairburn used material supplied to him by Schoon, and in some cases Schoon cut the lino-blocks for him. Hanno Fairburn was also involved in this work helping with fabric printing. Unlike Schoon and Walters, Fairburn added nothing of his own. His designs merely reproduce the rock art images in a rudimentary fashion. Examples of his rock art prints are held by the University of Auckland. Fairburn wrote an article entitled "Polynesian Cave Drawings" for Home and Building, 6, 1949, pp. 32-33 and 63-64.

15 The best history is B.Smith, Australian Painting, Oxford, 1962. See also J.Zwimmer, editor, Abstract Art in Australia, Melbourne, 1983, for essays on the development of abstract painting in Australia.

16 For Dadswell, see G.Sturgeon, The Development of Australian Sculpture, 1788-1975, London, 1978, pp. 122-125.

17 Walters to the author, October 12, 1976, p. 3.

18 For Nicholson, see H.Read, Ben Nicholson, vol. 1: Paintings, Reliefs, Drawings 1911-1948, London, 1948; for Moore's drawings see H.Read, Henry Moore, vol. 1: Sculpture and Drawings 1921-1948, London, 1957. For a general background to abstract art, see C.Harrison, English Art and Modernism 1900-1939, London, 1981.

19 For a good discussion of these aspects, see J.Burnham, Beyond Modern Sculpture, 1968, pp. 49-108. Parallel interests can be found in the work of American painters like Adolph Gottlieb in the 1940s. In some respects Walters' interests and his transition to abstraction parallels that of Gottlieb and his contemporaries.

20 Walters to the author, December 2, 1983.

21 Walters to the author, May 28, 1980, p. 3.

22 Gordon Walters, Salient, Wellington, May 7, 1969, p. 8.

23 Walters to the author, November 28, 1983, p. 2.

24 ibid, p. 2. This work by Mondrian is Composition 111, with Red, Yellow and Blue, 1927. It is catalogue number 334 in M.Seuphor's book, Piet Mondrian: His Life and Work, New York, 1956.

25 Walters to the author, December 2, 1983.

26 Walters to the author, February 16, 1981, p. 1. Her work featured in a show at the Denise René Gallery, Paris, in June 1950.

27 Walters to the author, February 16, 1981, p. 1.

28 Walters to the author, March 28, 1983.

29 He still has some copies of this magazine in his possession.

30 Vasarely (b. 1908) had exhibited at the Denise René Gallery since its inception in 1944. His works of the period 1945-1950 with their flat shapes, crisp edges and bright colours were the sort Walters knew and responded to at that time. See J.Dewasne, Vasarely, Paris, 1952; also M.Joray, Vasarely, Neuchâtel, 1967.

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THE YEARS 1953-1955

On his return to New Zealand in 1953, Walters was able to develop his painting with a clearer sense of direction. His work in the years 1953 to 1955 evolved from the geometric abstraction he had studied in Europe. There is a coherence about his new painting due to the focus on formal concerns in painting. Inspired by the example of Herbin and Vasarely, Walters reduced the number of forms in his new works and tried to achieve variety and quality by his handling of them. At the same time he began to look again at local source material viewing it from the perspective of his deeper knowledge of European painting, especially of post-war French abstraction. Because he knew that this kind of painting lay outside the terms of reference for New Zealand painting he chose not to exhibit at that time. Accordingly the significance of his work was unknown until the 1970s, except to a small circle of friends. It is now clear that some of his paintings of the years 1954-1955 rank as his first mature statements as an artist. There was a considerable variety of work produced at this period, though, and not all of it was of the same calibre.

Among the paintings of these years there are many works that depend too heavily on European models to be successful. There are also several groups of paintings that have greater substance and more originality. They are based on a limited range of forms which Walters used as the basis for a series of related but individual images. One group of gouaches and oil paintings uses motifs derived from schizophrenic art, others to be dealt with in the subsequent chapter, derive motifs from Maori rock drawing and Aboriginal art. Apart from their intrinsic interest as paintings these works show how Walters transformed source material and adapted it to his own purposes. Despite the range of sources he drew on, the direction of his work remained remarkably consistent. He tried to achieve abstract paintings that depend purely on the formal relat-



ionships between shapes, tones and colours painted on a two-dimensional surface for their meaning.

The group of paintings based on motifs derived from the work of a schizophrenic patient at an Auckland mental hospital evolved in the period 1953-1954. In 1953 Walters had renewed his acquaintance with Schoon who was living in Auckland. It was Schoon who introduced him to the schizophrenic drawings while Walters was visiting him that year. These drawings proved to be a catalyst for Walters' own work when he established himself again in Wellington.

Schoon made copies of the schizophrenic drawings in late 1949 or 1950 while he was working as a domestic orderly at the mental hospital. The drawings had been made by a patient Hathaway who had been a teacher before he was committed. Hathaway had not been given any art therapy and had originally used improvised materials to make his works. Schoon later recalled: "For his art Hathaway had nothing more than a lump of clay he could find in the grounds, and the concrete yard was his surface. His output was obliterated every day with a water hose." (1)

To Schoon the drawings were an immediate source of interest: "I looked at these drawings with astonishment - it was striking and original even if I could not understand for a start what he was at or about." (2) He began to perceive a pattern in the work: "It was linear and abstract in nature and had a distinctive, systematic style." (3) Intrigued by what he saw, Schoon decided to study and record Hathaway's ephemeral output. He began to supply him with coloured chalks to encourage his drawing. He noted: "After my duties, I went into the yard to collect his output of the day on paper. And from the volume of this work in its proper sequence there gradually emerged the story of its themes and significance." (4)

Walters was able to see Schoon's coloured copies of Hathaway's drawings when he visited Auckland. On a small scale, they were drawn on cheap paper in which the lines were like coloured crayons. (5) Unfortunately the

copies Walters referred to have been lost. However, he made his own versions of the copies which interested him, and kept them in a scrapbook.(6) Some of these are still extant (Plates 46-50). Walters' studies after the schizophrenic drawings are quite small, measuring an average 100 by 150 millimetres. Walters drew them in pen on scraps of newsprint and lined note-paper.(7) They are in monochrome and do not record the original bright colours. Walters, however, made a mental note of the colours and was able to recall them when he made his own paintings.

Walters' copy drawings reveal certain aspects of Hathaway's art that he chose to isolate for his own purposes. Both Schoon and Walters mention Hathaway's use of line as a feature of his style. They also point out that Hathaway's drawings, despite their abstract appearance, had a figurative basis, even though to the uninformed viewer that might not be obvious.

Of Hathaway's style and working method Walters has observed: "One of Hathaway's frequent stylistic methods was to make a simple line drawing of a subject - and then to make another version of the same subject but with the elements rearranged in alarming configurations. There is one of a head with the finger across the face which is a clear example."(8) Walters copied this work for future reference (Plate 47).

The drawing is remarkable for the puzzling and incomplete treatment of the forms. The head Walters mentions is fragmentary, but has recognizable eyes, nose, mouth and ear. The opening at the side of the face is identifiable as the finger Walters referred to. This incomplete form would otherwise be hard to decipher.

Hathaway rearranged the features, stylizing them and making them almost unrecognizable in the lower part of the same drawing. At the right-hand side of the paper, he drew the features horizontally and straightened out the facial contours. The finger is now a vertical intrusion and the mouth, viewed in profile, becomes a small indentat-

ion. Hathaway made the eyes into two circles intersected by a straight line on the horizontal axis. He arranged the forms in a rectangular compartment.

On his copy of Hathaway's drawing Walters wrote the phrase 'disintegration and rearrangement'. The phrase is possibly significant in its terminology. Walters' reference to disintegration brings to mind Jung's theory of the human psyche in which wholeness and integration are opposed by incompleteness and disintegration.(9) In Jung's view the symbols of art help to achieve a reconciliation of opposites. His study of art by schizophrenics and others showed a search for harmonic forms, especially the mandala where opposites are reconciled and the image integrated.

Interestingly, in Jungian terms Hathaway's art contains symbols of incompleteness or disintegration, (Plates 46-47) and mandala forms (Plate 50) where integration was achieved. In Jung's view these symbols derive from the collective unconscious and relate to primordial ideas. For a schizophrenic drawing symbolic forms of this kind could have a therapeutic function.

Hathaway's work had the intuitive qualities and lack of artifice Schoon and Walters admired in primitive art. Schoon noticed that once he paid attention to Hathaway there was a response: "Hathaway, withdrawn and seemingly aloof and indifferent or impenetrable, seemed to have noticed my interest. There was a reaction, a gesture on his part, for he suddenly produced realistic drawings of recognizable objects, a letter with an address, stamp, postal cancellation etc. Every day a drawing was made which showed these items in progressive stages of disintegration in a systematic linear drawing executed as swiftly as you and I write down words or sentences. This clever complexity and beauty was produced at lightening speed."(10)

Schoon liked the anonymity and freshness of Hathaway's art. Here was "a pure artist unburdened by Ego, recognition or respectability or even art fashions."(11) Walters admired those qualities while he was searching for his

own new style. But, as Schoon noted, Hathaway's art was not appreciated by Dr Palmer, one of the senior medical staff at the mental hospital: "One day as I was kneeling on the yard, copying his drawings, Dr Palmer arrived in a stately procession flanked by two old hand attendants, like a Henry the Eighth making his entrance at court, questioning me why I was copying the drawings. I replied because they are artistically fascinating and clever. Palmer snorted in true style. "What! you consider that art! My notion of great art is that of Michelangelo!!" It is, of course, the semi-literate colonial's perfect platitude that serves every occasion where cultural erudition is required. Soon after I was requested to resign as an attendant, because of this irregular, odd hobby, outside my course of normal duty."(12)



Figure 9. Theo Schoon.

Schoon was aware as early as the 1930s of literature on the art of the mentally ill written in German publications he had been able to see in Europe. Walters would have had some introduction to the subject through his study of Surrealist literature and from books like Herbert Read's Education through Art where the area is mentioned. André Breton had worked in a mental asylum and published an essay on the art of the insane.(13)

Schoon himself made extensive use of Hathaway's material in his own paintings and drawings which he exhibited at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland, in 1965.(14) He painted works on a white ground of flat latex paint. Like Hathaway he employed an essentially linear style in these works, sometimes using felt-tip pens to draw his coloured lines (figure 10). By doing so he tried to achieve the directness of Hathaway's originals and the feeling of spontaneity. Schoon deliberately chose commercial-type colours such as lime green, lemon yellow and crimson to avoid conventional expectations of taste.

Although Schoon did not publicly acknowledge his debt to the schizophrenic's drawings, Walters was well aware of it. Accordingly, when Schoon offered him the drawings

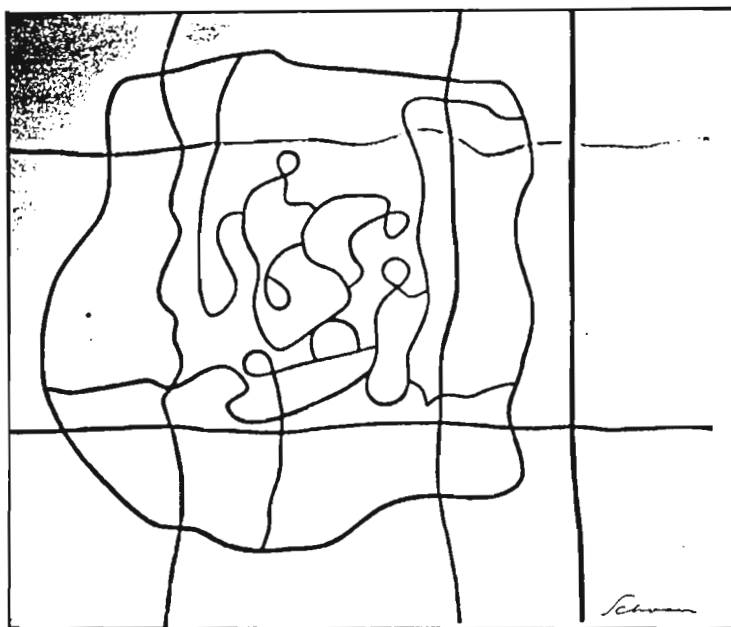


Figure 10. T. Schoon, Painting, 1965.

in 1967, on his departure from Auckland, he did not take them. Walters recalls: "I remember when Theo was leaving Home Street he threw the drawings away; some he offered to me but like an idiot I did not take them. I reasoned that because Theo had made such extensive use of them I could not touch them again. It's a great pity they have been lost, but many of Theo's paintings incorporate ideas from them."(15)

By this stage Walters had long since discarded any reliance on Hathaway's works. They were important to him mainly in the period 1953-1955. Surviving paintings allow us to see how he evolved his own works while making use of Hathaway's ideas. In some cases he followed Hathaway closely, even echoing his division of the picture surface into compartments with linear boundaries (Plate 52). In other instances, Walters changed the emphasis to interpretation of the forms in tone and colour (Plates 53-58).

An example of Walters' linear paintings based on Hathaway is Untitled Painting, 1954 (Plate 52), a gouache dated May 23. In this work he achieved a degree of simplicity and directness which goes beyond his reductive works based on rock art, like The Poet, 1947 (Plate 30). Whereas in The Poet he had worked over the pencil lines several times, in Untitled Painting he did not revise the coloured lines of green, blue and red. They were painted directly and left. To an unprecedented extent he left large areas of the paper plain and unmarked. The effect is to make the imagery appear weightless, like designs drawn on a pane of glass. This quality derived directly from Hathaway and is seen also in Schoon's work (figure 10, page 56).

Like Hathaway's drawings, Untitled Painting, 1954, was based on contrasts between curving undulating lines and hand-drawn, straight vertical and horizontal lines. As in Hathaway's images (Plate 49), the straight lines intersect to subdivide the surface into rectangular compartments. This system of organization was familiar to Walters from other sources as well. He chose blue with green

for the straight lines and red for the curving ones. The rectangular compartments enclose a variety of shapes made by the undulating lines as well as the small dots. In one instance Walters used a green dot to suggest the eye of a face made by the curving shape around it. In this case Walters used not only the formal devices of Hathaway's art but also included a reference to the associated figurative meanings. Hathaway had used dots to suggest eyes in some of his drawings (Plate 47).

In Walters this figurative reference is so slight that it could be overlooked, or appear to be intuitive. Walters still wanted to achieve the impression of improvisation modelled on Hathaway whose combinations were arrived at so quickly and without conscious effort. He also tried to obtain the unplanned feel of the schizophrenic's compositions. However, Untitled Painting, 1954 (Plate 52), has a sense of order and balance about it which reflects a knowledge of European abstraction and of relational composition. For example, Walters has balanced the horizontal rectangle at the upper right with the two smaller, square shapes below it. He related the verticals and horizontals directly to the format of the paper. In these respects there is a continuity with his first geometric abstraction of 1952-1953 (Plates 42-43).

Untitled Painting, 1954 (Plate 51), was also restricted to linear presentation. Walters drew numerous rectangular compartments with green and red lines. There are so many of these, most containing curving motifs, that it is impossible to comprehend the total image at a glance. Instead the painting looks like an ordered assemblage of pictographs, rather like Klee's works based on ancient script which appear to have been written not composed.(16)

The American painter Adolph Gottlieb's pictographic paintings of the 1940s like the Voyager's Return, 1946 (figure 11, page 59), arrive at a similar kind of presentation in rectangular compartments.(17) In Walters' case he made the lines forming the compartments and the enclosed motifs of equal value. By contrast in Gottlieb the divisions

are subordinate to the motifs they enclose. This generates an ambiguity. Either we can look into each compartment at the motif it encloses, or see the rectangular frame as part of each motif and a link with the adjacent ones. Walters painted thirty-two compartments, not two of which are the same in size or in the motifs they contain.

Again there are obvious connections with Hathaway's drawings in a number of respects. One is the linear, apparently unrevised nature of the gouache's execution. Another is the colour which has the undiluted look of commercial paints. A further aspect is the grid-like structure seen in the copies Walters made after Hathaway. Another point of comparison, noted in discussing the previous work (Plate 52), is the use of straight lines to define the rectangular compartments and of curved ones for the motifs inside them.

As in much Surrealist art, as well as the art of the insane, the motifs Walters drew have an overt sexual character and relate to basic signs for the sexual organs. He used symbols found in primitive art, especially rock drawing. Near the centre of Untitled Painting (Plate 51) is a sign often used to represent the vulva. Egg forms, some fertilised, recur throughout the painting. Motifs like radiating lines and concentric circles also appear in the imagery. Walters found a compatibility between the schizophrenic art and primitive art as had Breton, Klee and other painters he admired.



Figure 11. A. Gottlieb, Voyager's Return, 1946.



By using these primordial symbols Walters was trying to achieve a universal meaning. He wanted an indivisible bond between form and content. His integration of curved and straight forms encapsulates the idea of synthesis and unification which is also expressed in the sexual imagery.

While he was still doing the linear gouaches, he began to experiment with painting motifs derived directly from Hathaway more solidly, using larger areas of tone and colour to fill out and transform their appearance (Plates 53-54). Because the gouaches were relatively quick and simple to execute he was able to keep his options open. At the time he probably had no clear idea which direction would prove most rewarding. Gradually the linear works gave way to the solid handling of the imagery.

For these works Walters isolated a motif found in some of Hathaway's drawings - a rectangle open at one end and entered by a curving line, drawn from the sides of the rectangle (Plate 46). He was to use this motif in a series of gouaches and oil paintings dated to the years 1954-1955 (Plates 53-58). He repeated the open rectangle motif several times in each work, varying its size, tone, colour and disposition. In addition, Walters used small rectangles with this motif rather as Hathaway had done in his original drawings (Plate 46).

Of the open rectangle Walters has noted: "As I remember this is a hybrid, if that is the term. The idea of the broken rectangle came from drawings by Hathaway but I used this in combination with other things e.g. the wandering line in certain aboriginal rock drawings. After a while its origins were forgotten and it developed into a very personal device. I liked the play between the free line and the straight lines of the rectangle and used it in varying proportions."(18)

The symbolic meaning of Hathaway's forms has been discussed above in Jungian terms as a search for integration and wholeness. His open rectangle form possibly related to sexual ideas such as penetration. Sexual union is

one of the most basic symbols of integration and reconciliation between the sexes. In his works based on the open rectangle Walters shows clearly his interest in achieving compositional harmony between contrasting forms. He brings together curved and straight forms in the open rectangle motif. In some cases his compositions using the motif achieve a mandala-like configuration, for example Untitled Painting, 1954 (Plate 53). Considering the consistency of this interest in most of his mature work, especially in the koru paintings of later years, the relationship with Jungian concepts is noteworthy. The symbolic integration and reconciliation of opposites appears as a consistent theme in Walters' painting which has its origins in his study of Surrealist art and related psychology, as well as in the schizophrenic art of Hathaway. His study of primitive art was also influential in shaping his ideas in this area.

A feature of Walters' open rectangle works is the deliberate restriction to a limited number of forms. Walters had anticipated this approach in his first geometric abstract paintings of 1952-1953. He was aware of the late paintings of Mondrian made this way, and of Herbin's restriction in his late paintings to elementary geometric shapes, the circle, square and rectangle.(19) He noticed also that Hathaway sometimes worked this way. In a few examples he had copied, Hathaway had repeated the open rectangle motif several times, deploying it along the perimeter of the paper or projecting it at an angle from a central line. Repetition of motifs also occurs in rock art, usually with slight but perceptible variations.

In fact, writers on the art of the insane have commented on the relationships between the drawings of such people and those of primitive artists. For example, Franz Prinzhorn noted:"...a most surprising and close relationship occasionally exists between the works of untrained mental patients and primitive peoples, close enough in the strange motifs as well as the formal arrangements that it is often difficult to point to differences."(20) Prinzhorn also noted

the preference in the drawings of the mentally ill for "simple principles of order and repetition."(21)

The earliest paintings in Walters' open rectangle series date to February 1954. Two gouaches, Untitled Painting, 1954 (Plate 53) and Study for Composition, 1954 (Plate 56), were painted on the same day, February 23. Both works show him using the open rectangle motif in different sizes, tones and colours; and using interplay between positive and negative readings of it. In both gouaches he employed small rectangles in combination with the larger motif. Other paintings of that year (Plates 54-55) show him developing different but related compositions from similar components. Although all these works have a basis in drawing, Walters painted them in solid, flat colour. This gave them a different quality from his own linear gouaches and from Hathaway's originals. The colour Walters used in these works, too, is more personal. While he sometimes used bright colour he avoided the garish effects of Schoon's copies.

Walters drew out his compositions first in pencil. Traces of pencil are still visible in most examples. He appears to have used a ruler to construct the straight lines, though he painted the entire gouache free-hand. Because he saw the gouaches as sketches or studies for other works he did not make them highly finished. Instead he applied the colours directly over the pencil drawing with minimal revision. There are signs of the brush following the drawing around the shapes, and also some irregularities where the brush went outside the pencil guidelines. This gives an element of freshness to the execution of the works.

His approach can be illustrated by Untitled Painting, 1954 (Plate 54). Although Walters used the open rectangle motif derived from Hathaway, he approached it in the ordered analytical way of a geometric abstractionist, not in the intuitive manner of the schizophrenic. He used the open rectangle three times in this gouache. Each time he painted the motif black, but varied the

size and disposition. The open rectangle takes its place with rectangular shapes and a triangle, square and circle as the basis of a geometric abstract composition. Walters drew the forms crisply and painted them with flat unmodulated colours so that the chromatic intensity of the red, green and yellow is retained.

The final result is more comparable with the paintings of an artist like Auguste Herbin than the rudimentary drawings of Hathaway. Walters has divorced the open rectangle from its original context and transformed it into a unit in a composition based on the principles of geometric abstraction.

The parallels with Herbin (1882-1960) are not accidental. Herbin was an artist whose works had attracted Walters even before he went to Europe.(22) He had collected some small reproductions of his paintings and had an issue of the magazine Art d'Aujourd Hui with an article on Herbin's work.(23) Herbin formulated his ideas on art

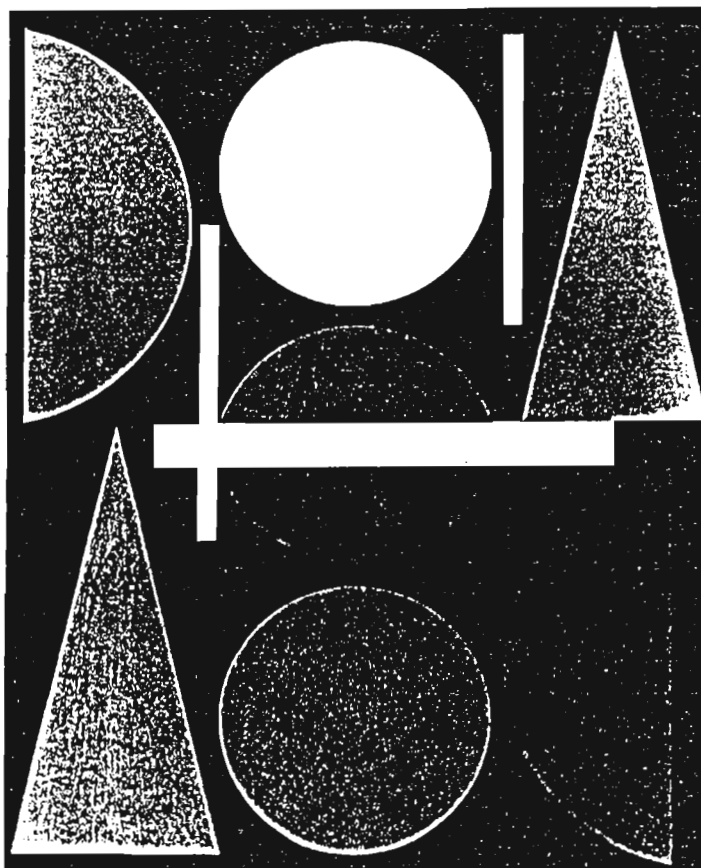


Figure 12. A. Herbin, Nude, 1960.

in an influential book L'Art Non-Figuratif et Non-Objectif, published in Paris in 1949.

Herbin came to reject any vestige of naturalism in his works of the post-war period. He came to regard naturalism as the destroyer of art, and three-dimensional illusionism as unnecessary for the painter.(24) For him a few geometric forms were all that were necessary for the abstract painter - the circle, triangle, half-circle, square or rectangle.(25) He believed that the main concern of the painter was with formal aspects: "Toute l'action de la peinture réside dans le rapport des couleurs entre elles, dans le rapport des formes entre elles et dans les rapports entre les couleurs et des formes."(26)

In addition, Herbin made the execution of his paintings precise and even. This was necessary for the hard-edge imagery he wanted. "Ce résultat exige une application précise de la couleur et l'exclusion absolue de tous les accidents d'ordre technique et matériel qui peuvent nuire à son unité."(27)

These ideas were now closely in accord with Walters' own thinking about art. As yet he had not achieved the hard-edge precision of Herbin, but his work was moving in that direction. Herbin also thought in terms of a pictorial alphabet from which the painter, like a composer, could create new works. By restricting the range of forms used the painter would be free to concentrate on the range of compositions they could generate. The relationships between forms and colours would provide the visual interest of the paintings. Effects of advance and recession due to colour interaction would substitute for spatial effects in other types of work. "Certaines couleurs expriment l'espace en profondeur (les bleus), d'autres l'espace en avant (les rouges). Certaines couleurs expriment la mobilité (les rouges, les jaunes et les bleus), d'autres l'immobilité (le blanc, le noir et les verts..."(28)

In his Untitled Painting, 1954 (Plate 54), Walters used colour to animate the picture in this way. For example the vermilion rectangle at the upper left seems to advance

the green to recede. The yellow form below appears to be in front of the blue. Thus, although the picture is composed of flat, two-dimensional forms, the painting has considerable vitality in terms of relationships between the strong colours and interactions between the forms. Also, the chromatic intensity adds to the visual impact of the image in a way reminiscent of Herbin who used strong colouration.

But Walters did not restrict himself to one range of colour in his open rectangle paintings. In some he chose a limited, subdued colouring where tonal contrast is reduced. Untitled Painting, 1954 (Plate 55), for example, is restricted to black, white and yellow ochre. The white is made by the paper itself. Walters used the ochre in this painting to soften the contrasts between forms and to give an harmonic feeling to the work.

Compositionally, too, this painting indicates something of the range of possibilities available to Walters with the open rectangle motif. In this example he varied the size of the motifs considerably, and also varied their proportions. He juxtaposed a large black motif, which is broad and squat, with a much smaller white one of narrower proportions. This work also shows a looser structure for the imagery than the previous example (Plate 54). Each of the open rectangles floats on the ochre field and is not confined by a precise rectangular frame as in Plates 54 and 56. Walters added to the feeling of freedom in the work by placing three narrow bars near the centre of the painting. Unlike the other forms they do not line up with vertical axis of the picture. Instead they have an oblique disposition, almost casual in effect.

Gouaches of this type, painted at a rate of one or more a day, indicate the creative energy of Walters at this period. Ideas were coming quickly and had to be put down on paper. There was not enough time to make larger paintings on canvas, except in a few instances. At a later stage he could sort through the gouaches and select some for enlargement and revision.

An example of this process can be seen in Composition, 1954-1955 (Plate 57), and its related study (Plate 56). In this case Walters also made another gouache version and an oil painting - now destroyed. Comparing the two versions illustrated, the changes between them appear considerable. The finished gouache (Plate 57) is larger than the study and was painted on a better quality paper. It appears brighter and more luminous than the study partly because of the better materials but also because Walters intensified the colours. The blue, for example, is a bright cobalt in the finished gouache whereas in the study it is a more subdued grey/blue. Because he painted the finished version more precisely the forms are sharper and the effect of tonal and colour contrast heightened. In addition to these changes Walters also modified the drawing. Whereas the study is divided evenly into two halves the finished gouache is asymmetrical. Walters also tightened up the drawing of the open rectangles. For example, the two rectangles at the left face the same way in the study even though they are contrasted - one being light on dark, the other dark on light. In the finished gouache Walters made the variation more pronounced by making the open rectangles face in opposite directions - one up, one down. This adds a variation of shape to the positive/negative contrast.

Judging by the dates on the study and the finished gouache, there was a considerable interval between the two versions. The study (Plate 56) is dated February 1954, the finished gouache (Plate 57) October 1955. In terms of working method this is of some interest. It points to an approach that allowed a separation between the conception of a composition and its final resolution. The study was there for reference so that he could return to the idea at a later date. When he made these gouaches it was the idea not the execution that counted. The studies were a storehouse of images ready for later use and development. From this period on that is a factor which must be taken into account when studying the chronology of

his work. Often an idea will occur in the form of a study years before its final realisation as a finished painting.

Already Walters shows a concern for relatively fine adjustments to his imagery. The changes made from one version of a composition to another would escape the attention of a casual observer. By temperament Walters was very suited to an approach involving calculation and refinements.

In the open rectangle paintings Walters made some use of the papier collé technique when arriving at the final disposition of motifs in his compositions. The small rectangles which occur in these works (Plates 53-58) were usually cut out of paper and placed on the surface so that the artist could arrange them in a number of different ways. Once he was satisfied he could draw the forms in their final relationship. This was a method familiar to him in his commercial lay-out work, and also known to him from the practice of European abstractionists such as Hans Arp. Walters admired Arp's cut-out reliefs and knew of his compositions made with cut-out pieces of paper arranged according to chance.(29) This method was especially useful for working out positive/negative relationships using a few simple forms. There is an echo, too, of Mondrian's use of cut-out bands when making the final adjustments to his New York paintings.(30) Like Mondrian, Walters had little interest in mathematical calculations in positioning his motifs. The cut outs allowed a practical method of work with intuition playing a part in the creative stages.

A few oil paintings of the open rectangle motif survive. Untitled Painting, 1955 (Plate 58) is a good example. Although still of modest dimensions this oil is about twice the size of the largest gouaches. No works of this period were painted on a larger scale than 20 x 24 inches. In this case the canvas contains three of the open rectangles, all of which enter from the sides of the work. By being cut off by the literal edge of the canvas they have an expansive quality compared with the fully enclosed motifs



of works like Composition, 1954-1955 (Plate 57). The integration of the open rectangle into his own style seems complete by this stage.

A feature of Untitled Painting, 1955 (Plate 58), is the meandering line which enters the picture space at the upper left, and leaves at the lower right. Walters established the position of the line by arranging a piece of string on the surface of the canvas. By using this approach he could adjust and refine the relationship between the line and the rectangles until the composition was resolved to his satisfaction. The procedure allowed the same flexibility as his use of cut-out rectangles in the same work.

He painted this work with fairly thick oil pigment. Unlike the gouaches where the surface is nearly smooth, the oil has visible brushmarks. Admittedly this is more obvious close to the work, but is still noticeable even from the optimum viewing distance, about one and a half metres away. There is a distinct ridge where paint surfaces meet. Consequently there is a greater physicality to the paint surface of the oil, and more awareness of its manufacture. The technical resemblance is closer to the de Stijl artists than to the smooth mechanical surfaces of Herbin or Vasarely. In this respect there is some inconsistency between Walters' gouaches of this period and his oils. Whether this was due to the unsuitability of oil for achieving this kind of surface or not is hard to say. Certainly in his later paintings made in P.V.A. he achieved greater consistency of handling between his gouaches and his larger paintings.

Unfortunately very few oil paintings of the open rectangle survive today. Apart from the work discussed, there is an oil of similar size (Plate 60) dated by the artist to the period 1955-1956.(31) It was the last painting of this series. Like the previous example, it was painted in muted colours and includes a number of coloured rectangles arranged in groups. By this stage Walters had lost interest in the motif and had found alternative ideas

to explore in his new work.

Viewed as a whole, the gouaches and oils based on the open rectangle show how fully Walters was willing to follow through ideas at this period. Considering that he was working full-time during the day his application to painting during these years is remarkable. For the first time he realised an ambition - to generate a series of paintings from a limited range of forms so that all related but no two were the same. Although the open rectangle came originally from the drawings of the schizophrenic Hathaway, Walters developed it and transformed it into something personal.

Until recent years the range of Walters' paintings in the early and mid-1950s has not been well known. The artist contributed to this situation by his reluctance to exhibit work of that period.(32) The open rectangle paintings, in fact, comprise only a small part of Walters' output between 1953-1956. At the same period he began to look again at indigenous sources in Maori and Oceanic art. The work related to these sources is sufficiently important to justify separate discussion in the next chapter.

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Footnotes:Chapter Three

- 1 Schoon to the author, October 23, 1982, p. 2.
- 2 *ibid.* 3 *ibid.* 4 *ibid.*
- 5 I saw some of these copies by Schoon at his house in Home Street, Auckland, in 1965.
- 6 This scrapbook is still in the artist's possession.
- 7 Walters to the author, November 27, 1982.
- 8 *ibid.*
- 9 For Jung and the role of symbols in art, see M.Philipson, Outline of Jungian Aesthetics, Northwestern University Press, 1963; also Carl Jung, Mandala Symbolism, Princeton, 1973; and Carl Jung, Man and His Symbols, New York, 1976.
- 10 Schoon to the author, October 12, 1982, p. 2.
- 11 *ibid.* 12 *ibid.*, p. 3.
- 13 For a general account, see W.S.Rubin Dada and Surrealist Art, New York, 1968, who mentions the interest of Dalí and Breton in the art of the insane. It was viewed as tapping the area of the subconscious in much the same way as primitive and child art could do. André Breton wrote an essay entitled "The Art of the Insane: Freedom to Roam Abroad", in 1948, which refers to studies of the subject by earlier European writers. For a translation see André Breton, Surrealism and Painting, London, 1965, pp. 313-317. Sir Herbert Read (1898-1968) was concerned with the organization of the London Surrealist Exhibition in 1936 and wrote a book on Surrealism the same year. Education Through Art, 1943, is regarded as his most influential book.
- 14 These works were not well received at the time and were only sold in the 1970s.
- 15 Walters to the author, November 11, 1982.
- 16 See J.S.Pierce, Paul Klee and Primitive Art, New York, 1976, p. 142.
- 17 For Gottlieb, see the catalogue, Adolph Gottlieb, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1968.
- 18 Walters to the author, February 24, 1983.
- 19 Walters had read Mondrian's reasons for eliminating all but vertical and horizontal bands from his works in Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art and Other Essays, New York, 1945. For Herbin, see note 23, below.

20 F.Prinzhorn, Artistry of the Mentally Ill, New York, 1972, p. 253.

21 *ibid.*

22 In his early career Herbin was influenced by Cubism. In 1931 he was a founder member of the Abstraction/Création association of artists. For some years he exhibited with the Denise René Gallery in Paris. See R.Massat, Auguste Herbin, Paris, 1953; and L.Degard, Auguste Herbin: Ein Ausschnitt aus seinem Schaffen, Basle, 1955.

23 See Art d'Aujourd Hui, November 1949, No. 4, unpaginated article entitled "Auguste Herbin". The artist still has this copy in his possession.

24 A.Herbin, L'Art Non-Figuratif et Non-Objectif, Paris, 1949, p. 123.

25 *ibid*, p. 106.

26 *ibid*, p. 104. 27 *ibid*, p. 95. 28 *ibid*, p. 94.

29 For Arp, see C.Giedion-Welcher, Jean Arp, London, 1958, and H.Read, Arp, London, 1968. Walters collected reproductions of works by Arp in his scrapbooks. He was especially interested in his wooden reliefs where the procedure of arranging a few cut-out pieces was similar to his own method of composing. Walters also knew of the Bauhaus artists usage of cut-out shapes for design and composition exercises. Another relevant connection here is with the art of Sophie Taeuber-Arp whose work Walters admired. She made compositions using geometric forms whic appear to have been based on the use of cut-out shapes. See G.Schmidtt, S.Taeuber-Arp, Basle, 1948, for reproductions and a discussion of her works.

30 See H.Jaffé, Mondrian, London, 1970, p. 154, for a discussion and illustrations.

31 As the two dates indicate, Walters began the painting in 1955 but finished it the following year. He has not used the open rectangle since that date.

32 See below, pages 206-207 for a discussion of the 1974 shows.

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THE YEARS 1955-1956

During the period 1955-1956 Walters intensified his study of Oceanic art and ethnic material. He did so with no clear programme; rather he studied the works for their own sake. He made regular visits to museums in Wellington and Auckland. He also read literature about Oceanic art and culture at the Alexander Turnbull Library. He recalls spending 'a couple of evenings a week going through ethnological material'.(1)

Publications such as the Bishop Museum Bulletins provided not only valuable visual references but informative writing about the cultural context. Maori art was a continuing interest, but he also looked at Melanesian designs as well as the tattoo patterns of the Marquesan Islanders.(2) He continued to study the Aboriginal art of Australia, and acquired illustrations of Aboriginal designs which he mounted in his scrapbooks for later reference.(3) His enthusiasm was reinforced by occasional meetings with Theo Schoon who was then applying himself wholeheartedly to a study of Classic Maori culture. Walters recollects: "About 1956 he [Schoon] became very interested in Maori Arts and Crafts again and began studying tattoo patterns and rafter patterns. In turn this got me going and I began my own study of Maori design."(4)

Unlike Schoon, though, Walters was not interested in reviving Maori crafts or rediscovering traditional techniques and ways of doing things. Nor did he want to borrow motifs from Oceanic art without understanding how they functioned in the original context. The systems of presentation were of increasing importance to him. At the time he had no clear idea how he could use the material he was studying. Viewed in retrospect, however, his growing knowledge of Oceanic art appears important in the evolution of his own style as a painter. But, he wanted 'to make something personal' not to borrow or depend too heavily on specific sources.(5)

His gouaches of 1955 and 1956 include works based

on motifs from Maori and Aboriginal art (Plates 63-70). Although they are only a small part of his output at that period, they are important for understanding the position he was to adopt in his subsequent work. In these paintings Walters re-introduced motifs from primitive art but worked them into a system of geometric abstraction. The motifs become a starting point for his own compositions where they are transformed to such an extent that they are virtually unrecognisable.

For example, in looking at Untitled Painting, 1955 (Plate 63), who could tell that the vertical motif was derived from a Maori rock art figure? Or that Untitled Painting, 1955 (Plate 66), was based on an Aboriginal rock art design? In both instances the original source has been so transformed that associations with primitive art are not readily apparent. Like his works based on the open rectangle of the schizophrenic, these gouaches are geometric abstract paintings where formal relationships are the major interest.

Nevertheless it would be unwise to dismiss the starting point for these works as unimportant. On his return to New Zealand from Europe Walters had felt the remoteness of the country from the urban centres of the Old World. He felt that abstract painting belonged there naturally whereas in New Zealand it seemed strange and exotic.(6) By drawing on the Oceanic tradition of art Walters was able to find a reference point for abstraction in local culture. He became interested in a synthesis of aspects from the Oceanic tradition and the European. It suggested a way of linking the cultures to which, as a New Zealander, he saw he belonged.

It was not just the motifs of Oceanic art, but also the systems of presentation which interested him. Although Oceanic art lay outside the conventions of easel-painting with which he was concerned, he could find parallels with directions in European abstraction. For example, in Plates 63 and 64, he not only derived the motif from rock art but also the principle of repetition he had

detected in the rock art source from Hanging Rock, near Cave. The rock drawing depicted a row of stylised figures linked together by their outstretched arms. This suggested to him the compositional basis of both gouaches in which the rectangular forms, derived from the rock art figures, are arranged in a row across the picture surface.(7) Obviously Walters has introduced variations in his geometric re-workings of the original motifs, but the relationship to the rock art source goes deeper than adaptation of a motif. In fact, the anonymous quality of the original figures, drawn with no recognisable features or individual characteristics was also influential. It placed the emphasis on the forms and their relations rather than on content. This was Walters' main concern in his gouaches.

In a similar way Untitled Painting, 1955 (Plate 66), uses the pictorial system of an Aboriginal line drawing. Walters studied the way the line convoluted and folded back on itself to create subtle variations on a theme. Walters' close observation of Oceanic art helped him to see how to incorporate stylized figures and similar motifs into compositions with geometric forms such as circles, triangles and chevrons. For example, in decorations on New Guinea shields, examples of which Walters had illustrated in his scrapbooks, figures are adapted to the form of the shields and the decorative borders. The

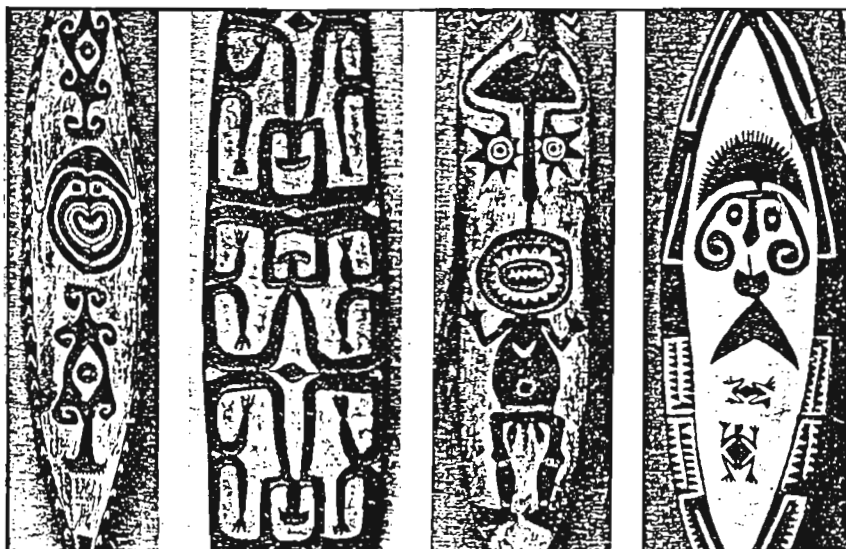


Figure 13. New Guinea Shields.

skilful use of visual counterpoint in these designs did not escape Walters' attention. By studying these works he was able to deepen his understanding of inter-relations between figure and ground. Alternative readings of the imagery was a way of making such compositions rich and fascinating despite the simplicity of their technique. It was now possible for him to see compatibility with the systems of European abstraction he had been studying.

The non-illusionistic quality of Oceanic art impressed him forcibly. Its powerful character derived from simple forms and clear presentation. The forms on the New Guinea shields (figure 13, page 74) like Maori rafter patterns were drawn and painted as two-dimensional images. Each form was registered with even focus and precision. The degree of abstraction and inventiveness was constantly surprising and stimulating for Walters.

By 1955 Walters was able to see Maori art and the art of the Pacific with fresh insight. This explains the dramatic difference between the gouaches of 1955-1956 and his earlier paintings of 1947 inspired by rock art. His new knowledge of geometric abstraction enabled him to transform the source material more radically than before.

In 1947 he was still influenced to some extent by Surrealism. He was attracted to the primitiveness of the rock art, to its naive, seemingly improvised quality. It appeared to have been made without artifice or effort. Like Miro and Klee he at first viewed the rock drawings as the intuitive expressions of minds free from the taint of European culture.

In New Zealand Landscape, 1947 (Plate 29), for example, he imitated the pictographic character of the rock drawings. The pictographic signs are uncomposed and placed over a ground of atmospheric ochres and earth colours. Relationships between the figures and the ground are not considered systematically. There is little concern about the format of the painting and how the imagery relates to it. Each motif remains distinct, particular and quite separate.



For example, the spiral and chevron are quite recognisable and, like the other motifs in the work, are juxtaposed rather than composed relationally.

Comparatively the 1955 gouaches based on the rock art motifs are quite different in character. In the first place they are more geometric than the 1947 paintings. Although the 1955 gouaches were painted free-hand, Walters constructed them out of geometric shapes. such as rectangles, squares and circles. There is a greater sense of order and control. He no longer tried to simulate the apparent improvisation of the rock art, Mondrian's comment 'Primitive art lacks consciousness, the product of centuries of human culture' is relevant here.(8) Besides Walters had come to realise that Oceanic art was governed by systems of order and presentation. The Surrealist view was not a completely accurate one.

Important, too, is the way Walters has made relations between forms, colours and tones the basis of the 1955 gouaches. It is virtually impossible to look at Untitled Painting, 1955 (Plate 63), without being aware of the relationships between the rectangular forms, the variations and interplay between the positive and negative aspects of the imagery, and the way the forms align with the vertical and horizontal axes of the paper. The imagery is consistently sharp and in focus out to the edges. This is not true of the 1947 paintings (Plates 29-31), where the corners are empty and the imagery still tends to centralize.

By restricting himself to a few geometric forms Walters made it easier for the viewer to see the relations between them. The individual forms lose the particularity of the 1947 paintings, such as The Poet (Plate 30). This means that the 1955 works operate on different artistic principles even though they have the common source material in Maori rock art motifs.

The treatment of the figure in The Poet and Untitled Painting, 1956 (Plate 70), provides an instructive comparison. Both works have a stylized figure based on Maori

rock art as the central motif, but the treatment is quite different. In Untitled Painting the figure has been transformed into an abstract shape composed of curves and bands which relate to the geometric forms throughout the composition. Walters has dispensed with the features such as eyes, the head and the arms which make The Poet so recognizable as a figure, even without the title.

There are undoubtedly connections with the ideas of Mondrian in the way he approached his 1955 gouaches. Not that Walters rigidly applied theory to his practice. As a painter, he took what he found useful but was prepared to discard anything he disagreed with.(9) With these reservations it is useful to consider the way his new paintings reflected the writings of Mondrian, familiar to him in English in the essays published as Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art and Other Essays. His interest in Mondrian went back to the 1940s, but continued after his European trip in 1950. In fact, Mondrian was to remain an important role model for Walters. At the time of his 1966 exhibition he used a quotation from Mondrian on the catalogue, indicating his debt to the Dutch master's ideas.

The quotation came from Mondrian's essay Towards the True Vision of Reality and reads: "Art has to determine space as well as form and to create the equivalence of these two factors."(10) In this essay Mondrian explained the stages by which his work evolved towards a style of geometrical abstraction limited to vertical and horizontal bands and areas of flat colour. He also gave the theory behind his approach.

Walters was attracted to Mondrian's belief that abstract painting could achieve a symbolic harmony and reveal universal laws. Ideas of reconciliation and unity, as we have seen, were already present in his works of 1954-1955. His concentration on polarities and on vertical/horizontal dispositions of forms can be related to Mondrian's influence. Undoubtedly Mondrian also helped to shape Walters' view of composition as relational in character,

and restricted to a few geometric forms.

For Mondrian art and life were closely connected. The new plastic art pointed the way to a better quality of life and would itself ultimately be unnecessary. Mondrian wrote: "Art is only a substitute as long as the beauty of life is deficient." (11) He viewed the art of the past as "superfluous to the new spirit and harmful to its progress". (12) By contrast the new plastic art could reveal the laws of nature and point the way. "It is necessary to stress the fact that these laws are more or less hidden behind the superficial aspect of nature. Abstract art is therefore opposed to a natural representation of things. But it is not opposed to nature as is generally thought." (13) To reveal these laws the artist must dispense with "the culture of particular form" which Mondrian believed could reveal "only veiled relations". (14)

To show relations clearly the artist must use "simple and neutral forms, or, ultimately, the free line and pure colour." (15) Mondrian favoured geometric forms for their neutrality: "We may call those (forms) neutral which do not evoke individual feelings or ideas. Geometrical forms being so profound an abstraction of form may be regarded as neutral; and on account of their tension and the purity of their outlines may even be preferred to other neutral forms." (16)

In addition Mondrian thought it was preferable to reduce signs of the artist's manufacture of the painting: "The less obvious the artist's hand is the more objective will the work be. This fact leads to a preference for a more or less mechanical execution or the use of materials employed by industry." (17) This viewpoint, shared by Herbin among others, was not intended to exclude the individual or make art into a mechanical exercise. Mondrian believed strongly in the role played by the individual in the creative process. "Far from ignoring our individual nature, far from losing 'the human note' in the work of art, pure plastic art is the union of the individual with the universal." (18)

By following his theory, Mondrian believed, the artist would be able to focus on essential matters, the relations between neutral forms and pure colours to create what he called "dynamic equilibrium". "The important task of all art today is to destroy the static equilibrium by establishing a dynamic one."(19) To achieve this the painter would concentrate on the relations between formal elements:"Intrinsic reality - dynamic movement - is established in abstract art by the exact determination of structure, of forms and space, in other terms, through composition."(20) Subject-matter and other associations were to be eliminated or greatly reduced.

In his own practice, Mondrian came to reduce the forms in his painting to vertical and horizontal bands. He found these sufficient to express the relationships he wanted with the greatest clarity and economy. His concept of composition involved relational ordering of forms and colour, avoiding symmetry to create a dynamic equilibrium between unequal but equivalent parts.(21)

For Walters Mondrian's theory and practice was influential and inspirational. In 1955 Walters painted several works (Plates 61-62) based on rectangular divisions of the picture surface. In both Study for Blue/Green and Study for Grey/Pink the forms Walters used are neutral and geometric in Mondrian's terms. They are two-dimensional and the paint is applied flat with minimal signs of handling. The paintings depend on the principle of "dynamic equilibrium", a relationship set up between equivalent but unequal forms. The compositions are relational and asymmetrical. These paintings reflect Mondrian's influence clearly enough, even to the elimination of the curved line which Walters liked and normally retained.

Paintings of this type, like so much of his work of the period, did not satisfy him. The influence of European art was too direct, the individual quality lost. That is why he turned to a starting point in the motifs and design systems of Oceanic art. Mondrian's theories suggested ways of modifying them to fit into a geometric type of

abstraction. At the time he did not know how fertile this approach would be. In retrospect it seems a crucial development in the evolution of his personal style.

If we look at the gouaches based on a rock art motif (Plates 63-65), it is easy to see how Walters has made the original figure geometric and neutral in Mondrian's terms. The body becomes a rectangle, the arms and legs linear projections. By drawing his geometric figure with sharp contours and by making it flat Walters was able to fit it in with other geometric forms, such as triangles, squares and the circle. He also made his geometric figure relate to the vertical and horizontal axes of the paper. The figure becomes a neutral form which can be composed relationally with the other forms in the work.

The colours of Untitled Painting, 1955 (Plate 63) are undiluted and pure in Mondrian's sense. For example, Walters used red, blue and yellow, the primaries, with black and white. These are precisely the colours Mondrian advocated and used so often himself. By choosing these colours Walters distanced his work from the primitive art source. The handling of the gouache, while not completely mechanical, is not obtrusive in any way.

With these gouaches Walters achieved something distinctive. The rock art motif, although neutralised and geometric, contributes to the individual quality of the imagery. Undoubtedly, too, the system of presentation in the rock drawing has contributed to the composition of these works. The forms, while composed relationally, are distinct and identifiable. The repetition of similar geometric figures gives a modular aspect to the structure of the paintings. It contributes to the distinctive rhythm or beat in Walters' works. The paintings are not as open in structure as Mondrian's mature works and retain the compartmentalised ordering seen in the open rectangle works of 1954-1955 discussed in the previous chapter. Walters has also made considerable use of interplay between positive and negative readings of his imagery. This depends more on his knowledge and study of Oceanic art than

on any European source. The paintings are distinctive because Walters has been able to bring together ideas from both European abstraction and Oceanic art into a personal style.

While he was painting these works in 1955 Walters had few artists he could turn to for advice or criticism. As always Schoon was an exception. Not until 1974 was he prepared to exhibit a group of works from the period 1955-1956 in one-man shows at Auckland and Wellington.

On the occasion of his Wellington show of gouaches he felt the need to write a short statement explaining his reasons for not having shown them during the mid-1950s. "They were not shown at the time I did them because I considered the artistic climate to be too unsympathetic if not downright hostile to abstraction."(22)

Despite the truth of Walters' statement there had been some growth of abstract painting in Auckland by 1954-1955. In 1954 Colin McCahon organized a small show of abstract works, including sculpture as well as painting, for the Auckland City Art Gallery. With the title Object and Image the show brought together paintings by artists like Milan Mrkusich, Louise Henderson and McCahon himself. (23) Walters was not invited to exhibit. At that time he had not met Mrkusich who was the leading exponent of abstract painting in Auckland. Undoubtedly they would have shared some interests but there was no dialogue between them until the 1970s.(24) Walters had met McCahon but their approach to painting was very different. None of these artists was considering the use of Oceanic art for adaptation or assimilation into their work at that stage.

The painter who shows some affinities with Walters in the period 1952-1955 is Denis Knight Turner. Turner was born in Wanganui in 1924 and had moved to Wellington in 1939.(25) Walters met him there while he was attending classes at the Wellington School of Art. Turner like Walters made his living from commercial art. He also knew Schoon and was persuaded by him to consider ways

of using motifs from Maori art in contemporary paintings. In the early 1950s Turner had shifted to Auckland where he painted gouaches and small oils using designs from Oceanic art. Compared with Walters he was uncommitted and superficial in his approach. He was satisfied with painting motifs onto a background of loose, brushed colour. His work shows little interest in the principles of Oceanic art or any attempt to make something personal of it. According to Schoon:"He [Turner] acquired what he could in a haphazard manner, in a rather simple-minded way."(26)

Denis Knight Turner's own work did not go as far as Walters' use of Maori pictographs in the 1940s. Turner subsequently stopped painting in this style and left the country in the mid-1960s. Obviously Walters had nothing to learn from him. He was useful mainly as someone to talk to and to show his painting when he was visiting Auckland. Essentially Walters was on his own. The small, disparate group of people involved in abstract art at that time was insufficient to make a proper movement. For Walters his evolution as a painter remained personal and isolated.

Maori rock art was only one source Walters used in the mid-1950s. Another was Australian Aboriginal art. Among the clippings in his scrapbooks are several sheets of copies after Aboriginal rock art.(See figure 14, page 83) Some of these copies had been made from rock carvings in South Australia and scaled down considerably from the original sizes. Walters studied these carefully and experimented with using ideas derived from them. He was attracted especially to linear designs in rock carvings from Mount Chambers Gorge. The precise meanings of the original carvings were not known to Walters and were of little importance to him. What he found attractive was the inventive use of pure line independent of obvious narrative meaning.(27)

Walters pencilled in a linear frame around two of the linear motifs he intended to use. Taking these motifs as starting points he made several works, including Untitled

Painting, 1955 (Plate 66). In this painting he combined aspects of several motifs into one image. He made the line continuous and related it to the format of the paper. The fragmentary quality of the original carvings is dispensed with (figures 14 and 15). He used rectangles to frame and focus the image. The drawn frame in the lower right of figure 15, page 84, already indicates this approach. Walters introduced the contrast between the undulating line and the straight edges of the rectangles around and behind it. The rock art motifs provided Walters with the starting point for his own composition into which he introduced his own ideas and his understanding of European abstract painting. (28)

The interest of the painting lies in the movement of the line and the way it folds back on itself to make a series of related but varied shapes. Walters has made use of the ambiguous quality of the line to bond figure

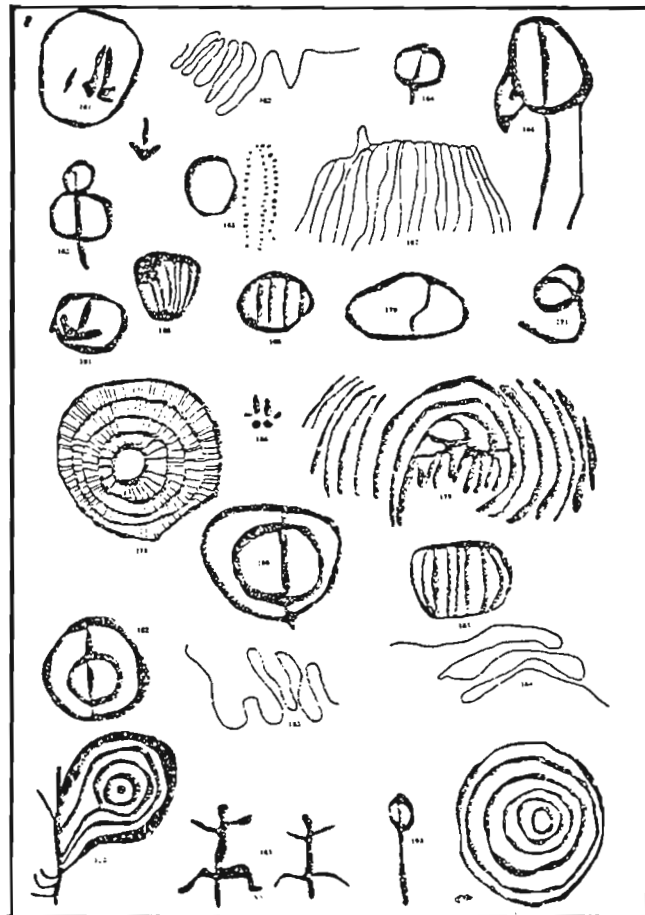


Figure 14. Rock Carvings, Mount Chambers Gorge.



and ground together in a subtle way that adds interest to the image. Again Walters achieved an integration of elements from Oceanic art and European abstraction to create a personal style.

Because of his interest in the Aboriginal linear motifs Walters made a group of works, including some oil paintings, based on them. Untitled Painting, 1955 (Plate 68), an oil on muslin-covered board, is an example. In this case Walters used the line in combination with strong colour. Walters has noted: "One of several works from 1955-57 using similar ingredients. The use of the linear element was partly inspired by Aboriginal rock paintings." (29)

Walters used the undulating line in combination with rectilinear forms so that his interest in the contrast between curving and straight elements continues. In looking at the painting it is not obvious that the artist has based any part of it on a primitive art source. Control and order are paramount. The individual colouring, a strong viridian green and indian red, has no connection with Aboriginal art. But the introduction of four small dots at the right-hand side of the painting probably derives from recollections of the oval incisions found in some Aboriginal rock carvings. (30) Walters uses them here and in related works like Untitled Painting, 1955 (Plate 67) with such assurance and freedom that the source no longer seems obvious or important.

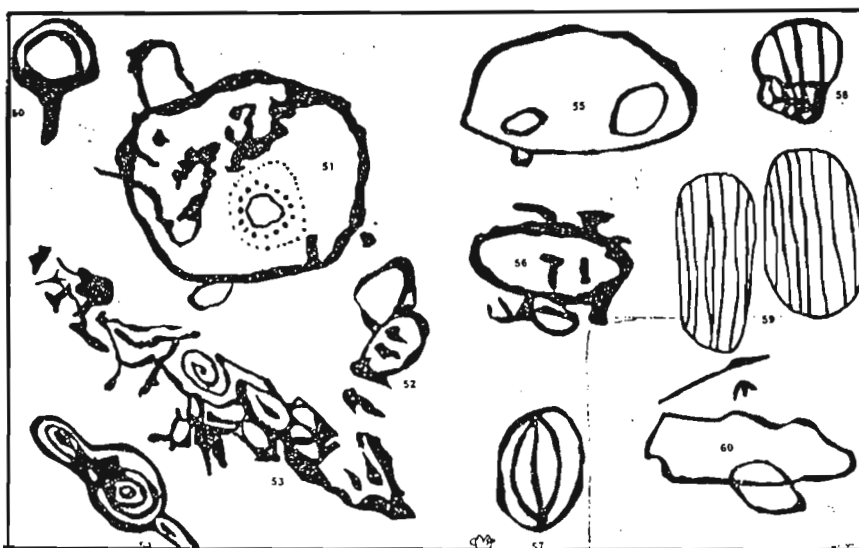


Figure 15. Rock Carvings, Paranamittee North.

During the mid-1950s Walters took an interest in the art of an Italian abstract painter whose work shared some of his concerns. This painter, none of whose works he had seen except in reproduction, was not known in New Zealand at that time. In fact, his reputation was confined in the main to Europe and the United States. Yet the Italian painter Giuseppe Capogrossi played a role in the emergence of Gordon Walters' mature style.

Born in 1899, Capogrossi did not develop his distinctive style of abstraction until 1949.(31) In that year he began the series of paintings on which his current reputation rests. These paintings are restricted to one basic form - a claw or comb shape. From that date all his paintings, drawings and reliefs were related through variations of the one motif.

By different types of composition, systems of construction and order Capogrossi was able to generate an apparently limitless range of individual works. His paintings are constructed out of groupings of the motif arranged usually in asymmetrical and dynamic compositions. The viewer is forced to concentrate on the relations between the motifs. Part of the compositional interest lies in the numerous variations Capogrossi achieved with the basic motif by positive negative interchange, by changes of scale, colour and tone.

Walters detected in Capogrossi's work a formal relationship with Oceanic art. In particular, his own study of Marquesan design led him to believe that Capogrossi had derived something of his approach from the stylized claw of Marquesan tattoo. Whether this was the case or not, Walters felt there was an affinity with the direction his own art was taking. The linking of ideas from Oceanic and European art he was concerned with seemed to be present and viable in what Capogrossi was doing.

Walters first became aware of Capogrossi in the early 1950s. He began collecting reproductions of his work from magazines to paste down in his scrapbooks for future reference. Of the examples he was able to find several

were in black and white, but one or two were in colour. In 1955 he acquired a copy of Michel Seuphor's booklet on Capogrossi to enable him to make a closer study of the Italian's work. To obtain the booklet he had to order it from London which is an indication of the value he attached to Capogrossi at that time.(32)

Capogrossi was important to Walters because his art showed how much scope there was for painting based on a severely restricted range of forms. The systems of construction Capogrossi used were familiar to Walters in part from his study of primitive art. In particular, Capogrossi was a master of the use of positive/negative interchange, creating subtle ambiguities between the claw motif and the ground. He also used the principle of repetition Walters had studied in Oceanic art, introducing the variations necessary to enliven his compositions.

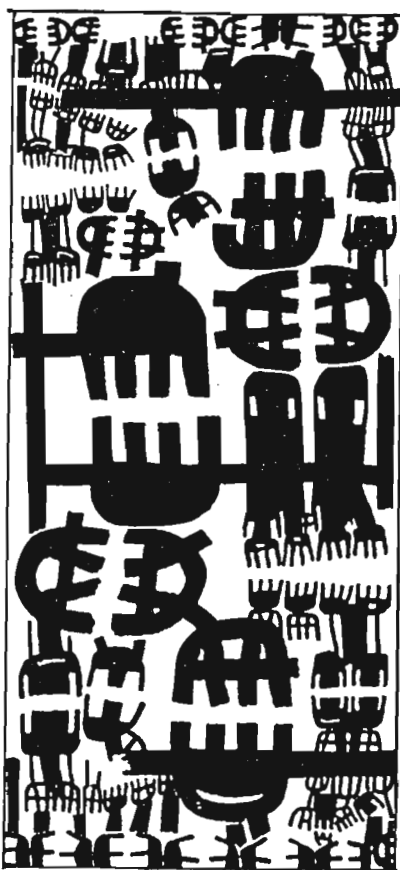


Figure 16. Capogrossi, Section 4, 1953.

Capogrossi also achieved variations on the basic motif by changing the scale, altering the proportions, and by inverting or cropping it. In the process, though, he never allowed its identity to be lost.

Despite his admiration for Capogrossi, Walters did not follow his example slavishly. He had arrived at his own approach independently. In style the two painters are quite distinct despite their shared interests. Capogrossi always worked within looser parameters than those Walters chose. The Italian's paintings have a free, gestural handling, and a spontaneity of execution quite unlike the calculated precision of Walters. The geometric aspect of Walters' mature style is totally missing.

Capogrossi transformed the claw motif to such an extent that its precise origin in Oceanic art becomes unimportant. It functions as his own personal motif. Significantly European writers on his work do not refer to its derivation from primitive art. In much the same way Walters so assimilated the rock art motifs in his paintings of 1955-1956 that no critics noted the source in Maori art until he pointed it out.

In drawing inspiration from Capogrossi Walters was not alone. Schoon shared his enthusiasm and studied the Italian's works closely. So did the Australian painter George Johnson, who made a series of works based on a motif rather like a cog-wheel.(33) In the wider context of art in Australia and New Zealand Capogrossi and his work remained unknown and irrelevant.

Walters' gouaches of 1956-1957 based on Marquesan art are inevitably reminiscent of Capogrossi. Untitled Painting, 1957 (Plate 79), incorporates the distinctive claw-like form found in Marquesan design. The motif possibly derived from the three-fingered claw of the mythical manaia. In this example Walters used traditional colouring, black, white and red.

Unlike Capogrossi, Walters arranged his version of the motif to line up with the vertical and horizontal axes of the support. He stated the main theme in the

upper zone of the gouache, where he drew the motif twice, and centred it on the page. Below, the motif appears again, reversed and cut in half. In a third and lower zone the claw motif appears in a smaller scale aligned vertically and centred. Walters replaced the calligraphic quality of Capogrossi's painting with a precise, geometrical presentation. With this gouache Walters achieved an image of apparent simplicity but of considerable sophistication. Although it has stylistic features recognisable as Walters' own, it is impossible not to be aware of the influence of Capogrossi.

In the period 1955-1956 Walters had effectively established the basis for his own style of painting. He had tested out various approaches, settling on a style of geometric abstraction. He absorbed ideas from a number of European painters, notably Mondrian, Herbin and Vasarely, as well as Capogrossi. Increasingly he turned to the study of Oceanic art looking not only for motifs but also systems of presentation and design which he could integrate into his own style of abstract painting. By 1956 he was ready to evolve his most distinctive series of works, the koru paintings.

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Footnotes:Chapter Four

- 1 Walters to the author, August 29, 1983, p. 1.
- 2 ibid. He had looked at the work by W.G.Handy, L'Art des Iles Marquises, Paris, 1938.
- 3 These include diagrams of rock carvings from sites in South Australia.
- 4 Walters to the author, March 28, 1983, p. 4.
- 5 ibid.
- 6 "They felt right there to me. Where they had felt strange and exotic in N.Z. For the first time I felt the full impact of N.Z.'s insularity and isolation from European culture." Walters to the author, September 24, 1984, notes 2.
- 7 Information supplied by the artist. Walters had numerous small photographs of the rock art to which he could refer. He did not visit the sites again. The figures were similar in appearance to the one reproduced on page 31.
- 8 P.Mondrian, Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art and Other Essays, New York, 1945, p. 18.
- 9 "With regard to Mondrian's theories - he said on one occasion when questioned about the changes to his work occurring in New York which negated to some extent his basic thesis that - 'first comes the work and then the theory follows'. I took this in and was never rigid about theory". Walters to the author, September 24, 1984, note 1.
- 10 Mondrian, op. cit. p. 13.
- 11 ibid, p. 32.
- 12 P.Mondrian, "Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art", Circle, London, 1937, p. 12.
- 13 ibid, p. 47.
- 14 Mondrian, 1945, op. cit. p. 60.
- 15 Mondrian, Circle, op. cit. p. 42.
- 16 ibid.
- 17 ibid, p. 54.
- 18 Mondrian, 1945, op. cit. p. 31.

- 19 Mondrian, Circle, op. cit. p. 42.
- 20 Mondrian, 1945, op. cit. p. 35. 21 *ibid*, p. 20.
- 22 Statement dated October 2, 1974. It was published with the checklist of the exhibition held at the Peter McLeavey Gallery.
- 23 See M.Dunn and P.Vuletic, Milan Mrkusich, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1972, p. 10, for a discussion of this exhibition. See also, G.H.Brown, New Zealand Painting: 1940-1960: Conformity and Dissension, Wellington, 1981, p.54.
- 24 They first met when Walters moved to Auckland in 1971. Unlike Walters, Mrkusich has never shown an interest in primitive art.
- 25 So far there has been minimal research on the career of Denis Knight Turner. For further discussion see Brown, 1981, op. cit. pp. 84-85, and pp. 100-101.
- 26 Schoon to the author, November 1983, p. 1.
- 27 The copies of the South Australian rock carvings are still in Walters' possession. Figures 14 and 15 were taken from his scrapbook.
- 28 See the statement by the artist in the retrospective catalogue, Gordon Walters, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983, p. 34.
- 29 *ibid*.
- 30 In a letter Walters was unable to remember a specific source for the dots. "...the essential idea emerged, if you like, from a play with the elements, in this case a playful investigation of straight lines and wavy lines with the dots providing some accents - if there had been a specific starting point I'm sure I would have remembered it." Walters to the author, August 29, 1983, p. 2.
- 31 For Capogrossi, see G.C.Argan and M.Faglioli, Capogrossi, Rome, 1967, with full bibliography. Walters studied Capogrossi's work in the booklet by M.Seuphor, Capogrossi, Venice, 1954. It was translated into English the following year.
- 32 Walters still has the book. He remembers having lent it to Schoon in the late-1950s.
- 33 For Johnson, see J.Zwimmer, "A Late Argument for Abstraction: George Johnson", Abstract Art in Australia, Melbourne, 1983, pp. 41-71, with bibliography. Johnson was born in New Zealand but shifted to Australia in 1951. The resemblance of his paintings to Capogrossi's was noted by critics like Bernard Smith.
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THE ORIGINS OF THE KORU PAINTINGS

Gordon Walters is known best for his paintings based on a Maori design motif - the koru. It is on these paintings that his reputation as an artist largely depends. Although Walters first exhibited his koru paintings at Auckland in 1966, the origins of the works can be traced back as far as 1956.(1) He was not prepared to exhibit any of the koru paintings until he felt sure he had achieved something resolved and individual. To do this with the koru was no easy task, in part because of its familiarity and association with Maori art, and in part also because of its decorative character. Walters did not want to appear to be plundering ideas from Maori culture, nor did he want overtones of craft ornamentation carrying over into his painting. It took time for him to feel certain that he had transformed the koru sufficiently to have made something personal.

Walters studied the koru motif and its uses in Maori art as part of his general investigation of Oceanic art in the mid-1950s. He was intrigued by its modular role in so many decorative contexts. He saw how the Maoris had varied the few forms to make a wide range of striking designs. The symbolic association of the koru with New Zealand was also important to him. He later wrote:"The koru is my link to my environment and I must have this relationship. I am not a European. If one does not respond in some way to one's environment what is there? Then one admits that reality is somewhere else and one becomes a provincial."(2)

At the start Walters did not know where his study of the koru motif might lead.(3) Initially in looking at the koru closely he was reflecting the interests of Theo Schoon. Walters recalls:"About 1956 he [Theo Schoon] ...began studying tattoo patterns and rafter patterns. In turn this got me going and I began my own study of Maori design."(4)

Schoon made a careful investigation of Maori tattoo



or moko, in particular, where the koru and spiral are the basic design motifs. He read what there was on the subject, especially the writings of Major General H.R. Robley (1840-1930), who published a book on moko in 1896.(5) Robley also made drawings of tattooed heads some of which Schoon could see at the Auckland Institute and Museum. Schoon often discussed the Maori moko with Walters, drawing his attention to the way the koru was used in this art form.

Equally important was the application of the koru to the decorating of gourds (hue), or calabashes, used traditionally by the Maori as drinking vessels. It was in this area that Schoon showed a passionate concern for reviewing what he saw as a lost art. Not satisfied with study, he began the cultivation and planting of gourds so that he could dry and decorate them in the Maori way. For Schoon the revival of a traditional way of using the koru was more important than trying to do anything new with it. Walters sees their approaches as totally distinct:"Our approach to this material was very different. Theo invested considerable energy in growing and decorating his own gourds and in painting kowhaiwhai patterns in a largely traditional way. I was out of sympathy with this approach and felt that he was trying to bring back the past."(6)



Figure 17. T.Schoon, Carved Gourds.

Despite their differences of approach, Walters found that Schoon stimulated him to make his own investigation of the koru and its usage in Maori art. He looked at the koru motif with the benefit of his study of European abstract painting. He was increasingly interested in trying to adapt the motif to a European type of abstract painting. He knew that the Maoris had used the koru in their rafter paintings, or kowhaiwhai, where the motif had been applied to a nearly flat surface. But this was still in the context of applied art.

Walters was also aware of works by Melanesian artists of the Lake Sentani area in North New Guinea where a related form was employed in decoration. Art of Lake Sentani, like that of New Zealand, shows a predilection for rounded and curved forms. Double spirals occur as well as koru-type forms on bowls, gourds and other items.(7) In retrospect, Walters feels that this material played a considerable part in his evolution of his own geometric version of the koru.

His first works using the koru date to 1956. At that time he was still living in Wellington and working at the Government Printing Office. In his free-time he managed to produce works on paper testing out how the koru could be used in a series of paintings. These new works evolved naturally from his previous paintings of 1954-1955 and relate stylistically to them.

As it occurs in Maori art the koru has a completely organic quality. It is made up of a curving stem which terminates in a bulb-like form. Frequently the koru was used in combination with other curvilinear forms, such as the double spiral. Attempts have been made to explain the origin of the koru in natural forms. For example, Sir Peter Buck concluded that its source was in the native fern plants:"...in the curvilinear art which had progressed to the stage of curves and loops, the spiral fronds of ferns seem to be about the only appropriate inspiration that could have been derived from New Zealand flora."(8) An alternative explanation traces the koru to the shape

of the breaking waves of the sea.(9) These suggestions are certainly incorrect since koru-like forms have a long tradition in both Eastern and European art. They do, however, underline the association of the koru with ideas of movement and growth.

In Maori art the koru has a characteristic flowing, spreading nature. Essentially it serves to provide a decorative embellishment to surfaces of gourd or rafter. It lends itself to a wide range of surfaces and situations, as well as to a variety of materials and techniques of execution. Usually the koru is arranged on rafter paintings as a repeating pattern. In traditional usage it is likely that the rafter patterns excluded straight lines. The introduction of mid-ribs and straight cross lines was seen by Augustus Hamilton as a modern invention, when he made his pioneering analysis of twenty-six rafter patterns in 1896.(10) A feature of the rafter pattern designs is that they can extend indefinitely to fit the required area of board. The koru designs are not composed in the sense of a European-type painting. They are viewed as decoration to given surfaces.(11)

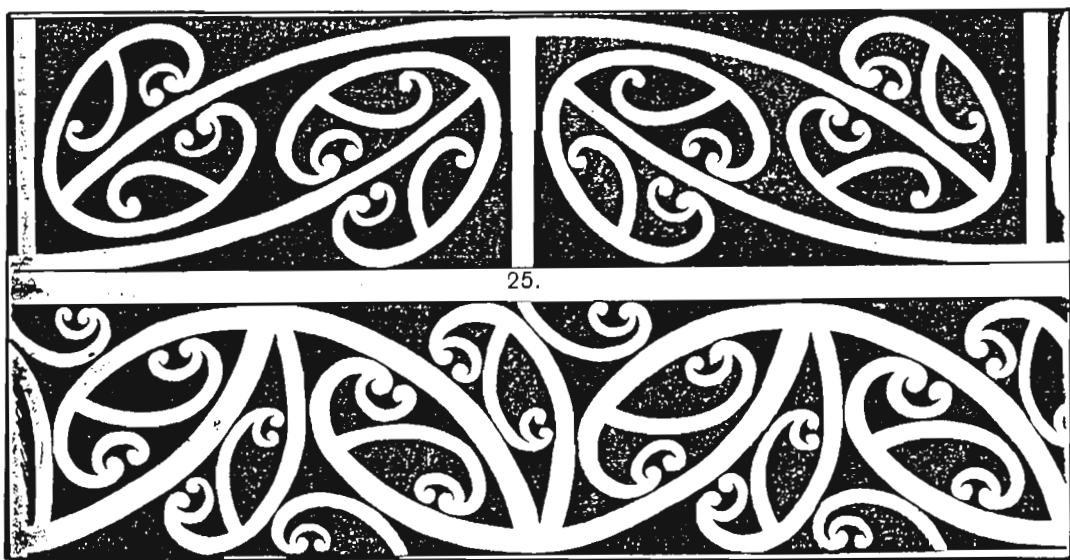


Figure 18. Maori Rafter Patterns.

Within these patterns the koru can be identified easily as a modular element, varied, repeated and extending in varying sizes to whatever extent was required. The forms used in the rafter patterns were deliberately restricted to the koru, supplemented by hand-drawn circles and bands in some instances. Walters was attracted to the rafter patterns because of their limited range of forms and the skilful use of repetition to generate visual interest. He recalls: "What interested me particularly was the principle of repetition which was then such a feature of European abstraction i.e. Capogrossi." (12)

The Maori craftsmen had to use rather crude pigments and materials. (13) In the case of pre-European art, carvings were made with stone tools not conducive to precise effects or exact control. Much of the kowhaiwhai painting was also carried out with extremely limited resources. The patterns were invariably hand-drawn and hand-painted. In many cases the koru motifs show considerable irregularities. Stems do not taper smoothly or consistently. There are, instead, wobbles, changes of direction and occasional flattening out of curves. Because the rafter paintings were not planned out with modern instruments, they do not have the precision and technical finish of European geometric abstraction.

Instead the rafter paintings are quite spontaneous in execution and there was lee-way for accidental effects and modifications. The colours used by the Maori were very limited. Red ochre, white and black are the traditional colours for paintings where the koru form was used. None of these pigments, made as they were originally from natural, organic substances like charcoal or haemitite, had a harsh or consistent colouration. Quite the contrary. The black appears more like a modulated grey, the red ochre like a subdued brown, and the white more like a yellowish-grey than a sparkling clear white. In recent times, however, some rafter paintings have been touched up with commercial house paints giving a more colourful and garish effect. In some cases traditional kowhaiwhai

patterns were restricted to black and white alone.

Undoubtedly Walters, like Schoon, was impressed with the uncontrived vigour of the Maori works. The Maori artists were free to deploy their koru forms in almost any way they liked. Reversals, repetitions, variations of large and small motifs side by side gave a very wide range to the works of the old-time craftsmen. On close study the immense variation and richness of the Maori use of the koru became apparent. And here was a paradox. What superficially was the same was, on closer inspection, varied and different. Schoon found, for example, as Robley had before him, that each facial moko was distinct and differed in some way from all others.(14)

The inventive freedom of the old craftsmen was only possible because of their understanding of the koru designs and of the principles behind them. To his horror Schoon soon found that the present-day Maori artists knew little or nothing of the koru designs and how to construct them. Their contemporary paintings and decorations were stale pieces of craftsmanship copied blindly from older works. The last spark of creativity had gone from such products.

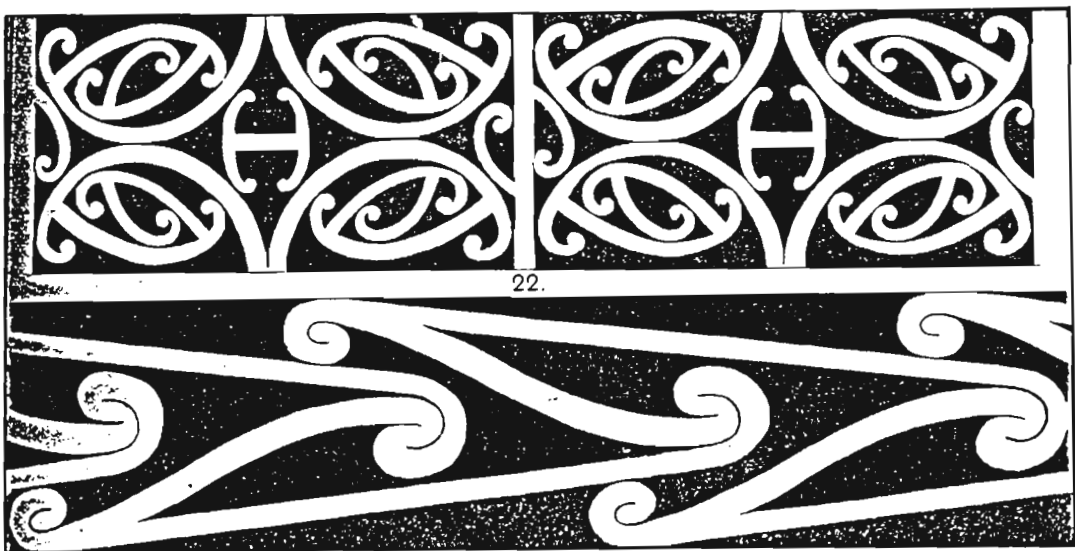


Figure 19. Maori Rafter Patterns.

Schoon himself tried to rectify this situation by discussing the production of new designs with Maori carvers. Finding muted response he determined to apply his ideas to the koru designs he made for his own gourds and decorative panels. However, he modelled his approach very closely on traditional examples so that the derivative aspect is always pronounced.(15)

It was against this background that Walters made his own koru-based studies. He knew that substantial modifications would be necessary to adapt the motif to a modern style of painting. He wanted to distance his works from the original usage in Maori art. In particular he was determined to remove the associations with applied art that Schoon usually retained.

Walters' earliest koru studies are dated to the months October to December 1956.(16) His surviving paintings of this period are small-scale works on paper, made with much the same method as his gouaches of 1954-1955 based on motifs from schizophrenic and primitive art. This background helped him to develop and personalize the koru motif fairly quickly.

Walters made studies in pencil, gouache and ink using the koru motif as his starting point. Study, 1956 (Plate 71), is an example of his beginnings with the new motif. This

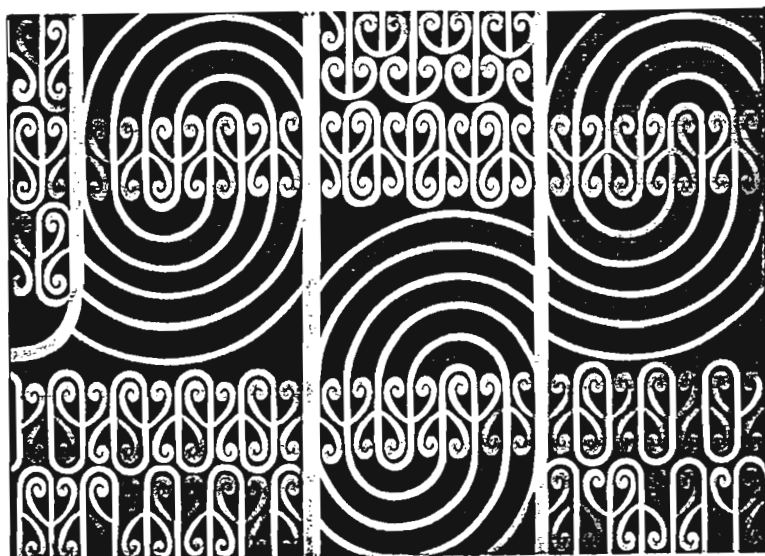


Figure 20. T.Schoon, Decorative Panel.

is a small gouache in red, black and white. Although the colouration derives from traditional Maori art, Walters modified the koru forms and worked them into a new context.

To begin with he arranged the forms to align with the vertical and horizontal axes of the paper. He straightened out the koru stems so that they line up in rows. He also introduced hand-drawn circles as part of the composition. Departing from Maori practice, Walters did not fill all the surface evenly with motifs. Instead he concentrated the koru-derived forms in the upper part of the work. Below is a black rectangle which provides a base to the painting and a contrast with the filled area above. Walters has adjusted the koru motif to a relational composition familiar to him from geometric abstract painting.

Walters arranged the koru-derived motifs in eight rows. This gives an order to the imagery and facilitates an understanding of the relations between the forms. Each of the rows is varied and has a different disposition of the motifs. In Maori kowhaiwhai painting the total decorative effect is more important than the specific relationships between the forms. For Walters the distinctions between the forms and their relative positions are crucial to his composition. It is not a pattern that can be repeated to decorate a panel or gourd. In fact, some of the forms are cropped off at the edges of the image and show the artist's interest in movement rather than in pattern.

Walters painted the koru-derived forms free-hand. None of the small circular motifs is geometrically precise, nor are the koru stems ruled to make them lie perfectly horizontal on the paper. Instead Walters has allowed irregularities in the drawing of the forms without disturbing the order and control of the composition. His technique of painting the koru-derived motifs is not that different at this stage from the traditional Maori one.

Unlike the traditional kowhaiwhai patterns that can face in any direction and still be perfectly legible

Walters' painting has to be seen from one viewpoint. If the paper is turned on its side or placed upside down the composition no longer works. This reveals an obvious but important difference. In Maori art the koru designs were always decorative and functional. The designs were not intended to be isolated from their context and viewed in an art gallery. For the Maori the convention of easel painting was unfamiliar and known only through contact with the European.

Walters was concerned with removing the koru motif from its original context and adapting it to a new and previously unexplored role in European-style painting. Doing this would involve a distancing of the motif from its traditional application in Maori art. Unlike Schoon, Walters felt this was essential to his aims as an artist. He knew that even if substantially altered the koru motif would not be freed entirely from association with the culture that fashioned it. There would always be some residual overtones and association with Maori art. How to achieve the right balance between the old and the new was one of the problems Walters had to face in 1956.

Whereas Schoon was trying to learn old crafts, to rediscover lost techniques and design principles, Walters wanted to make something new and personal. He found the overtones of Maori art and culture too oppressive in Schoon's work and detrimental in effect. Besides Schoon seemed to be involved with a dead tradition. Making something new with the koru motif was no easy task. Study, 1956 (Plate 71) had shown Walters some of the difficulties. At the same time he could see the potential for further development. He was encouraged enough to try out other approaches.

An untitled pencil study, dated October 1956, (Plate 72) marks an important transition in his treatment of the koru motif. In addition to the koru-derived motifs this work includes a spiral - another commonly used motif in Maori art. Again Walters chose a vertical format which he divided into three zones. There is a small one at



the top, a larger one with the koru-derived motifs below that, and a third zone containing the spiral at the bottom.

In this case it is possible to see the pencil construction lines and the use of pencilled notes to suggest colours for a later painted version. Walters did not use a ruler to establish the horizontal and vertical divisions, but again he relates them to the format of the paper. The method of drawing remains relatively free so that there are no geometrically precise forms in the work. It retains a hand-made quality. He measured the divisions between the large lower zone and the ones above by eye alone. He calculated the division between the lower zone and the ones above it to lie precisely in the middle of the image so that it bisects the work exactly. The centre of the spiral also lies exactly on the vertical axis of the work so that there is a feeling of precision and order in the relation of the forms to the format.

Whereas the Maori artists deployed their koru designs on rafters in repeating decorative patterns, Walters created a relational type of composition. He balanced the large spiral with the smaller but more numerous koru-derived motifs above it. He left some areas empty of drawn imagery to give contrast and variety to the work. Walters made a new composition which avoids the known patterns of traditional Maori art. His concern in this study is to transform the koru and adapt it to a European style of abstraction.

Walters' treatment of the koru in Untitled Drawing, (Plate 72) is noteworthy. He used two distinct ways of constructing it. One repeats the treatment seen in Study, 1956 (Plate 71), where he straightened the stem and drew circular appendages to it. In Study the koru-derived form is the positive image and is placed against a light background. The background is secondary in importance to the forms painted on it. Walters' second treatment makes significant changes. He straightened the stem and further simplified it by eliminating the circular appendages. In addition he made use of optical ambiguity to

develop the visual interest of the imagery further. Instead of allowing the koru-derived form to separate from the ground he bonded the two together. He achieved this by drawing the koru bulb at one end of the stem only. This left him space at the other end to draw a bulb termination on the white band transforming it, too, into a koru stem. By doing so he made both black and white forms of equal importance. Both the positive and negative aspects of the image are related formally. This creates an essential ingredient in Walters' transformation of the koru into something personal. It allowed him to depart significantly from the traditional Maori treatment of the motif where figure and ground are always distinct and different.

Looking back to this development Walters recalls: "...I suddenly hit on the positive/negative use of the koru and knew immediately I had something...but it took a long time to realize the potential fully and I tried hard to build on what I had."(17)

But he was dissatisfied with Untitled Drawing (Plate 72) where he felt the reference to Maori art was still "too direct and not properly digested."(18) He decided to explore the potential of his new treatment of the koru motif in a number of gouaches. Ideas were coming quickly and in the gouaches he stored up material for later analysis and reappraisal. He also made some studies in brush and ink testing out ideas in black and white.

Ranui, 1956 (Plate 73), is an example of his ink studies. By restricting himself to black and white he was able to focus on the forms without having to consider the problems of colour. Black and white was very suitable for studying the positive/negative aspects of the imagery because of the clear tonal distinction. In Ranui Walters decided to dispense with zonal divisions and to carry the koru-derived imagery unbroken from top to bottom of the work. Only at the very bottom of the study is there a small area unfilled with motifs. This provides a visual base for the image.

In addition to using the koru-derived forms Walters

employed hand-drawn circles as well as an equilateral triangle. Although the koru-derived forms are still somewhat curving and organic in character, Walters was already considering a more geometric treatment of them. He had not yet standardized the forms as he was later to do. For example, in Ranui he drew two kinds of termination to the koru stems - one is a simple bulb, the other has an upward curve in the stem before the bulb is drawn onto the extended stem. These variations occur in Maori kowhaiwhai patterns, for example in figure 18, page 94. At first Walters used the two kinds of termination in most of his early koru works. Plates 74-77 provide other examples. Later Walters dispensed with the extended bulb termination and used only the simpler form. He came to regard the simpler form as more suitable to his purposes especially once he made the imagery more geometric.

In Ranui Walters introduced a structural type that he was to continue to use in his later koru paintings. He contrasted the centre and sides of the image. He arranged the black terminations in vertical rows at the left and right sides of the drawing. They line up approximately with the edges of the paper and relate the imagery closely to the format. In the centre of the drawing Walters placed the white motifs so that they are enclosed and framed by the black terminations on either side. Instead of lining the white terminations in rows Walters staggered them so that they contrast with the black. Only at one or two points does Walters vary this arrangement. Walters identified the black and white aspects of the drawing with contrasting formal dispositions of the motifs.

Already in the 1956 works Walters was experimenting with different scales for the koru imagery. For example, Untitled Drawing, 1956 (Plate 75), is about the same size as Ranui but has fewer and larger motifs. By using the larger scale Walters was able to reduce the number of motifs in the work. This suggested ways of introducing further variations into works based on this limited range of forms. Untitled Drawing (Plate 75) relates to Ranui

in the way Walters has arranged the black terminations in rows at the sides and contrasted them with the white ones near the centre. In this example, though, he kept the white terminations closer to the vertical axis of the work so that there is a larger gap between the white and black terminations. This contributes to the comparative structural clarity of this work and the sense of order it conveys. Walters recalled this composition when he painted the first major koru painting Te Whiti, in 1964. (Plate 103)

In addition to the pen studies Walters also made some oil paintings using the koru-derived forms. An example, now destroyed but known from a photograph, is Painting, 1955 (Plate 77). It was based closely on the surviving study (Plate 76). Of this work Walters wrote: "One of the first studies using the koru motif; a small oil based on this study has not survived." (19) At this stage Walters did not envisage making large paintings from the koru imagery. Consequently the oil was quite small though it was about a third larger than the study.

For the study Walters used ink and gouache. He brushed the ink on without using a pen at any stage. Colour is confined to areas at the top and bottom of the work only. He painted these coloured bands in gouache using red ochre. He retained the same colour in the oil version.

In Painting, 1956, Walters again contrasted the centre and sides of the image. By arranging the black terminations in an oval around the centre he formed a space where he placed hand-drawn circles and triangles. He arranged the circles and triangles around the oval but left gaps so that there is a less structured feeling than in the surrounding koru-type forms. He arranged the black and white stems in rows so that they alternate up and down the painting. He also stacked the white koru terminations in rows at the sides so that there is a repetitive structure. This is broken at only one point, at the left, by a white circle. Because the koru-derived forms are so tightly arranged they contrast with the geometric motifs

which appear to float on the oval field. Walters varied the tension in the work by holding the koru-derived forms tightly in position but allowing the central motifs greater freedom.

Despite the hand-drawn quality of Painting, 1956 (Plate 77), there was a definite calculation in the way Walters related the imagery to the format. This contributed to the geometric feeling of the work created in part by the use of circles and triangles. Walters disposed the koru stems and terminations symmetrically on either side of the vertical axis. He also placed black circles at the top and bottom of the central oval so that they lie exactly on it. In addition he also marked the horizontal axis by arranging four circles and a triangle in a row along it.

Although the artist created a feeling of geometric order, he did not allow the composition to become totally predictable. Apart from the white circles at the upper left, he also introduced variations into the central motifs. He left large gaps between some of the geometric motifs but not between others. In two places he allowed the extended kind of koru terminations to project into the oval space where they joined the other motifs, creating further variety. He drew three of the triangles facing up and one facing down. By these means he set up interesting relationships between the forms which make the composition lively and varied.

These conscious departures from the expected and predictable were crucial to the formal relationships Walters wanted in his koru-based paintings. Without them the works could resemble a pattern, the very thing he was trying to avoid. This was one of the crucial differences between his treatment of the koru-derived forms and the Maori use of the koru itself. Nevertheless he liked to set up the expectation of symmetry and then depart from it in an unexpected way. This occurred in Painting, 1956 (Plate 77), and was developed further by Walters in his later works.

In both the study and the finished painting (Plates 76-77) Walters drew out the composition in pencil. He then painted the forms free-hand so that the circles are not geometrically true to shape, and the koru-derived stems are not exactly the same width. The technique is far removed from the geometric precision of his later paintings in the koru series. Because the finished painting has not survived it is only possible to speculate on the technical details. But it would have related to the other small oils of 1955-1956 of the non-koru type. The paint would have been applied quite thickly and brushmarks would have been visible. It is unlikely that Walters would have equalled the smoothness and neutrality of execution found in the ink and gouache study. At this stage he was still in the process of achieving a hard-edge style.

In a slightly later composition, dated December 1956, (Plate 78) Walters returned to the traditional koru forms but related them to a geometric structure. He divided the surface horizontally with black bands and centred the koru motifs on the bands. There was some precedent for this approach in kowhaiwhai patterns where mid-ribs were used. See Figure 18, page 94. In this work, though, Walters reduced the number of forms and varied the relations between them. He experimented with filling in one of the koru forms with black so that it takes on a new aspect. In some areas he used a yellow ochre to fill in the spaces between the bands and the korus. The most radical variation occurs in the white form, shaped like the head of a native club, or mere, which is drawn vertically in contrast to the other motifs.

This was one of many experimental drawings in which Walters studied the possibilities of the koru motif. In this case his return to the traditional forms does not seem as successful as his more personal works like Ranui (Plate 73). The appeal of the organic curving line of the traditional koru form was obviously strong. There must have been a certain hesitancy in rejecting something

so intrinsic to his source. In the end, however, the potential of works like Ranui held sway. He knew he had the basis for something personal and the motivation to follow it through over an extended period of time.

These studies and paintings of late 1956 are seminal works in Walters' development as a painter. Looked at in retrospect they are the key to the koru series which was to evolve from them. They show his ability to make something new and distinctive out of a familiar motif drawn from Maori art. He had laid the foundation for his major achievement as a painter. Although he had established his direction he needed time to work out his ideas more fully. He wanted to refine and personalize the koru-derived forms still further before exhibiting his work to the public. That process was to continue over the following ten years.

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Footnotes:Chapter Five

1 Walters first exhibited a group of the koru paintings at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland, in March 1966. He also entered a koru painting in the Hay's Prize, Christchurch, the same year.

2 Walters to the author, November 11, 1983, p. 3.

3 Walters to the author, October 6, 1983, p. 2. He wrote: "In the beginning I did not investigate Maori art with the idea of making paintings. I did not know what the outcome might be."

4 Walters to the author, March 23, 1983, p. 5.

5 See H.G.Robley, Moko, or Maori Tattooing, London, 1896; see also, L.W.Melvin, Robley: Soldier with a Pencil, Tauranga, 1957.

6 Walters to the author, October 15, 1982, p. 4.

7 About this relationship Walters has noted: "Sentani material and use of this motif can be traced right back to the Dongson culture of Sth. east Asia some of which looks pretty close to my use of the motif." Walters to the author, August 29, 1983, p. 2. See also, S.Kooijman, The Art of Lake Sentani, The Museum of Primitive Art, New York, 1959. For general background see, A.Bühler, T.Barrow and C.Mountford, Oceania and Australia: The Art of the South Seas, London, 1962.

8 P.Buck, The Coming of the Maori, Wellington, 1962, p. 328. Buck refers to the koru motif as a scroll. See also p. 319.

9 This association was made by A.Hamilton in his book, The Art Workmanship of the Maori Race in New Zealand, Dunedin, 1896, p. 119.

10 *ibid.* The twenty-six kowhaiwhai patterns are reproduced in a colour insert in front of his chapter on rafter painting.

11 *ibid.* The patterns were stretched and modified to fit the requirements of a given location.

12 Walters to the author, March 23, 1983, p. 5.

13 For a discussion of Maori materials and techniques see Hamilton, *op. cit.*, also T.Barrow, The Decorative Arts of the New Zealand Maori, Wellington, 1964; and G.Pownall, New Zealand Maori Arts and Crafts, Wellington, 1976. No thorough study of the kowhaiwhai has been made in recent times.



14 See Robley, op. cit. p. 91. He wrote:"for no two Maoris were alike in all their markings." For a more recent study of moko see Elaine Brown, "Maori Moko: An Ethnohistorical Reconstruction of New Zealand Tattoo", unpublished Masters thesis, California State University, Chico, 1980. The thesis has an extensive bibliography on the subject.

15 Because Schoon's work has not been properly studied and recorded it is not possible as yet to give a fair appraisal of his achievement. His book, Jade Country, Sydney, 1973, gives the best account of his approach and attitudes to reviving a Maori craft. In his jade designs he certainly was not satisfied with traditional models. Instead he invented new designs some of which used the koru motif. By that stage he had already seen Walters' mature koru paintings and had them as an example.

16 The dates range from October 23 to December 2, 1956.

17 Walters to the author, October 6, 1983, p. 3.

18 *ibid.*

19 See the retrospective catalogue, Gordon Walters, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983, p. 36.

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THE YEARS 1957-1964

After the initial burst of activity in evolving the first koru studies in late 1956, Walters applied himself to further exploring and refining the imagery. Among problems he had to solve were matters of scale and technique. In some of the works he restricted himself to black and white so that he could concentrate on composition and the positive/negative aspects of the forms. At first he retained a hand-drawn quality in his works, but he gradually discarded it in favour of a more geometric method.

It became clear to Walters that in this kind of art the studies on paper were only a starting point. Those first designs would need adjustment and refinement before finished paintings could result. But the modifications could be made at any time, even years later. If, as sometimes happened, there was an interval of years between study and painting there would be stylistic as well as compositional changes between the two. Increasingly Walters came to see a separation between the conception of the work and its execution. As his technique became more mechanical and precise there was no scope for even the slightest changes while he was painting the final work. This meant that the creative process was concentrated on the studies and preliminary drawings. By 1964, when he painted the first major koru works, he required an exact full-scale drawing of the whole composition before he could execute the finished painting. The final drawing was at first made directly onto the support and was covered over by the layers of paint. When he used canvas he made the drawing on paper and transferred it to the support by tracing.

He was initially unable to spend as much time on his painting as he would have liked. The demands of his job increased and put restrictions on his time and energy for painting. He recalls: "The years 57-60 were difficult for me firstly because in early 1957 my job at the printing

dept. became much more demanding. I became chief artist in charge of the art dept. and what had been a relatively straightforward job suddenly became more complicated and took a lot of energy."(1)

Pressure from his job, however, did not prevent him from making a number of significant advances in his handling of the koru-derived forms. Scale and enlargement emerged early on as important issues. By 1957 Walters wanted to make larger works than the inks on paper of the previous year. Using an enlarger he was able to project his studies onto larger pieces of paper and draw over the image. This gave him an idea of their appearance on a larger scale. This procedure revealed problems. It was not going to be a simple matter of mechanical enlargement. The projected images showed up weaknesses in the smaller studies. These changes were passable in commercial art situations but were unacceptable for his planned koru paintings. When enlarged the spacing between the koru-derived forms became critical. The spaces appeared too wide and in need of adjustment. Also, he realized that the width of the koru stems needed to be calculated precisely for the larger scale. He found that the irregularities of the hand-drawn circles and triangles were exaggerated when enlarged and were no longer acceptable.

Concerning these matters Walters has noted:"With my own work I began in 1957 to enlarge the first of my koru ideas up to the size of the large ink drawings I still do (approx. 18 x 24 inches). Enlarging these made their shortcomings more obvious and I worked away at solving the main problems of proportion and scale."(2)

Because the enlargements required substantial modifications they took up to three weeks each to make. This contrasted with the speed and ease of the original ink and gouache studies which he often finished in a day. Already the labour-intensive aspect of painting larger works based on the koru motif was becoming apparent. Walters at first still painted the enlarged works free-hand over a pencil under-drawing to preserve a hand-made and somewhat

improvised look in the completed work. Of necessity the first enlarged koru works were experimental. Walters subsequently revised or destroyed them. However, he did make a photographic record of some of the works to preserve the ideas. From this period on he photographed most of his works for future reference. He used ideas from this period in the mid-1960s when he painted his first series of major paintings based on the koru motif.

Walters soon discovered that oil paint on canvas was unsuitable for making paintings with the koru-derived forms. He needed a flat, opaque medium, preferably one that would dry quickly. Between 1958-1959 he tried using ink brushed onto a smooth gesso-coated hardboard. While the originals of these works have been destroyed, several examples are known through Walters' photographs. (Plates 80, 85, 86 and 87) Measuring on average twenty-four by eighteen inches (609 x 458 mm.) they were about twice the size of his first koru studies of 1956. In these works he could leave the gesso surface to establish the white and paint in only the black. By doing so he eliminated the need for several layers of paint, and was able to bond the imagery closer to the board surface.

The ink paintings were vertical in format; and this verticality was reinforced by the arrangement of the forms in rows down the board. Walters related the forms to the vertical and horizontal axes of the support. This gives a frontality to the imagery. He gave both centre and sides of the works compositional importance..

In Untitled Painting, 1958 (Plate 80), Walters arranged the koru-derived forms in a bilateral composition. He stressed the central axis by stacking rows of koru terminations vertically on either side of it. He also emphasized the sides of the image by arranging vertical rows of koru terminations parallel and close to the literal edge of the support. The work has a simple structure and is nearly symmetrical. But Walters broke the pattern at the lower right by introducing a black circle. To do so he had to shorten the adjacent koru stem. Compared

with his inks of 1956, the koru-derived forms are more standardized and geometric. Walters has reduced the number of different forms in this example. He made the koru stems straighter and did not taper them as he had done before. The stems become more geometric and less organic as a result. He used only the simpler type of koru termination eliminating the extended kind from his composition. His treatment of the bulb termination is also noteworthy. Though still hand-drawn it approximates a circle. These changes show that Walters had considerably revised his approach to the koru imagery since his first studies.

Other ink paintings of this period had a similar method of construction around a central axis. (Plates 85, 86 and 87) The compositional basis of these works, derived from primitive art, is what Walters has described as the binary principle. In his words: "a vertical division with the two sides differing slightly but maintaining a balance." (3)

In Maori art this type of construction occurs in tattoo or moko, in gourd-carving and elsewhere. As Walters knew, it is also the basis of many Maori rock drawings. Many rock art figures have a hollow central area with the image on either side being roughly symmetrical, but always retaining some unpredictable element which breaks the pattern. Stylized drawings of the moko, such as Robley used in his book on the subject, show the face tattoo flattened out and centred on the nose. The two sides of the moko are nearly identical, but vary in detail. See figure 21, page 113.

In his inks of 1958-1959 Walters used this idea as the basis for his compositions. He disposed his forms in a bilateral composition but introduced one or more elements, such as a black or white circle not found on the other side. For example, in Study, 1958-59 (Plate 86), he placed a black circle near the upper right which has no equivalent on the left-hand side of the painting. Discovering this irregularity involves the viewer in studying the relations between the forms. Not only does

the black circle break the symmetry it encourages a closer study of the imagery and the principles behind it.

To some extent, then, the ink paintings of 1958-1959 depend on a design principle which derives, like the koru-based motifs themselves, from primitive art. But Walters has adapted it to the context of easel painting. By working it into a geometric style of abstract painting he transformed it into something new and personal. Other sources in primitive art which contributed to Walters' use of the binary principle of construction included New Guinea masks and ceremonial boards, and the decorative art of the Marquesas.(4)

For Walters the binary principle was of considerable importance. It provided him with the basis for a series of compositions with the koru-derived forms which extended into the 1980s. Its advantages for deployment of the koru motifs became obvious to him. It allowed the contrast between black and white, and between positive and negative to be fully integrated into the structure of the work.



Figure 21. Moko of Te Pehi Kupe.

He could relate the changeover from positive to negative readings of the imagery to the bilateral structure. For example, in Study, 1958-1959 (Plate 85), he was able to have black terminations at the sides contrasting with white ones at the centre or vice versa. He could alternate this disposition while retaining an underlying order.

Walters preferred the vertical format for the koru works. He found that it had a number of advantages. By allowing an almost simultaneous viewing of centre and sides, it intensified the interaction between forms giving the work a more dynamic quality. There was also a totemic aspect to the vertical format, recalling primitive masks, which contributed to the confrontational appearance of his works. He liked clarity, even focus and frontality. The vertical format was suited to the ordering of forms in rows. This order is not progressive, but repetitive and systemic. It enabled him to avoid some of the conventions of relational composition where achieving balance between unequal but equivalent forms is important.

In Study, (Plate 85) as in other works of the period, Walters varied the scale of the koru-derived forms. By varying the width of the koru stem, or band as it has now become, he could achieve changes of scale in the one work. In this work he used three distinct sizes, large, medium and small. But none of the koru bands was exactly the same size as the others. He drew them by hand and allowed variations within certain parameters. The changes of scale introduced variety into the work by allowing contrasts between the large and small forms. By introducing changes of scale Walters created further visual ambiguities in his painting. Although the imagery is flat the smaller forms can appear to recede and the larger ones to advance creating virtual spatial effects. These effects are more pronounced in the related work, Study, 1958-1959 (Plate 86), where the artist also varied the band lengths making the imagery less stable and more ambiguous. These works of 1958-1959 represent important developments in Walters' understanding and handling of

the koru-derived forms. They were to lead on directly to some of his major koru paintings of the 1960s.

While he was making his early koru works, Walters naturally referred to reproductions of paintings by the Italian painter, Capogrossi. He had no intention of copying Capogrossi, but inevitably there were points of contact as well as differences. Walters could see that the Italian in some cases varied the size of the claw motif within one picture, contrasting very large forms with much smaller ones. In Capogrossi this reflected his involvement with the idea of composition focussed on a large centralising form. Walters was not interested in this usage specifically, but was intrigued by the possibilities of employing large motifs in combination with small ones. About 1958 Walters made a group of works based on the Marquesan claw motif which show him coming as close as he ever did to Capogrossi.

Study, 1958 (Plate 82), is an example of these works. Although the Marquesan motif recalls Capogrossi, Walters' treatment of it is different. The work is more symmetrical than most of Capogrossi's compositions, and depends on vertical and horizontal divisions of the surface. In fact Walters arranged the motifs on the binary principle he had used for his koru paintings of the same period. He again divided the image down the centre, leaving a clear division between left and right sides. The work approximates bilateral symmetry but Walters introduced small differences to vary the design. By using a system of order derived from his study of Oceanic art Walters arrived at a deployment of the claw motif which has no exact counterpart in Capogrossi.(5)

In this composition Walters employed large-scale paired claw motifs at the top. Below he painted four rows of small motifs which are no more than a third the size of the large ones above them. Despite this difference of scale the image remains balanced because the small motifs are more numerous and compensate in strength of numbers for their smallness of size. Here the contrast between the large and small motifs recalls Capogrossi



who often used large motifs to give his compositions a central focus. By contrast, Walters has moved his large-scale claw motifs to the upper part of the work and related them closely to the format. His treatment depends on a principle of order and near symmetry derived from his studies of Oceanic art. The totemic aspect is noteworthy. The large paired motifs at the top of the work are like a stylized head or mask, the smaller motifs like the decorative patterns carved or painted on the bodies of figures in much Maori and Oceanic art. Frequently in Maori art the head of a carved figure was made much larger than the body to indicate its symbolic importance. In this work Walters arrived at a personal handling of the Marquesan claw motif, despite the similarities with the art of Capogrossi and his debt to him.

In Study (Plate 82) and related works (Plates 81 and 84) Walters made a number of experiments using the Marquesan motif. In these cases he employed the technique of gouache and pasted paper so that he could have freedom to move motifs around and test out variations of size, direction and scale. He realized that there was further potential in the Marquesan motif but discarded it to concentrate on the koru. Undoubtedly he felt the associations with Capogrossi were too strong, even allowing for their differences of approach. It was with the koru-derived imagery that Walters felt he could make his most significant contribution.

Compared with Capogrossi, even in 1958-1959 Walters was using a less painterly technique. With Capogrossi the painting of the imagery and its invention were not isolated as they were increasingly with Walters. Capogrossi relied on the handling of the brush and paint to give his forms their individual character. He kept a spontaneous aspect to his technique which Walters gradually eliminated. During the late 1950s Walters moved closer to the attitude of Vasarely and the geometric abstractionists so far as technique was concerned. The anonymous flat execution became his goal. As Vasarely observed: "...it is not enough

for art to be abstract in order to be new if it uses the same means as traditional art."(6)

His commercial art training helped Walters to achieve a more precise style of painting. He composed his works on a draughting table where he drew and painted them without recourse to an easel. This involved working close to the painting enabling him to achieve a high degree of control and finish. This working procedure facilitated his transition to a more geometric approach to constructing his new paintings. By 1960 he was moving further away from painterly techniques towards the hard-edge precision of his mature style. But this did not happen at once. It was a gradual development related to his changing conception of the koru-derived forms and the best way of realizing them.

In his ink paintings based on the koru Walters restricted himself to black and white. By doing so he introduced an austerity not found in his gouaches of the period between 1953-1956. Those works revealed him to be a forceful and gifted colourist. The difficulties he encountered in handling the koru-derived forms encouraged him to dispense with colour for a while. By using black and white alone he was free to concentrate on the formal relationships. Also, black and white emphasized the positive and negative aspects of his imagery by giving them maximum tonal contrast. From the very start with studies like Ranui (Plate 73) of 1956, he found black and white was highly suited to the koru motif. Colour seemed of secondary importance.

Walters was aware of precedent in European abstraction for the use of black and white. Vasarely produced a number of black and white works in the mid-1950s and later.(7) See figure 22, page 118. He was in the habit of making one version of a painting in white on black, and another of the same composition in black on white. Capogrossi also made a large number of black and white paintings. As Argan noted:"Gia agli inizi Capogrossi studia la virtuale tensione ottica con quadri in bianco-nero...Bianco e

nero, alfa e omega, i poli opposti dell'estremo contrasto oscurità - visione."(8)

Walters also knew about the black and white works of American painters like Leon Polk Smith and Ellsworth Kelly. Black and white gave a starkness and strength to the koru imagery that Walters liked. However, he regarded black and white as only one way of treating the koru-derived forms. In a group of small gouaches dated 1960 he introduced colour again.

An example of these gouaches is Study for Painting Number Seven, dated December 1960. (Plate 94) Walters painted it on a piece of sketch-book paper in black, blue, red and pale grey. Compositionally it relates to the black and white ink paintings of 1958-1959. It is closest to Study, 1958-1959 (Plate 87). Walters has made a composition that employs bilateral symmetry. He used colour to break the regularity. For example, he separated the koru-derived forms into three groups and colour coded them. The greatest weighting is in the lower group which is red and black. The red, blue and grey each register as a different tone. Accordingly the grey with the lightest tone and the greatest contrast with the black achieves special prominence. By variations of colour and tone

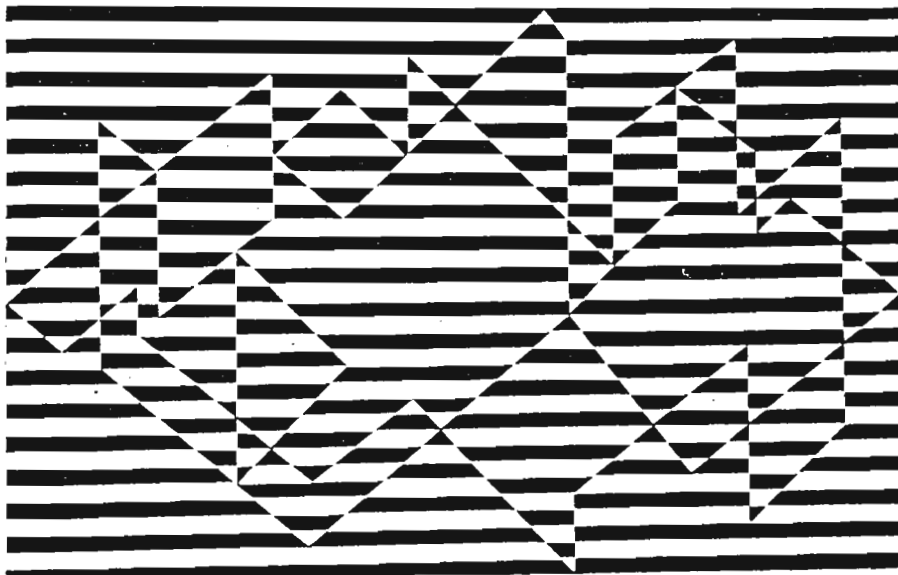


Figure 22. Vasarely, Lucon, 1956.

Walters was able to achieve different effects from those in his black and white ink paintings.

Another gouache of this type, Study, 1960 (Plate 93), was painted in red, blue and black on white paper. Walters pencilled notes in the margin and on the painting itself indicating that it was a working study for a later painting. Like the previous example it is a bilateral composition with the two sides symmetrical. Again he dispensed with the irregularities found in the inks based on the binary principle. The work depends on repetition and alternation of colours for its effect. He organized these colours systematically in rows down the surface in the following sequence: blue, blue, red, red, blue, blue, red, red, blue, blue, and a final band of red to complete the work.

In this gouache Walters added to the regularity of the composition by making all the koru-derived bands the same width, allowing for slight irregularities caused by free-hand painting. He eliminated even the variations of scale found in Study for Painting Number Seven. (Plate 94) But he added a new aspect to the work. At the centre of the gouache the bands extend almost to the sides of the painted area. From that point they taper row by row until at both the top and bottom they are at least a third shorter in length. This produces the effect of recession because the central longer bands appear to be closer than the tapered shorter ones above and below. The repetitive structure and frontality of the imagery tends to correct or cancel this illusion.

With this work it is difficult to escape the resemblance to a mask-like face. Diagrams of Maori facial tattoos present similar features, widening out where the moko is broadest and narrowing to chin and forehead where the design is tapered to fit the smaller area available. See Plate 21, page 113. In this case the rough oval shape made by the koru terminations helps to reinforce the association and make the confrontational impact that much greater. Coloured studies of this type were to provide Walters with a considerable amount of raw material when

he came to make larger paintings a few years later. In fact this was a crucial period in the evolution of ideas for paintings.

Another group of gouaches dated 1960 (Plates 89-91) departs entirely from the compositional types discussed above. Instead of symmetry there is assymetry and relational type composition. In these works Walters allowed the koru bands to enter from two sides of the paper but not to fill it. The bands reach at most half-way across the surface. This produces a contrast between a filled area and an empty one. By making the bands of irregular length, Walters emphasized the seemingly casual placement of the forms and appears to have been exploring a less-structured type of disposition. In these works he also used circles which appear to detach from the bands and float freely on the coloured ground. This comes about because the circles are not held tightly in position by the bands.

These gouaches indicate the dependence of Walters to some extent on the technique of papier collé. As we have seen Walters had used this method in the conception of some of his works from the early 1950s. He had studied Arp's use of the technique and was also aware that Capogrossi had made use of cut-out shapes for his shallow reliefs. (9)

For the koru-derived forms the cut paper technique offered some practical advantages. It meant that the artist could make adjustments of the forms without the time and labour involved in making an entire new drawing or painting. Also, he could change the scale by widening bands or by increasing the diameter of the cut-out circles. It presented a practical method of solving problems which appealed to him. In this period he got into the habit of cutting up studies he was dissatisfied with and using the parts as the basis of new works. This was to become a standard procedure in the evolution of many of his later koru designs.

Of this procedure he has noted:"The dismembering and rearrangement of small studies on paper has always been

for me a basic method of generating new ideas."(10) Moving cut-out forms around on pieces of grey or black paper suggested some of the experimental compositions of this period. In one gouache (Plate 90), now destroyed, Walters tried arranging one group of motifs vertically and another smaller group in his usual horizontal disposition. This involved relational composition, balancing unequal forms with one another to achieve a state of equilibrium. A feature of the work was the contrasting movement between the horizontal and vertical bands which gave tension to the field between them. By allowing the koru terminations to break out of their painted frame Walters increased the dynamic quality of the composition. In this respect it differed considerably from the bilateral works which were internalized and contained by the frame.

By attempting compositions like this Walters avoided taking a rigid approach to the koru works. He was interested in the vertical disposition of motifs for a while and used it in several studies of 1959-1962. In some of these works he employed a variant on the koru forms known to him from kowhaiwhai patterns at the Whare Runanga at Waitangi. For these patterns the Maori artists had eliminated the bulb terminations and reduced the forms to bands with semi-circular projections along one side. See figure 23, page 122. The bands run parallel to one another and then turn inwards. Unlike the koru stems, the bands have straight terminations. As is typical of traditional Maori art, the imagery is ambiguous, but the positive and negative aspects are distinguished in form and importance. The white bands and projections are dominant, the black forms secondary to them. Walters was attracted to the Waitangi patterns because they were simplified and less organic than the koru motif itself. They were also suited to compositions with a vertical arrangement of motifs.(11)

With the Waitangi kowhaiwhai patterns as a starting point Walters made a number of ink drawings and cut paper works. Whatever the medium used for the final work, in all cases Walters used papier collé in the creative process.

All these works have a vertical arrangement of bands touched by circles, or near circular forms. In all cases the artist avoided precise geometric construction. He used eye measurement alone to determine sizes, spacing and numbers of motifs.

Papier Collé, 1960 (Plate 92), shows his handling of these forms. The work is made from white, dark grey and cream paper. On the main sheet of smooth white paper Walters pasted a large rectangular piece of dark grey paper. This effectively defines the area of the image. On this he pasted an arrangement of cut-out forms comprising three vertical bands of cream textured paper, thirteen white circles and three dark grey ones. He made the three bands differing widths and lengths. Although he arranged them vertically none is aligned with the others or with the literal sides of the work. In cutting out the bands Walters produced a ragged edge which is reminiscent of

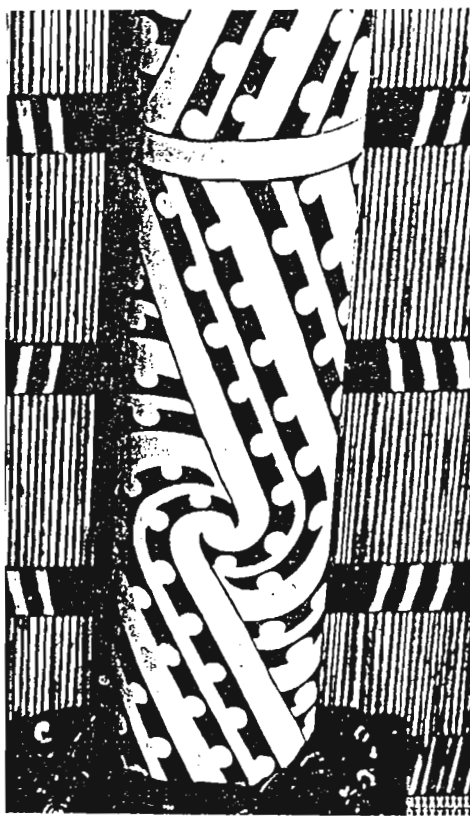


Figure 23. Rafter pattern, Whare Runanga, Waitangi.

of the free-hand painting of the rafter patterns. He made the cut-out circles approximate rather than geometrically exact. He also made the circles of various sizes, no two the same.

In addition to having circles touching bands Walters also allowed several circles to detach and float on the dark ground. He positioned some of the circles so that they just touch the bands and others so they are overlapped by them. These variations are his own invention and are not found in the Waitangi rafter patterns. By introducing dark grey circles, not found at Waitangi, Walters achieved a positive/negative reversal. At these points the imagery becomes ambiguous. It is possible to see the black shapes as bands with circular projections lying in front of the cream bands rather than behind them. This interpretation is not possible in the Waitangi patterns where figure and ground are distinct and separate. As he had done with the koru forms Walters made the relationship between the positive and negative aspects of his imagery closer than in the Maori source. In the process he transformed it into something individual.

Study for Waitara, 1959 (Plate 88), an ink study on paper incorporates similar forms, but in this case there are no free-floating circles. Walters painted the work with a brush establishing a regular alternation of black and white vertical bands across the work. The ink study is tighter in construction than the papier collé discussed above. Walters related the composition more closely to the format by arranging the bands to line up roughly with the vertical axis. This effect is reinforced because the bands run from top to bottom of the paper without breaks. The arrangement is comparable with his koru works with the forms arranged in rows.

In Study for Waitara Walters varied the width of the bands, especially the white ones. He also allowed curves and undulations in the bands so that they do not become mechanical and precise. By using black circular projections as well as white ones, though they are less numerous,



he encouraged the interplay between positive and negative aspects of the imagery also found in Papier Collé. (Plate 92) A feature of both works is that the circular motifs cluster towards the centre of the image. In Study for Waitara this is pronounced and contrasts with the disposition of the black and white bands which alternate evenly across the whole image. By making the white bands and circles at the sides of the work smaller in scale than those near the middle Walters added to the centralising emphasis in the composition. He was not entirely satisfied with the composition and decided to make a modified version.

Black and Yellow, 1963 (Plate 101), was a finished painting based on an earlier study. In it Walters returned to the ideas first used in Study for Waitara but revised his approach. He made the forms more precise and related the imagery more clearly to the format. In this example he returned to bilateral composition, centering the forms on a broad yellow band that bisected the image on the vertical axis. On either side he made the yellow vertical bands progressively narrower as they move away from the centre. This established a clear hierarchy in the white bands. By contrast the black bands became larger at the sides of the work. As he had done with his bilateral koru compositions Walters used the contrast between centre and sides to reinforce the positive/negative aspects of his image. This contrast was carried through to his treatment of the circular motifs as well. Towards the sides the motifs are smaller and largely white on black. At the centre the circles are larger and black on white. Unfortunately this painting was damaged and had to be destroyed. A surviving study preserves the composition.

Other ideas derived from Maori art also attracted his attention for a time. He made several paintings based on the spiral, along with the koru the most familiar of the motifs used by the Maori. He had employed spirals in earlier works, such as the pencil study of 1956 (Plate 72), but now he planned works where the spiral would be the main formal element. Spiral Theme Number One,

1962-1963 (Plates 97 and 99), shows his treatment of the motif. Unfortunately the present whereabouts of the work is unknown. He painted it on hardboard, dividing the work into two zones. The larger zone contains the geometric version of a double spiral, the smaller one has a small white circle centred on a black rectangle. As with the koru, Walters transformed the organic flowing quality of the Maori double spiral into a more geometric configuration. Instead of the form starting from a central point as in a conventional spiral, Walters painted a continuous black band which he aligned horizontally with the board at the centre and allowed to curve back on itself forming rows of evenly spaced bands with curving ends. Instead of containing the spiral inside the painted zone Walters allowed it to expand outwards so that it appears cropped off at the corners. This contributed to the pulsating effect that gives the work its pronounced kinetic quality. The black rectangle provided a compositional contrast and was designed to balance the spiral below achieving an equilibrium. At this stage Walters was unwilling to use a symmetrical structure instead of relational composition. However, it is possible to isolate the spiral from the zone above and see that it would have functioned as a self-contained image.

This painting can be seen in a photograph of the artist's Tinakori Road studio, Wellington, taken in 1963. On the nearby bookshelf is a carved gourd by Theo Schoon where the double spiral was used as a decorative motif. In Schoon's work the spiral retains its traditional Maori treatment as an organic form. The contrast between Schoon's craft-oriented and traditional usage of the spiral and Walters' geometric re-working of it into an abstract painting is striking. While the stimulus from Schoon continued to be useful to Walters the gap between the two artists in their ideas and approach was widening.

By 1963 Walters was ready to take his paintings based on the koru forms a stage further. The period from 1957 had been a difficult but fruitful one for the development

of his art. He had resisted the temptation to rush his paintings quickly onto the market. Instead of showing his work to the general public he had withheld it entirely. Consequently his achievements as a painter were unknown outside a small circle of artists and friends. This situation was soon to change. He was now ready to make a series of larger paintings using ideas he had been working out and storing up since 1956.

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Footnotes:Chapter Six

- 1 Walters to the author, October 10, 1983, p. 4.
  - 2 *ibid*, p. 2.
  - 3 See the retrospective exhibition catalogue, Gordon Walters, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983, p. 39.
  - 4 A good general reference work, later used by Walters, is J.Guiart, The Arts of the South Pacific, London, 1963. He also consulted the original works in local museums.
  - 5 Walters had studied a number of works on Marquesan art including K.von den Steinen, Die Marquesaner und ihr Kunst, Berlin, 1925-28.
  - 6 See Victor Vasarely, Vasarely, Paris, 1965, p. 5.
  - 7 See W.Spies, Victor Vasarely, London, 1971, p. 48 and also p. 77.
  - 8 See G.C.Argan and M.Faglioli, Capogrossi, Rome, 1967, p. 49. Argan refers to American usage; for example the black and white works of Jackson Pollock. Subsequently black and white painting became widespread and was especially associated with optical art. This was commented on by W.Seitz in his catalogue The Responsive Eye, New York, 1965, p. 30.
  - 9 For Capogrossi's reliefs see Argan and Faglioli, *op. cit.* p. 48, and plates 57-60. For a discussion of Cubist use of papier collé see J.Golding, Cubism: A History and an Analysis, 1907-14, Boston, 1968, p. 103 ff. For Arp see H.Read, Arp, London, 1968.
  - 10 See Walters catalogue, *op. cit.* p. 37.
  - 11 The connections were first discussed by P.AE.Hutchings in his article "The Hard-edge Abstractions of Gordon Walters", Ascent, 4, 1969, pp. 9-11. The rafter patterns at Waitangi appear to relate to Augustus Hamilton's type number one, illustrated in his The Art Workmanship of the Maori Race in New Zealand, Dunedin, 1896, between pp. 116 and 117. The Waitangi paintings are twentieth century work and not of high artistic quality.
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THE YEARS 1963-1966

Between 1963 and 1965 Walters developed his koru studies into a series of paintings which he first exhibited at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland, in 1966. Although these paintings were dependent on his earlier work, they do reveal significant changes. Among the most important developments was the use of geometrical construction. Instead of drawing the imagery free-hand as he had done previously, in the first large koru paintings he used a ruler and compass to make the bands and circles precise. With this development came a more neutral and smooth technique of applying the paint, as well as a change to acrylic medium, which gave the imagery a hard-edge quality. These changes intensified the optical effects already present to some extent in the hand-drawn works. Only in 1966 when he had his first show of the koru paintings did Walters emerge publicly as an important contemporary New Zealand artist.

During these years Walters had the support of his wife, Margaret Orbell, who was then a student of Maori language. They were married on May 14, 1963.(1) With her scholarly knowledge of Maori culture his wife was able to deepen and share his interests in Oceanic art. At first they lived in a house off Tinakori Road, Wellington, where Walters had a studio.

At the Tinakori Road studio Walters completed the first large koru painting which he later titled Te Whiti. (Plate 103) This painting is dated 1964 and was a revised version of the composition.(2) Of it Walters has noted: "I cannot remember the exact details...I know I worked on it in 1964 though it may not have been finally completed until early 1965. I did not at that period keep a notebook and details are a bit hazy. I do know, however, that it went through about three versions before it was finished and these were definitely done well before 1965."(3) There was an ink study for the painting, now destroyed.(4)

Te Whiti itself was painted in alkyd enamel on hardboard

and measures 48 x 36 inches. This size was exactly double that of the ink study and was to become a standard one for his new paintings. He found that by using standard sizes he could monitor problems of scale very closely.

The painting has a precise geometric appearance. Walters ruled the horizontal lines and made the width of bands perfectly even. All the black and white bands run parallel with one another providing a regular alternation. There is none of the irregularity found in his earlier koru-type works. He drew the circles with a compass and gave them the same diameter. He used the same diameter for the band terminations which now take on a regular geometric form. Walters left the indentations of the compass at the centre of each circle and termination, not disguising how they were constructed. The variations of shape found in the free-hand paintings gave way to the modular regularity of the new geometric units. He completed the transformation of the koru stem and bulb into a straight band with circular termination. These geometric forms became the basis of his koru paintings.

By making the decision to use a geometric construction for his forms Walters was bringing the findings of previous years to their logical conclusion. Once the koru-derived imagery became geometric it was distanced further from the Maori context. It took on a more modern appearance which was important to Walters who did not want craft and ethnic associations giving an old-fashioned or quaint look to his paintings.

The geometric construction developed naturally out of Walters' habits of work as a commercial artist. Like Vasarely and Mondrian he had no desire for the bohemian artist's atelier.<sup>(5)</sup> Instead his studio was spartan, with white walls and ceiling. He was used to doing much of his drawing at a draughtsman's table where set-square, compass and other mechanical aids were always available.

He had come to realize that the hand-made qualities of his earlier koru studies interfered with the effects he now wanted.<sup>(6)</sup> For maximum impact the forms needed

to be sharp. The free-hand hesitations and uncertainties of registration tended to make the forms appear blurred and less forceful. On a larger scale these aspects would have been exaggerated.

Thus his decision to construct Te Whiti so precisely emerged from the demands of the imagery itself. Inevitably an impersonal technique also imposed itself on the work. Walters was still seeking a method of paint application that would match the precision of his drawing. He knew that it was crucial to keep the paint surface as smooth and neutral as possible if each part of the painting was to be evenly sharp and in focus.(7) His earlier use of gouache or ink had pointed the way but was not suitable for a painting of this size.

His choice of hardboard as a support seems logical enough. His previous experience had proved that it provided a suitable smooth surface with the added advantage that it did not require stretching like canvas. Also, being cheap because it was made from local materials, it did not require a large financial outlay. He could draw out the final composition and construct the circles and terminations on the firm hardboard surface.

For this type of painting an easel was of little use. Walters needed to be able to work across the painted surface rather like a draughtsman at his drawing board. The firm hardboard was useful for supporting his arm as he painted. Here Walters' experience as a commercial artist helped him. He was familiar with the discipline needed in organizing type and illustrations on the page in lay-out work. The disciplines required were much the same for the construction and execution of his new koru paintings.

His choice of paint is also significant. He did not use oil. Instead he chose commercial paint, alkyd enamel, which gave a smooth flat finish. Obviously, as he had found earlier, the properties of oil paint, its richness, translucency and *matière*, were not suitable for this kind of painting. His previous studies in gouache and

ink had proved that a fast-drying paint capable of giving opacity and showing little or no brushwork was desirable.

Water-based P.V.A. paints were then just coming onto the New Zealand market. Walters was one of the first New Zealand painters to dispense with oils and use alternative and modern materials. By doing so he was able to obtain a much better match between his style of painting and his technique. Not all local abstractionists made the change so promptly. Milan Mrkusich, whose style at that period involved gestural paint handling, continued to use oil into the late 1960s.(8) His near contemporary Colin McCahon, though, had made use of commercial paints in his works of the late 1950s.(9)

For Walters it was important to have a fast-drying paint to do away with long waits for the paint to dry between coats. He needed to be able to work across the board with minimal inconvenience and damage to parts already completed. In this kind of painting the ability to apply consecutive thin coats of colour without a build-up of thick paint is crucial. Te Whiti had the smoothest, most uniformly flat surface Walters had achieved up to that point. By waiting until 1964 to make his first large koru paintings Walters obtained a satisfactory match between his technique, his materials and his imagery.

Walters painted Te Whiti in black and white for a number of reasons. One was clarity. As he had found in the ink studies which preceded it, black and white makes the drawing as clear as possible. It also reinforces the polar contrasts of the work, between the curved and straight forms, between the positive and negative readings of the imagery. By eliminating colour, by making the forms geometric and hard-edge, Walters focused attention of the formal relationships which were his main concern in the work.

Walters was aware of the unique look of his new painting in terms of what was being produced in New Zealand at that time. He observed:"...there was no precedent locally for my way of working and often the directness and brutality



of my way of painting scared me. To counter this brutality of method (or so I saw it) I became fanatical in adjusting the relationships between forms, all the time looking for the ultimate in refinement; and this was what took so long and why I could hardly bear to show the work even when I had worked it out in the early 1960s."(10)

Few New Zealand painters can compare with the strength and directness of Walters in his first major koru painting. Again it was Colin McCahon alone who anticipated Walters here in works like Painting, 1958, composed of black and white rectangles.(11) But McCahon's work, though comparable in quality, belongs to a more expressive style of abstraction. The geometric construction of the Walters and its smooth neutral finish had no equivalent in New Zealand painting of that period. Te Whiti was the first hard-edge abstract painting made in New Zealand.

Initially it was an isolated image without a proper context. Walters did not want to exhibit his painting until he had completed more finished works using his geometricised version of the koru motif. He was aware that there was no informed art criticism able to discuss this kind of painting in New Zealand, only journalist reviews. As a result he did not exhibit the work immediately. Instead he waited several years while he painted more works based on the same limited range of forms.

Walters drew his first koru painting with geometric clarity while avoiding an obvious structure based on regular divisions of the surface.(12) Although the vertical axis is a reference point for his composition, and is marked by three white circles, the imagery is not symmetrical. Walters drew bands across the central axis in several places and positioned circles and terminations to left and right of it. The composition goes back to Untitled Drawing, 1956 (Plate 75), but has been revised and tightened up. For example, the spacing between forms has been greatly reduced contributing to the enhanced feeling of order and control.

Walters made use of the literal edges of the support

as he had done in the 1956 ink drawing. But now he was able to stack the band terminations in an exact vertical row so that the relationship between the forms and the edge of the board is made clearer and more emphatic. The polarity between centre and sides and black and white aspects of the imagery was already worked out in the 1956 drawing. Again in Te Whiti Walters has intensified the effect by the precise construction of the forms and by the hard-edge style. Because it is difficult for a person with bifocal vision to focus on centre and sides of the image simultaneously, Walters encourages an eye movement from one to the other. This introduces an element of time into the viewing and understanding of the work.

There are obviously many ways of looking at a work of this type. Walters gave importance to the upper-left corner of the painting by introducing two black circles set back from the edge of the board. They break the left row of koru terminations and, in my view, provide an entry into the composition. Starting there, it is possible to view the imagery from left to right, row by row, in a method made familiar by reading lines of type. The setting back of the two circles from the edge of the board, not found in the 1956 drawing, can be compared with the indentation of a paragraph. By comparison the upper-right corner of the painting appears closed off.(13)

Visually Te Whiti is a relatively stable image. In part this is because Walters has drawn the bands, circles and terminations relatively large and the spaces between forms quite small. Because the black and white interaction is consistent there is no unpredictable or puzzling change-over. Also, the composition appears balanced despite the subtle irregularity of deployment in the white forms. Walters used the principle of compensation. When he moved a motif to the left of centre in one band, he adjusted another to the right elsewhere in the composition to compensate. The fact that he made none of the adjustment in accordance with a totally predictable method gives the painting something of its mystery and capacity to

sustain continued viewing.

Te Whiti is important historically as the first of the series of large koru paintings which followed. Walters finally decided to enter it for the Hay's Prize at Christchurch in 1966.(14) As a result it was not shown at Auckland in March 1966 with his other works in his first one-man show of the koru paintings. The dates of the Hay's Prize and the New Vision show overlapped.(15)

The New Vision exhibition was arranged with some prompting from Theo Schoon who was friendly with the gallery owner, a fellow Dutch artist, Kees Hos.(16) Hos had financed an exhibition of Schoon's own paintings and gourds the previous year. In that instance Hos had also paid for the materials Schoon used for his paintings and prints. Undeterred by the limited success of Schoon's show, Hos wanted to exhibit contemporary New Zealand painting to the public. He was able to subsidize the art gallery operation by teaching printmaking and by selling pottery in the shop below the gallery.(17) For this reason it was not essential for Hos to show works by known or popular artists. He kept overheads low by charging his artists for publicity and for the costs of exhibition openings.

Walters had not held a one-man show since his small exhibition at Wellington in 1949. Seventeen years is a long time between exhibitions. In Walters' case he felt that the market for his kind of painting was limited and that the critical values then current would not support his style of abstraction. He was undoubtedly correct in his assumption. He hoped that the considered and mature character of the koru paintings would now be recognized by at least other artists and professional staff in the major public art galleries.

The New Vision exhibition contained twelve paintings plus four drawings and two gouaches. The majority of the paintings measured forty-eight inches in height and were vertical in format. As catalogued for the show, all the works were identified by numbers; for example, Painting Number One. The numbers did not give the sequence

in which he had painted the works. Instead they identified the works for the show and pointed to the formal concerns they had in common. Numbers helped to focus attention on the abstract nature of his paintings and to avoid associations with subject-matter. At least one painting, Black on White, 1965 (Plate 108), had an alternative title which the artist suppressed for the show.

In his notes for the exhibition catalogue Walters was at pains to stress the formal nature of his art: "my work is an investigation of positive/negative relationships within a deliberately limited range of forms. The forms I use have no descriptive value in themselves and are used solely to demonstrate relations. I believe that dynamic relations are most clearly expressed by the repetition of a few simple elements."(18) By numbering the works Walters was able to reinforce this point. In doing so he was in line with the practice of other New Zealand abstract painters, like Milan Mrkusich, who had followed this policy in their titles of paintings of the late-1950s and early-1960s.(19) Walters made no mention of Maori art or culture in his catalogue notes. In these ways he kept allusions to other than formal concerns to a minimum.(20)

Of the twelve paintings shown at New Vision fewer than half survive. Some were damaged and later destroyed by the artist. Several of the destroyed works, however, are known from photographs. Others were unrecorded. The surviving paintings and photographs of destroyed works are sufficient to indicate the quality and range of work Walters could achieve with the koru-derived forms.

Looking at the works collectively, it is possible to identify a number of distinct sub-groups. There are paintings with narrow bands (Plates 105 and 108), others with wider bands (Plates 107,110,111, 113 and 114), and one, Painting Number Seven, 1965 (Plate 109), with a combination of narrow and broad bands. Walters used black and white for both the narrow band paintings and for the related drawing, Number Fourteen (Plate 106). In

the wider band paintings he normally introduced colour, for example in Painting Number Eight (Plate 110), where he used red ochre as well as black and white. He introduced colour also in Painting Number Seven (Plate 109), where he used both red and blue as well as black and white. In this case the colour and variation of band widths enlivens what is otherwise a bilaterally symmetrical composition. With this exception, all the paintings were composed in a relational way and were asymmetrical; though in several instances Walters eliminated blocks of colour.

All the paintings were executed in P.V.A. medium on hardboard. Taken together, the paintings had a consistent hard-edge quality and an uncompromising emphasis on formal values. It was a unique exhibition and a manifesto of Walters' intentions as a painter. By waiting to refine his new painting style the artist could now realize a long-held ambition - a professional show of abstract paintings hung in a proper gallery space.

For Walters himself the show provided the first chance to see his works collectively on the wall. His studio space was not large enough to provide a comparable setting for his work. After the show he wrote to Kees Hos mentioning this aspect: "In spite of the tensions involved I think I rather enjoyed holding the exhibition and certainly learned a lot from it. It was very instructive to see my work on the wall and here, too, I am a lot clearer as to what constitutes a significant grouping." (21) From photographs of the exhibition installation (Plate 120), it is possible to see that Walters placed the coloured painting Number Seven between the black and white works, Number Nine (Plate 111), and Black on White (Plate 108). Undoubtedly he intended to provide a degree of variation in his hanging of the show by contrasts of this kind. Because all the paintings were of similar size it was crucial to pay attention to presentation if the show was to look impressive on the wall.

All the paintings had wooden beadings along the edges of the hardboard, projecting slightly to protect its

surface.(22) There was no framing of the conventional type designed to set the imagery back in space. Nor was there the unframed look pioneered in New Zealand by Colin McCahon with works like the Northland Panels, 1958 (National Art Gallery, Wellington). The wooden beading defined the perimeter of each work in an understated way. It also helped to internalize the images, most of which were composed with reference to the format and did not imply projections beyond the painted area.

Painting Number Seven (Plate 109) was based on a gouache of 1960. It relates back to some of Walters' first studies using the koru-derived forms in its bilateral composition. As we have seen, this type of structure was often found in primitive art. Normally Walters would break the symmetry in some way, as he did, for example, in Study, 1958-1959 (Plate 86) where there are one or two subtle variations in the composition. In Painting Number Seven Walters varied the image by the introduction of colours and unequal groups of koru-derived forms. Scale changes between the bands, and the resultant changes in the size of the terminations, add a further variation to the work.

In Painting Number Seven the forms are restricted to koru-derived bands and terminations. Walters used no additional geometric units like circles or triangles. By retaining blocks of black between the drawn forms, as well as the red ochre colouring, he recalled Maori kowhaiwhai painting. By comparison works such as Painting Number One (Plate 105) are different in these respects and appear to be more distanced from Maori art influence.

By applying P.V.A acrylic paint with a smooth even consistency Walters was able to achieve a matte finish and to reduce reflections and brushmarks. The paint remains on the surface of the board and separate from it. Taken with the exact geometric construction of the forms, though, the artist achieved a much crisper image than before and a closer bond between his drawing and painting.

Compared with some of the other paintings in the 1966 show, Painting Number Seven is optically stable. The

absence of circles doubtless contributed to this stability. When drawn and painted in Walters' new style circles tended to create spatial ambiguities and optical movement. This occurs, for example, in Black on White, 1965 (Plate 108). Another contributing factor to the stability of Painting Number Seven is the low tonal contrast throughout most of the imagery. Both the red and the blue are strong colours. Taken with the black, they have none of the dramatic tonal contrast of works like Painting Number One (Plate 105) or the earlier Te Whiti. Walters restricted white to one small area of the work, and even there it is more of a grey than a pure white. There is no dazzle or optical shimmer. Number Seven represents a restrained treatment of the koru-derived forms.

This restraint was not typical of all the works. In particular, Painting Number One shows a very different treatment of the imagery.(23) Because it was the only painting bought from the exhibition by a public art gallery it has been exhibited more often and has received more critical attention than any other work from the 1966 show.(24) To some extent this has concerned the artist:

"Painting Number 1 in the ACAG is one that has had, in my opinion, rather too much exposure. For some time now I have wanted to repaint it and make minor adjustments to the spacing etc. I still think the idea a good one but I would like to re-do the work on canvas, tighten it up here and there and change the proportion slightly. I could give it a lot more punch."(25)

The New Vision show derived its range and richness from the fact that it represented some ten years of work with the koru-derived imagery. Although all the finished paintings were executed in 1965, Walters drew on material for the show which he had been accumulating, refining and thinking about for a decade. Works like Painting Number Seven depended on ideas developed in his ink studies of the late-1950s. Painting Number One developed in the 1960s in the years immediately preceding the show. It reveals his receptivity to ideas current in European

abstraction of that period, in particular Op art. His reference in the above quote to 'visual punch' points to his concern with optical sensation in the painting.

To understand the range of Walters' new koru works it is useful to study Painting Number One in more depth. It reveals subtle but distinct changes of emphasis from works like Painting Number Seven, or the horizontal picture, Number Eight (Plate 110). Not only are the bands narrow so that alternation between black and white is quick and insistent, but also at the top and bottom of the painting they are free from koru-derived terminations. The bands run uninterrupted across the board in these parts of the work. There is a more open feeling compared with Numbers Seven, Eight or Nine, for example, where all the imagery is defined and internalized. By eliminating blocks of tone and colour from his painting, he intensified the interaction between the geometric forms. There is no relief from the alternation between black and white, positive and negative. These features contribute to its new feel and relate it to Drawing Number Fourteen (Plate 106) more closely than other works in the show. Black on White (Plate 108) shares some of these features as well.

Paradoxically Painting Number One is at once simple and complex. Walters established an order with the even, measured alternation of the black and white bands from top to bottom of the work. Having established this order, he introduced breaks into the bands. Starting from the top the first break occurs in the fifth black band and follows in the fifth white one. Breaks in the bands continue down the painting through ten black and eight white. Then there is alternation of unbroken black and white bands, six of each, extending to the bottom of the painting.

Because there are more unbroken, alternating bands at the bottom of the image than at the top, there is an effect of a base to the painting. This idea occurs in a lot of Walters' koru-type paintings but is less pronounced here than in earlier works like Te Whiti (Plate



103). When the painting is hung on the wall, this weighting compensates for perspectival recession away from the viewer of the bands in the lower part. Otherwise they could appear smaller than those at the top which are closer to the eye.

It is possible to see the bands metaphorically as bars and the breaks in them as openings. The artist prompts us to look up (or down) the breaks in the bands. By doing so it is possible to visualize a complex motif made up of individual terminations, bands and circles disposed vertically in white to the left of the central axis, and in black to the right of it. Whichever sequence is followed, isolating the black first or vice versa, two strong foci occur. They hold the key to the composition of Painting Number One.

Painting Number One is based on polarities: straight and curved; black and white; positive and negative; left and right; top and bottom. The same principle applies to a number of other works in the exhibition, in particular Drawing Number Fourteen (Plate 106). In that case the imagery is more complex and black and white are drawn together into an oval composition. Black on White (Plate 108) shows the polarities more clearly and links them to the left and right sides of the work.

There is a high degree of calculation in the effect of Painting Number One. As for other works in the show, Walters made studies before arriving at the finished composition. In a pencil study (Plate 104) Walters indicated the bands but concentrated on the two focal areas of the image.(26) This study shows the relationship to the principle of bilateral symmetry underlying the composition. One side of the picture seems to mirror the arrangement of the other. Walters made the central axis the 'magnet' for the eye.(27) From that vantage point we can compare the two sides for redundancy of imagery; but rapidly realize that, though similar, the two sides are different. By using transparent tracing paper Walters could easily check how the imagery looked in reverse. In fact, reversal

is always an option with this kind of work, provided the necessary modifications are made.

In a destroyed study, made in 1963, Walters used the pasted paper technique. As in the tracing paper study he concentrated on the imagery at left and right of the centre. The bands remained a constant frame of reference. What we see here of Walters' working procedure shows him allowing intuition and freedom to play a role at the preliminary stages. In the final painting the immaculate technique and precision disguises from the viewer the processes involved in its manufacture. Important though the preliminary studies are for the artist, he does not see them as art works to be kept and valued in their own right.

The role of perception in viewing Painting Number One is obviously important and has been considered by the artist. At the time it was painted there was considerable interest among artists and theorists in the psychology of perception. Walters requires that we consider how we perceive the imagery by making us conscious of the illusions to which it gives rise. Although the imagery is flat and two-dimensional, it is hard to see the black and white forms this way. Walters uses the changeover between positive and negative as a substitute for spatial depth in other kinds of painting. On the right, the black forms overlap the white and appear to be in front of them. On the left, the reverse happens. Because the spatial effects are perceptual and illusory the ambiguities cannot be reconciled with one another.

Another perceptual effect in Painting Number One is that white forms appear bigger than black, even though they are drawn the same size. This illusion is well known to psychologists of perception and was, of course, familiar to Walters. White appears to expand and to eat into the surrounding black forms. Consequently the left-hand white circles, bands and terminations look larger and nearer than the black ones on the right. Actual measurements made from the painting are as follows: black bands; 2.4, 2.4,

2.5 cm: white bands; 2.5, 2.4, 2.5 cm. The white circle has a diameter that is fractionally smaller than the two black ones to help make them appear the same size. Walters compensated for the illusion that the white forms appear bigger than the black by allowing the black koru-derived motifs at the right to extend through ten bands, whereas the white are limited to eight. He adjusted the spacing between the black circles and black band terminations so that it is consistently narrower than between the white equivalents to help correct the illusion that it is wider.(28)

These effects lead on to the matter of optical movement, of dazzle and shimmer that constitute a part of the work. After looking at Painting Number One for a short while it is normal to experience a range of optical sensations. One such sensation is the appearance of after-images as superimposed colours or points of light. This is especially noticeable around the ends of the curved band terminations and circles. Around the black circles there appear bright auras of light seemingly encircling the shapes and creating a perceptual space in front of the picture plane. Because the auras are optically generated they seem to move and give an effect of surface shimmer.

Although the white forms on the left are comparatively more stable, the white seems to overlay the black creating a blurring effect on the edges of the circle and band terminations and to bridge the areas of black that separate them. Similar optical effects happen between the black and white bands as well so that the whole painted surface is animated in this way. This results in a puzzling and challenging visual experience. On the one hand there is the apparent simplicity and objectivity of the painting, its flatness and neutral execution. On the other there is its perceptual complexity and constant assault on the eye and mind of the viewer. The powerful tensions set up in this way provide part of the impact of the work.

Optical sensations such as shimmer and after-images

of the type discussed above occur not only in Painting Number One, but also in Drawing Number Fourteen and Black on White. Painting Number Nine (Plate 111), now destroyed, in the wide-band format also had some optical movement, though to a lesser extent. In no case was optical sensation the main or only justification for the paintings. The relationships between the limited range of forms were important in the conception of all the works. Furthermore Walters made sure that the forms remained legible despite the optical movement.

Undoubtedly it is significant that Walters' show corresponded in time with the promotion of Op art in the mid-1960s. The influential exhibition called The Responsive Eye was staged at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1965.(29) In the catalogue William Seitz pointed out the emphasis on "purely perceptual effect" aimed at by painters such as Victor Vasarely and Bridget Riley, among others. He also noted the departure from older systems of abstraction.

"This break with the assymetrical, relational composition so typical of most post-painterly abstraction is of supreme importance to perceptual abstraction. Here is an art without relationships - more accurately an art with a different order of relationships. The assymetrical dialogues between large and small, above and below, empty and full, or bright and dull that took place across picture surfaces have been ended either by central placement or uniformity."(30)

For Walters in 1966 formal relationships and assymetrical compositions remained important. Despite his interest in visual ambiguity he was not prepared to pursue optical effects as ends in themselves. Nevertheless it was inevitable that after his 1966 show he would be called New Zealand's Op artist. He was not happy with a label which applied to only some of his work up to that time, and to one aspect of it.(31) Besides he did not like most optical art. The works of Bridget Riley, though, were an exception: "I saw reproductions of her work in the

early 60s in Art International. To me her work is an extension of one aspect of abstraction - perceptual ambiguity - carried to an extreme. I like her work though most purely optical work bores me ... She has never been an influence on my own work."(32)

Unlike Walters, Riley does not limit her work to the same few forms. Each work is designed to generate specific effects and the forms chosen accordingly. In some cases, like Static 3, 1966, the image is nothing more than a square made up of 625 minute ovals laid out on a grid. The work is symmetrical and is not composed relationally like most of Walters' paintings. The arrangement of the oval forms is repetitious and predictable. The optical sensations that the oval forms generate gives the painting its interest.(33) With Walters, even in an extreme work like Painting Number One, the optical effects are only one aspect of the picture. The drawn image has a compositional interest dependent on the relationships between the koru-derived and geometric forms. With Riley the image is subordinate to the perceptual effects of light, movement or colour they induce in the spectator.(34)

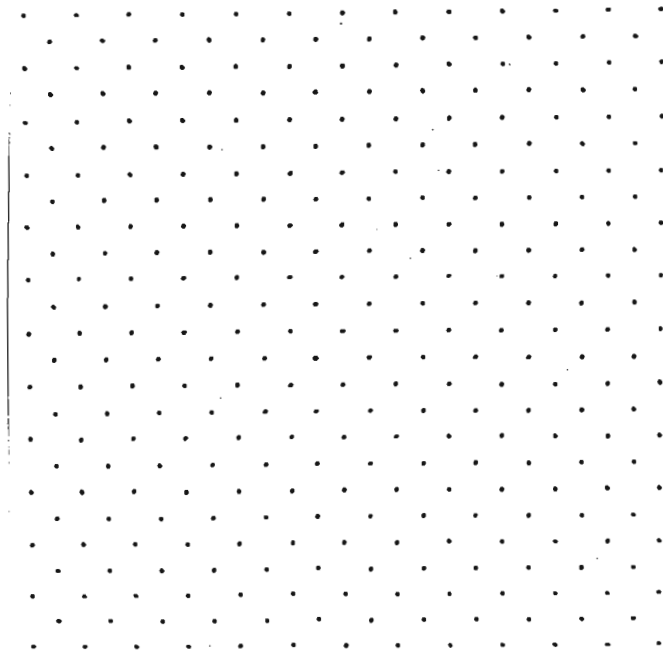


Figure 24. B.Riley, Static 3, 1966.

For Riley and other major Op artists like Vasarely the compositional and formal concerns of Walters were of little value. Vasarely frequently used grid structures and repetition of a single geometric form to generate perceptual effects of after-images and movement. Mathematical order or systematic reduction or enlargement of the forms superseded relational composition in much Op art. The perceptual effects were accessible to any spectator whether knowledgeable about painting or not. A problem with Op art, as Walters knew, was that the effects were limited and soon lost their novelty. This undoubtedly contributed to the hostility the Op art movement aroused. To achieve the most forceful perceptual effects Op artists often eliminated other elements from their works giving them an extreme quality.

Walters did not want to be associated too closely with Op art for these reasons. He was interested in visual ambiguity and had been since his study of Maori rock art in the 1940s. Also, he was not averse to perceptual effects of movement, auras, colour and after-images being produced by his painting provided they did not negate the relational and formal aspects of his art. He well knew that Mondrian's late paintings generated optical movement at the intersection of the vertical and horizontal bands.(35) Such effects in no way undermined the compositional values of Mondrian's art. For Walters, as for Mondrian and other geometric abstractionists, opticality was an available option.

The origins of Walters' interest in opticality in European art extended back to the 1940s. In particular he had been attracted to the prints of Josef Albers: "I also had studied the perceptual ambiguity in the works of Josef Albers which I greatly admired, especially the prints he did in the 1940s which were occasionally reproduced at the time. Although not a conscious influence they must have had an effect on my work. I liked his precision and the exactitude of relationships in his work."(36) As Albers' prints of the Graphic Tectonic

series of 1942 show, optical effects are not incompatible with relational composition.

An example of Albers' prints is To Monte Alban. It is a precise hard-edge image made up of ruled vertical and horizontal lines. These are arranged to allow ambiguous readings. For example, the white rectangles at upper left and lower right can be seen as either the flat tops of pyramid-like structures or openings at the end of corridors. Albers used repetition of a few forms and alternation of black and white, as well as ambiguity, to give optical movement to his composition. The alternation of bands in Walters' Painting Number One has more than an echo of this type of work. As in the Walters' painting, Albers created two foci in his print, one on either side of the central axis, which contribute to the perceptual ambiguity of the image.

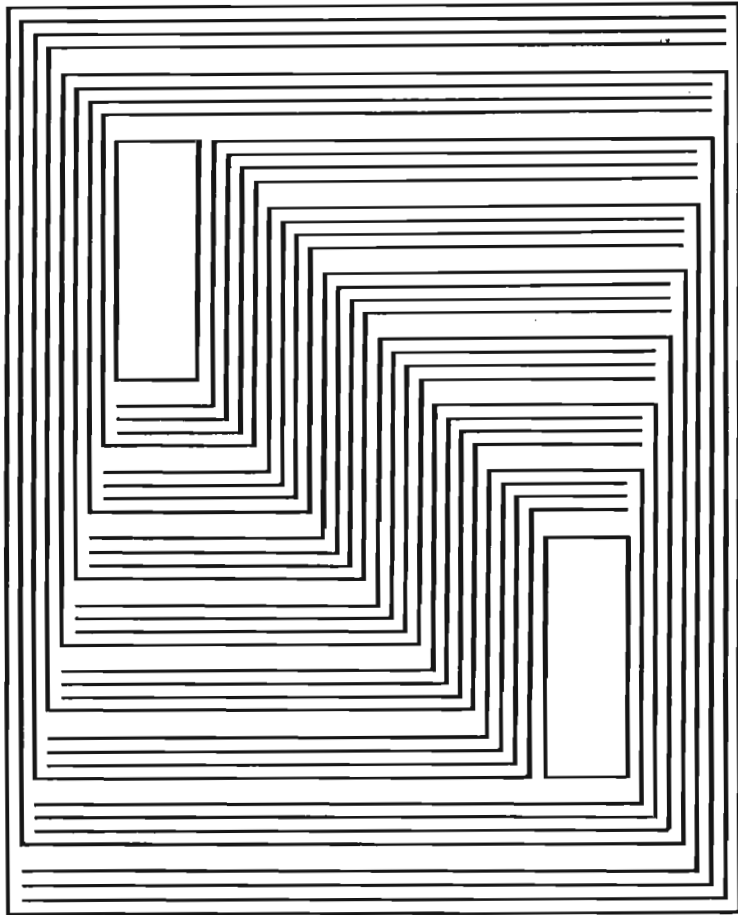


Figure 25. J.Albers, To Monte Alban, 1942.

The optical aspects of Walters' 1965 paintings obviously had a diversity of sources. It would be incorrect to see them as arising solely from the Op art paintings of the 1960s. Instead, like the leading Op artists, Walters derived his interest in optical effects and perceptual ambiguity from his study of European geometric abstraction. He had no desire to be seen as an Op artist with few concerns other than with generating optical effects of a sensational type. He made sure that the range of works in his 1966 show was varied sufficiently to make the opticality of a few paintings appear as one of a number of different and valid approaches to the koru-derived forms.

Painting Number Eight, 1965 (Plate 110), for example, is a different type of work. It is composed of fewer forms than the optical Painting Number One, and they are of a larger scale, making them more legible. In this example Walters used the traditional colours of Maori art, black, white and red ochre. There are blocks of colour which contrast with the koru-derived forms and contribute to the stability of the imagery. There is no optical dazzle.

In this work Walters used a familiar compositional type balancing the koru forms on the right-hand side of the painting with an uncluttered expanse of black on the left which has one white circle at its exact centre. This creates the dynamic equilibrium typical of asymmetrical relational composition. It also continued an investigation by the artist into using stacked terminations, in vertical rows, to relate to and reinforce the format of the work.

This compositional arrangement also was found in the destroyed Painting, 1965 (Plate 114), where the central axis of the work was reinforced by two rows of stacked terminations. In this example Walters approximated bilateral symmetry, but introduced several variations to break it. These variations were found at the sides, not at the centre of the image. Walters again made the central axis an important reference point for his composition.



At the centre the rows of koru-derived terminations were regular and unbroken by circles. By contrast, at the sides they were varied by the introduction of circles - two on the left and three on the right. It was a development of a compositional type he had used in the hand-drawn works of 1958 (Plate 80). But he made the vertical axis more prominent by eliminating the black bands drawn across it in his earlier paintings. By doing so he made the relationships between centre and sides of the imagery more dynamic. He also emphasized the geometrical basis of the work.

Painting Number Nine, 1965 (Plate 111), now destroyed, but known through photographs, was among the most individual achievements of Walters in the first koru paintings. Although relational in composition, it had a precise geometric structure as well as geometric forms. The viewer is aware of controls in its construction, such as the division of the surface into measured, even units - bands, circles, terminations and triangles. Walters again emphasized the format of the work by stacking rows of koru-derived terminations at the literal edges of the work and by marking the central axis.

By using not only a limited range of forms, like Mondrian or Capogrossi, but by making them geometric modules arranged according to a strict geometric division of the board, Walters achieved an exactitude of relationships which operated within tight parameters. The exact dovetailing of positive and negative aspects of the imagery was more precise and controlled than in Capogrossi. Even the geometric compositions of Sophie Taeuber-Arp from the 1930s do not have the machine-like precision of relationships found in a work like Painting Number Nine. This not to deny the role played by intuition in its conception.

To a limited degree the vocabulary of cybernetics can be applied to a Walters painting of this kind.(37) He uses a formal language made up of recognizable characters rather like an alphabet. These include the band with circular termination, the band with terminations at each

end (variable lengths), the circle, and the band alone, without terminations. Various extensions of these characters can occur, for example the triangles used in Painting Number Nine. All the characters Walters uses are recognizable and easy to identify in his paintings.

By arranging these characters in rows, Walters evokes the system of serial operation in which characters are transmitted in channels in sequence, and are processed sequentially. In cybernetics such characters can be transmitted simultaneously in different channels and processed together, rather as Walters' forms can be viewed more than one row at once. The time taken to view the rows of characters Walters uses and to compare them with one another relates to the principle of duration in cybernetics. The meaning cannot be grasped until enough information has been transmitted. This proposes a short-term memory facility needed to retain a limited number of characters for purposes of evaluation.

As in cybernetics the concept of complexity must be taken into account. It is not enough to define the individual parts of a system or work in sequence. There is more information contained in the statement as a whole. In their collective, relational aspect Walters' paintings achieve the complexity of meaning which makes them so rich visually. The pictorial alphabet the artist used in works like Painting Number Nine is made up of elementary characters, but they allow a wide range of expression.

As with artificial languages, it is possible to apply 'rules' to the construction and deployment of the forms in the koru paintings. For example, in Painting Number Nine, 'rules' of composition could be devised as follows: all bands must be of the same width; black bands must alternate with white ones; all circles must have the same diameter; black circles, terminations and triangles must lie near the central vertical axis. The viewer arrives at these 'rules' only after studying the painting and checking their validity against the imagery. Unwritten 'rules' of this type might apply to one work only; though groups

of compositionally related works might share some of them in common. Discovering such 'rules' can be like breaking a code, and change the way we see the painting.

It is also possible to compare koru paintings like Number Nine with music. The identifiable characters or forms of the paintings recall musical notation and their relationships musical structures. In particular, the time element required in viewing a work of this type, and the need to hold sequences in memory, is analogous to the processes involved in listening to music. The changes of emphasis in the work, from the measured alternation to the sharp juxtaposition of the apices of triangles near the centre of the image, can be related to changes in tempo and rhythm in music. Walters was certainly aware of the interest abstract painters from Kandinsky and Mondrian to the present had taken in establishing parallels between the abstract nature of music and non-figurative painting.(38) He did not actively pursue such analogies, however, and has made no serious study of musical composition. He has not shared the musical interests of some New Zealand painters, for example Milan Mrkusich.

Despite the remarkable quality of Walters' new koru paintings they received little attention at the time. After the show response remained sluggish, and his Auckland dealer Kees Hos noted in a letter the following year: "Your work is being shown here as the occasion demands and never fails to draw much attention. This is in particular the case with your painting in the City Art Gallery, which turned out to be one of the strongest in their collection. I hope that this will act as a consolation for the rather slow sales response to the rest of your work here in Auckland."(39)

The 1966 New Vision show was not a sales success.(40) The main sale of Painting Number One (Plate 105) to the Auckland City Art Gallery may have been dictated by the topicality of Op art at that time and the desire of the Director to represent the movement in the permanent collection. Op art had little following in New Zealand. Only the artist

Ray Thorburn in his Modular Series of 1970 did any serious work in this area and that was some years after Walters.(41)

Subsequently the Auckland City Art Gallery bought very little work by Walters. There was no interest in extending representation of the koru paintings. By comparison purchases of works by other artists, like Mrkusich and McCahon, were more regular. Sales were not a true guide to the artistic success of the show which was considerable. A beginning had been made. From that time on Walters became better-known and a more visible force in contemporary New Zealand art.

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Footnotes:Chapter Seven

1 Margaret Orbell is now a Senior Lecturer in Maori Studies at Canterbury University. Gordon Walters was introduced to her by Theo Schoon.

2 Although the painting has the title Te Whiti and the date 1964 inscribed on the verso it is difficult to know exactly when Walters gave it this title. When first exhibited at Christchurch in 1966 it had the title Painting, 1965. See Hay's Prize catalogue, Christchurch, 1966, number 154. The painting was later damaged and was restored in New York for the present owners.

3 Walters to the author, November 11, 1982, p. 2.

4 However, Walters made a revised version of the study which is now in the same collection as the painting itself.

5 Vasarely wrote:"The Bohemian artist belongs to the past, as does anything that is hasty and improvised." V.Vasarely, Vasarely, Paris, 1965, p. 5. Bridget Riley is another artist whose studio was spartan in appearance: "The studio-workshop is white throughout, including chairs and the enormous working table, no nuance of colour escapes notice in these surroundings." Maurice de Saumarez, Bridget Riley, London, 1970, p. 89.

6 Walters knew Mondrian's attitude towards gesture as expressed in his writings:"The less obvious the artist's hand the more objective will the work be. This fact leads to a more or less mechanical execution or to the employment of materials produced by industry." Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art and Other Essays, New York, 1945, p. 62. Vasarely recommended:"The gradual and total rejection of traditional easel painting, the customary techniques, the visible stroke, and the lingering remnants of figurat-ion." See Gaston Diehl, Vasarely, Lugano, 1972, p. 29.

7 Vasarely's approach was to reduce the paint density: "The matter of traditional painting is banished, only the natural texture of the support or a certain thickness of the coloured paste survives. The tints are strong and few, rigorously flat, mat (luminous) or brilliant (deep)." V.Vasarely, Vasarely, Paris, 1965, p. 32.

8 See M.Dunn and P.Vuletic, Milan Mrkusich, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1972. Mrkusich started to use acrylic paints about 1968, particularly with his corner paintings.

9 McCahon began using commercial house paints such as Dulux and Monocoat in 1958. Among the first of these works was The Northland Panels, now in the National Art Gallery, Wellington. See the catalogue, Colin McCahon:A Survey Exhibition, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1972, pp. 25 and 26.

10 Walters to the author, May 1, 1978, p. 3.

11 See McCahon catalogue, op. cit. p. 24.

12 Although Walters measured the band widths, he positioned the koru-derived forms not according to a mathematical system but intuitively.

13 Walters' experience as a lay-out artist may well have influenced his approach in compositions of this kind. Certainly this kind of entry-point and line by line reading of the forms is not found in the works of Mondrian or Herbin.

14 See footnote 2 above for further details. The painting did not win a prize and attracted no critical attention in the local papers.

15 The catalogue for the Hay's Prize gives the dates March 8 to March 18 for the exhibition of works. The New Vision show catalogue gives the dates March 7 to March 12 for Walters' Auckland exhibition.

16 Kees Hos was born in the Hague in 1916. He studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts at the Hague. After emigrating to Auckland he taught at the Elam School of Art from 1960 to 1961. While owner of the New Vision Gallery he was active as a print-maker. In later years he was appointed Principal of the Gippsland Institute for Advanced Education. He now lives in Australia.

17 Thanks to the generosity of Kees Hos I had access to the New Vision files on Walters, consisting of business correspondence. This provided details of sales made, prices paid and names of clients. The files were then housed at the gallery. My information about the gallery and the Schoon show also derives from conversation with Hos and Schoon.

18 Gordon Walters exhibition catalogue, 1966, p. 1.

19 In a letter to the author Walters noted: "Numbering work was an American practice. In the early 1950s Pollock especially did it. I gave it up because one can never remember a number for long." Walters to the author, August 10, 1978, p. 2.

20 His failure to mention Maori art remains somewhat puzzling. But it is significant that there was no reference to his derivation of forms from Maori art in the short reviews of the show either. That indicates the degree of his success in assimilating the koru motif into his own style.

21 Walters to Hos, April, 15, 1966. The letter was written from Number 5, Rutland Flats, Wellington. New Vision Gallery, Walters' files.

22 The beading was also intended to give protection to the vulnerable sides of the hardboard support.

23 For an earlier discussion of the work see M.Dunn, "Gordon Walters' Painting Number One", Auckland City Art Gallery Quarterly, nos. 66-67, 1978, pp. 2-9. See also the brief reference by Ernst Gombrich in The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Art, Oxford, 1979, p. 133.

24 It was purchased for the Auckland City Art Gallery with the agreement of the Director, Gil Docking. The price paid was forty guineas.

25 Walters to Ronald Brownson, October 28, 1977. Auckland City Art Gallery Walters' file.

26 See Gombrich, op. cit., pp. 133-134. As Gombrich notes the use of two foci of this kind is common in decorative art and is useful for triggering off ambiguous readings of the imagery.

27 *ibid*, p. 126 seq.

28 Walters has commented on this: "Yes, the optical effect is for the white to spread somewhat and on the circles or bulbs if you like I do compensate for this in this manner - the whole work is outlined first and then filled in, so actually the black circles are larger by the thickness of the line used, thus the white circle reads from inside of the line, the black from the outside; the line being incorporated in the filling in both cases." Walters to the author, August 10, 1978.

29 See also Cyril Barrett, Op Art, London, 1970, with bibliography on the movement. Walters knew of Vasarely's optical work from magazine reproductions.

30 W.Seitz, The Responsive Eye, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1965, p. 8.

31 Richard Melville also made the connection with Op art in 1968: "The same motif [koru] is put to systematic use in Gordon Walters' restrained and beautifully executed contribution to Op painting." See "A Stranger in New Zealand", Architectural Review, December 1968, p. 445.

32 Walters to the author, November 28, 1983, p. 4.

33 As Barrett has observed: "Once the optical effects have begun to work, the precise location of the picture in physical space may become difficult to determine." See Barrett, op. cit., p. 103. He notes that time is a factor in the perception of most optical effects.

34 Bridget Riley refers to the physical impact of Op art as follows: "...the eye is attacked and 'devoured'"

34 cont. by the paintings...We have to submit to the attack in the way in which we have to learn to enjoy a cold shower bath." See Sausmarez op. cit., p. 30. Walters' catalogue statement finds parallels in remarks by Soto: "The elements I use, I use solely to realize an abstract world of pure relations, which has a different existence from the world of things." See Barrett, op. cit., p. 68.

35 Barrett is one of the writers who have found resemblances between Mondrian and Op art. Another is Barbara Rose: "Certainly the bright optical flicker of Mondrian's Boogie-Woogie paintings must have inspired more than one Op artist." See Barbara Rose, "Mondrian in New York", Artforum, 1971, p. 63. But, as Jaffé points out, Mondrian did not consciously produce these effects, or at least saw them as 'secondary phenomena'. Mondrian did not discuss them in his writings on art. See Hans Jaffé, Piet Mondrian, London, 1970, p. 198.

36 Walters to the author, October 1984.

37 See G.Gilbertson.(translator) Encyclopedia of Cybernetics, New York, 1968, for a fuller discussion of terminology. The basis of Computer Art rests on the idea that the artist's work consists in designing a programming system, a method of generating a repertory of forms. Walters' work does involve systems and processes not unlike those needed in devising a computer programme. But Walters would always place high store on the image and not allow process to substitute for it. For further reading see, A.Moles, Information Theory and Esthetic Perception, London, 1966; H.Ronge, Kunst und Kybernetik, Cologne, 1968; also, the catalogue Cybernetic Serendipity, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1968.

38 Kandinsky in his essay Concerning the Spiritual in Art, 1912, discussed the relationship between colour and musical tones. Op art has often been related to music. See J.Lancaster, Introducing Op Art, London, 1973, pp. 9-10. For a full discussion of the connections between music and formal art see Gombrich, op. cit., pp. 215-305, with bibliography.

39 Hos to Walters, May 24, 1967. New Vision Gallery, Walters' files.

40 Total sales amounted to £94.10. After gallery expenses and commission Walters received £43.12. These details are derived from the New Vision files.

41 See Lancaster, op. cit., pp. 11-12, for a short discussion of Thorburn's Modular Series. Like most Op art, Thorburn's work had none of the relational compositional features of Walters' painting.

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THE YEARS 1966-1968

The 1966 New Vision show marks a turning-point in Walters' career. After a long period of recluse-like existence he now felt ready to promote his paintings by exhibitions and entry in art competitions.(1) He was taking a short break from his regular employment in the months after the show with a view to assessing his painting and the direction it should follow. He wrote to Kees Hos:"Before I look for new employment I am having a break of three months (half of it is already gone) to develop new work. I can afford this luxury and indeed feel I am entitled to it as my last job lasted eleven years! So at the moment I am enjoying myself."(2)

Walters discussed plans with Hos for another show at New Vision, projected for 1967. He had sold Te Whiti, his Hay's Prize painting, to a private collector. His satisfaction with the painting is evident in lines to Hos written in September 1966:"It is one of my best and I should like to include it in my next show."(3) He felt things were going well and was keen to arrange his next show. In June 1967 he wrote to Hos:"I feel it is to be to my advantage to show again as soon as possible. It is of little importance to me at this stage whether the sales response to my showing is good or bad. The important thing I feel is to eliminate too great a time between painting and showing. This has the effect of freeing me to go on developing new things."(4)

Despite this change of outlook about exhibiting, his next Auckland show did not take place until 1968. Walters' severe standards of self-criticism kept surfacing and holding him in check. In September 1967 he wrote to Hos:"It is essential that I produce absolutely the best I am capable of for my next show at the New Vision and this means that I must continue to work slowly and be able to make a strong selection over a period of time."(5)

In Wellington his work also began to attract some attention. A young dealer, Peter McLeavey, started operating

his business from his flat about 1966. He saw the merits of Walters' works right from the start. Thus began a relationship between artist and dealer that was gradually to play a major role in the projection and sale of Walters' painting in the capital.(6) Although it was not until 1969 that McLeavey held a one-man show of Walters' work in Wellington, he made a number of sales before that date. About October 1967 Walters wrote to Hos asking to have some of his paintings sent back to Wellington. He took the opportunity to point out the increased attention his painting now received in Wellington: "There is a growing interest in my work and I should like to have these paintings to show."(7)

Hos, detecting a note of dissatisfaction about poor sales at New Vision, replied: "We have also noted the growing interest in your work, and in all modesty I believe that we have contributed to it. One of your drawings was bought recently by a staff member of the City Art Gallery, and as soon as payment is completed we shall send you our cheque."(8) Gradually Walters' work was becoming better known. By 1969 he was included in a new history of New Zealand painting written by Gordon Brown and Hamish Keith. He was represented by his first major koru picture, Te Whiti.(9)

These years were also crucial ones for the evolution of Walters as a painter. His paintings of 1966 were executed in P.V.A. on hardboard. Painting Number One, 1966, (Plate 116) and Painting Number Two, 1966 (Plate 117), are both vertical works measuring 48 by 36 inches - a standard size for the paintings of the previous year. These two works were included in a touring show New Zealand Painting, organized by the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1966.(10) Because of this show both works obtained a high degree of visibility for the artist. Painting Number One, 1966, was later bought by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. It became Walters' first sale to an Australian public collection.

Painting Number One, 1966, is assymetrical. Walters

avoided the central vertical axis and referred the imagery to the left and right sides of the board. The koru-derived forms extend to the right-hand perimeter of the work. By contrast at the left there is a block of black which runs uninterrupted from top to bottom of the board. Walters achieved a balance between the filled and empty areas as he had done with some of the paintings of the previous year.

The alternating black and white bands are in an unbroken sequence down the board providing a regular even beat. As with some of his 1965 koru paintings, black and white readings of the band terminations and circles are polarized and restricted to the left and right sides of the image. By stacking the terminations in vertical rows Walters emphasized the geometric structure of his composition and related it closely to the format. At the right-hand side the vertical row of black terminations and circles reinforces and draws support from the literal edge of the board.

In Painting Number One, 1966, the artist deliberately emphasized the sides of the painting and gave them the prominence usually accorded to the centre in traditional easel painting. This indicates the literal nature of his type of painting. The shape of the board and its proportions become crucial references. With this type of painting it is possible for the artist to emphasize any section of the work and still retain a sense of measure and control. The extreme perimeters of the board, at the sides, top and bottom, all offer the artist composition-al scope.

In Painting Number One, 1966, Walters conceived the literal edge of the board as a restraint. The right-hand row of band terminations and circles is contained by the edge as if a barrier had been erected at this position. In this case Walters used the edge to control and hold his imagery in check. The reverse procedure was also an option for him. For example, in Painting, 1965, (Plate 107), he painted an inner boundary which repeats and

echoes the literal edges of the support. This enabled him to give a feeling of dynamic movement to some of the bands by allowing them to break through the barrier. It becomes a foil for achieving a new range of effects with his limited range of forms.

It is interesting to note that Walters also considered the lower-right corner of the image in Painting Number One, 1966 (Plate 116). He emphasized the corner by a concentration of three black circles and three black terminations in that area. This gave a visual weight to the corner which contributes to the stability of the image as a whole.

Walters' thinking about the relationship between his imagery and the support led on directly to Painting Number Two, 1966 (Plate 117), a work of unexpected reduction. He emptied the central area of the board of drawn imagery entirely. The koru-derived forms are restricted to the top and bottom of the board reinforcing the literal edges of the support, rather like a frieze. The complexity of many of his earlier koru paintings has given way to a much simpler image.

Despite the reduction, however, the work still links with his earlier koru paintings. The polarities so typical of many paintings in the New Vision show are still there, but are more simply stated and related to the format. Blocks of colour free from drawn imagery also occurred earlier, for example in Te Whiti (Plate 103), but did assume the field-like appearance of the black in this painting. Yet it remains a relational-type composition despite its reductive style. Mondrian himself had made compositions with large empty spaces near the centre contrasted with small areas of colour near the perimeter.

In Painting Number Two, 1966, Walters used maximum tonal contrast at the top of the image between black and white. By comparison the base of the work appears more subdued tonally because Walters painted the koru-derived forms in blue and black with reduced tonal contrast. By reversing the positive/negative relationship between

top and bottom of the painting Walters avoided a symmetrical effect. Also, the corners, each of which contains one termination, are contrasted on the vertical axis but linked on the diagonal. This was one of the most extreme compositions Walters had attempted up to that time.

In this image he eliminated the anthropomorphic allusions of some of his 1965 paintings. By shifting the blue to the lower part of the composition he avoided the landscape overtones that might otherwise have crept into the work. He minimized references to traditional Maori art by the prominence he gave to the central black area which approximates a square though it is not an exact geometric configuration. By using the blue colour he avoided traditional Maori art colours also helping to downplay this association. His avoidance of circles in this work contributed to its optical stability as did the reductive use of bands and terminations.

From a technical viewpoint Painting Number Two, 1966, indicates the advantages and disadvantages of using the hardboard support. On the one hand there is the firm even surface making it easy to draw out the composition and providing a surface for the artist to rest his arm on as he painted. A photograph taken by Margaret Orbell (Plate 112) shows Walters at work. He preferred to paint with the board laid flat, like a draughtsman at his table. This helped him to achieve a smooth finish and a hard-edge quality.

On the negative side hardboard also had its limitations. At that time the material came in a limited range of sizes so that joins were necessary if he wanted to attempt larger works. Also, when he applied the undercoat it tended to lie obviously on top of the support making it difficult to avoid a separation between image and surface. In Painting Number Two, in fact, it is possible to see brushmarks coming through the black which derive from the undercoat. Any corrections or changes made while the work was in progress produced a slight thickening of the paint surface and aggravated this problem. Because

Walters aimed for an immaculate finish any blemish was noticeable and detracted from the desired effect. Hardboard also proved to be highly vulnerable to scuffing, scratching and even perforation. Once damage of this type had been caused it was almost impossible to restore or salvage the work. Any repairs, unless carried out by a trained art conservator, tended to be visible and detrimental to the work.

By 1966 these problems were readily apparent to the artist. Some of his koru paintings from the 1966 show were damaged and had to be destroyed.(11) Considering how laborious they were to produce this was a severe problem which he had to solve. During 1966 he started to consider making his paintings larger, a move that would lead him to a different, more flexible support. In 1967 he began using canvas again.

His new larger paintings on canvas were a feature of the 1968 New Vision show where it was possible for viewers to see older paintings on hardboard next to newer works on canvas.(12) The 1968 exhibition contained eleven paintings and three works on paper. Three of the paintings were on the new large format, 60 x 45 inches.(13) The earlier hardboard paintings remained on the 48 x 36 inch size. In this show Walters exhibited several works which were not based on the koru at all. The works ranged in date from 1966 to 1967.

In the catalogue for the 1968 show Walters included some notes about the paintings:"The new paintings continue the exploration of motif begun with the works shown in my previous exhibition. In the present series of paintings there are changes of emphasis. In some, the system of parallel stripes establishes a field for tensions of the repeated motif. In others, the units tend to form a geometric structure. In all of them, feeling alone dictates the placing of the motif. Some of the works depart from the figure / ground ambiguity to present a curved motif which also functions as a module. Here again form becomes meaningful because of repetition,

activating the plane of the canvas with a sense of movement."(14)

These comments do not actually indicate the full range of developments that had occurred in the work. The change to a canvas support, the increased size of the new paintings, the use of different compositional types and the introduction of Maori titles for the works are all passed over in silence. Walters' reference to "parallel stripes" establishing a field for tensions does apply to works like Hiwi, 1966 (Plate 118), from the show, but could equally apply to paintings from the 1966 exhibition, for example, Painting Number One, 1965 (Plate 105).

In fact, Hiwi is a useful example to show the continuity of approach between the works of 1965 and 1966. It is vertical in format and is divided from top to bottom by alternating black and white bands of equal width. There are twenty-four black bands and twenty-three white. The image begins at the top with a black band and finishes at the bottom with one. This acts, as in Painting Number One, 1965, to contain the image and to counteract the tendency of white to dominate over black. In Hiwi Walters retained the narrow bands of black and white associated with the optical aspect of his art.

In Hiwi the black and white bands are not disrupted at the top, bottom or sides of the image. In addition there are six unbroken bands of black and white at top and bottom, and eight running through the centre of the image. A white band runs through the horizontal axis of the painting dividing it into two halves, an upper and lower that provide a parallel to the left and right polarities of Painting Number One, 1965.

The upper half of Hiwi contains the larger grouping of band terminations and two circles, one in black and one in white. The koru-derived motifs run through fourteen bands. In the lower half, the grouping occupies eleven bands and is simpler as well as smaller. There is only one circle, in black. Walters has disposed the terminations across the central area of the painting in such a way

that black and white forms occur on both the left and right sides of the imagery. There is not the separation that occurs in Painting Number One, 1965. By doing this Walters helped to tie the imagery together and to avoid spatial warping of the surface. The shifts of tension are made across the bands from one side to the next and without a specific geometric relationship with the centre of the board. Walters deliberately set up a contrast between the ordered measure of the alternating bands and the staggered, irregular positioning of the band terminations.

What happens is that Hiwi is a more complex image to grasp than Painting Number One, 1965. There is also the additional relationship set up between the upper and lower parts of the work. While the upper is dominant, the lower part helps to generate a surface tension across the bands in the centre which divides the image into two parts. Despite this, the painting does appear to break up into two self-sufficient parts. If the work is divided at the central white band, we have two horizontal paintings neither of which implies or demands the other.

In some of the works in the 1968 show Walters emphasized diagonal movement. This was a departure for him in the koru paintings where he had previously avoided the diagonal to a large extent to concentrate on vertical and horizontal movements. Admittedly the diagonal was implicit in some earlier compositions but was tightly controlled and restricted to one or two bands. An untitled drawing of 1967, owned by Gordon Brown, is one of the few surviving works of this type from the show.<sup>(15)</sup> In the Brown drawing Walters drew the koru-derived terminations so that they are set back by the width of the circular termination in each row as they descend down the paper. To further emphasize the diagonal movement, he kept a separation between black and white groupings of the motif. To compensate for the strong diagonal movement on the right-hand side of the painting, he used blocks of black at the top and bottom of the drawing to provide stability. When



he returned to using the diagonal in his later works he chose to use a horizontal format. In the 1967 drawing the relationship between image and format appears somewhat arbitrary.

The major paintings of the 1968 show were Tahi (Plate 122) and Tawa, later renamed Kahukura (Plate 130).(16) Tahi, dated 1967, measures 60 x 45 inches and was the first koru painting on the new large size. Walters now felt confident of handling the koru-derived forms on this bigger format. But he was unwilling to lose the human scale in his paintings. He did not feel the need to go up to a monumental scale, even though it is obvious that the imagery could stand this enlargement. Another factor restricting the size of his work was his method of painting. If the painting became larger than the new size Walters would have found it difficult to reach across the surface and paint the central areas without having special equipment. His studio space at that time also made it difficult to stretch, paint and store works larger than this size. He could not accomodate bigger paintings, much less hang them on the wall and get back far enough to calculate their effect. Even so, this new size meant that his works were now as large as any being painted in New Zealand, except for the largest paintings of Colin McCahon. For example, the works of Milan Mrkusich painted in the late 1960s are usually smaller than Walters' new large koru works. Of course Walters used this size only for his most important canvases and continued to paint works of a smaller scale as well.(17)

Walters' choice of a canvas support for the new large works was dictated by dissatisfaction with hardboard for reasons discussed above and also from a desire to integrate the image and support more successfully. By using a full-scale drawing and tracing it through to the canvas he eliminated the need to construct the circles and terminations on the canvas.(18) Thin coats of acrylic paint applied so that they soaked into the weave of the canvas helped to keep a consistent surface throughout

light and dark areas of the painting. Instead of brushmarks and build-ups of paint around circles and band terminations, Walters could now achieve a completely even paint surface. The paint also took on an even matte finish with none of the shininess that was present in areas of works like Hiwi. In Tahi these changes of technique helped Walters to produce a painting where the imagery and the technique achieved a perfect match.

Preparations for Tahi were intensive, Walters has noted: "Two studies for this work survive (PVA on paper). This was the first all-over work utilising a random disposition of elements. It represents the main development following my first use of the motif in the 1966 exhibition." (19) One of the studies dated June 1967 shows the image worked out in complete detail on a sheet of paper measuring twenty-four inches high. At this stage Walters had already chosen the colours and tonal range of the painting. The study is in two colours, a strong pale yellow and black. The yellow Walters chose is completely unlike any colour used in Maori art and has no precedent in previous New Zealand painting. The yellow is sharp, clear and bold, more like the colours used in commercial art than those favoured by most New Zealand painters of the period.

The direction Walters took with Tahi in terms of colour was logical and deliberate. His style of painting allowed the use of large areas of flat, undiluted colour. The colour could register with a strength of visual impact not possible in gestural painting where brushwork and colour mixture break down the purity of the colour. Without the even focus and hard-edge style of Walters this type of colour was hard to use.

There was some precedent for the use of strong colour in Walters' gouaches painted in the years 1954-1955. But there are important differences. In the gouaches, for example Untitled Painting, 1954 (Plate 54), Walters restricted the strong colours to specific parts of the painting. Like the drawn forms, the colours form part

of a relational composition. A strong colour accent in one part of the painting is balanced by an area of grey or white elsewhere. In no case is strong colour carried through the image as in Tahi. Walters' early use of colour in the koru series followed the model of his gouaches of the mid-1950s. For example, in Painting Number Seven, 1965 (Plate 109), the blue occurs only near the top of the image and is balanced by an equivalent but larger area of red at the bottom. In Tahi the yellow and black are carried through the entire image.

In his early paintings Walters used colour not unlike Mondrian and the geometric abstractionists. Tahi shows some awareness of the American use of colour in abstract painting. Walters was able to see reproductions of works by Elsworth Kelly and Kenneth Noland in magazines like Artforum. In 1968 he travelled to Melbourne to see the exhibition entitled The Field which showed the response of young Australian painters to recent American art. While in Australia, Walters saw works by Albers, Louis, Frankenthaler and others, as well as paintings by the Italian Lucio Fontana which impressed him because of their "bright, cosmetic colours".(20)

From 1967 onwards Walters increasingly freed colour of the restrictions imposed by relational composition. He allowed colour to carry through the image, thus giving it a more forceful role. This development corresponds with a widening of his range of colour to include stronger reds, blues, yellows and greens. He began to see colour as an element in its own right, though it remains subservient to the drawn imagery in most of his work.

With changes of attitude to colour in Tahi went changes of approach to the handling of the koru-derived forms as well. In this painting he did not concentrate circles and band terminations in a few, specific parts of the work. Instead in Tahi he distributed the drawn imagery more evenly over the whole painted surface. He avoided the structural relationship between the imagery and the format that he had previously developed. For example,

in Painting Number Nine, 1965 (Plate 111), the central, vertical axis and the sides are important reference points for the positioning of the band terminations and circles. In Tahi Walters made the imagery less structured. The band terminations and circles occur so frequently, and at so many points along the yellow and black bands that it is impossible to establish reference points. The imagery is too complex and uniform to allow easy analysis. It depends much less on relational-type composition and principles such as balance and compensation. Instead the painting has an all-over quality. No part seems more important than another. This is accompanied by a constant sense of movement, of visual counterpoint between yellow and black, black and yellow, which is unbroken and unrelieved. The modular nature of the bands, circles and terminations itself becomes a principle of order.

Walters described his procedure with Tahi as random. He explained: "With regard to random, I use it to describe an irregular as opposed to a regular structured placing of the units - involving a degree of chance. This relates mainly to the all-over works which are often made by cutting up studies and re-arranging the pieces without much conscious control. I think random describes the process adequately."(21)

Walters did not see the random disposition of motifs as supplanting his previous approach to composition. He saw it as an alternative with possibilities for a series of new works. The role of intuition was important in all his works. But in Tahi the parameters were that much looser. Because there are so many band terminations and circles it is difficult to discern an order. The random procedure of the artist in making the work carries through to the spectator, who scans the work restlessly without clear directions.

One consequence of the random placement of forms in Tahi is that the image is not internalized in the way paintings like Hiwi are. Bands enter from each side of the work and reach to differing points so that the idea

of extension beyond the painted surface is implied. Some of the bands are very short giving the impression of the American practice of cropping at the edge of the canvas.(22) One outcome of this is an expansive feeling in the painting that helps to overcome the tightness in some of the 1965 and 1966 works. This difference of emphasis adds to the innovatory quality of Tahi, and makes its importance in Walters' development of the koru paintings quite apparent. The freedom of random placement contributes to an exuberance in the imagery that feels less restrained because it is not tied directly to the format of the canvas or to a geometric structure. The painting represents a major development in the koru series. Walters had the satisfaction of seeing it sold to a major industrial firm then forming a collection of New Zealand art.(23)

Kahukura (Plate 130), the other major painting in the 1968 show, is the same size as Tahi but in a horizontal format.(24) In Kahukura Walters reverted to a compositional type seen in his earlier koru works which he now refined and gave a new feeling of monumentality. Of the painting Walters has noted:"Based on the binary principle: a vertical division with the two sides differing slightly but maintaining a balance; my basic approach to picture-making which owes a lot to primitive art in general and Maori art (traditional) in particular."(25)

The reference point for this type of composition in his earlier koru paintings is a work like Painting Number Seven, 1965 (Plate 109), where the image is based on bilateral symmetry. But in this case there are important differences in treatment. In Kahukura the separation between the two sides of the painting is made more emphatic because the bands all terminate on their side of the vertical axis and do not carry across the dividing line. The linking band found in Painting Number Seven that runs across the central axis and holds the image tightly together is dispensed with in Kahukura. The two sides become autonomous but linked by their formal similarity

and the black colour that runs through both sides of the imagery.

Kahukura is a bolder and more confident work than its predecessors. Here Walters used repetition with more assurance than before. The stacking of band terminations one above the other in rows is carried out with unprecedented authority, and takes on additional force because of the way Walters used the format of the work to reinforce the drawn structure. By his use of colour Walters further stressed the bilateral nature of his composition. The left-hand side is colour-coded with black and white, the right-hand side with ochre-yellow and black. At only one point is the white brought across to the right-hand side of the image. This occurs at the bottom of the painting where one white circle crosses the dividing line and seems to demarcate the end of the koru imagery, rather like a full-stop. It is followed by an expanse of black, the only part of the canvas which is not filled by bands, terminations or circles.

Like Tahi, Kahukura is a work of assurance and maturity. Although it could have fragmented into two halves, the work has a unity which is one of its strengths. Its structure is so clear, and the logic of the repeating bands so evident that its composition appears inevitable. With Tahi and Kahukura Walters created two of his finest and most accomplished works with the koru-derived forms. They have a greater presence and feeling of scale than the works of the earlier series, as well as a more refined technical realization.

All the paintings in the 1968 New Vision show had titles, unlike the 1965 works where Walters used numbers almost exclusively. In the period between the two shows Walters must have revised his attitude to titles. Their introduction, according to Walters himself, goes back to 1964 and the first koru painting Te Whiti. In a statement he noted: "In the beginning I simply titled works Painting Number 1, 1959, and so on; but I was not entirely happy with this. Then in 1964 I began to use Maori names for

titles. This began with my painting entitled Te Whiti."(26)

This statement appears to be misleading. None of the 1965 paintings except Black on White have titles. Even the first paintings of 1966 were numbered. It is only during 1966 that titles like Tiki and Hiwi occur. Since Walters often titles works long after their completion, even these works may not have been given Maori titles in that year. Furthermore, Te Whiti was originally exhibited as Painting, 1965, in the 1966 Hay's Prize show.(27) It appears under this title in New Zealand Painting: An Introduction, first published in 1969.(28) Taking these factors into account, the title may be regarded as retrospective, or one that Walters chose to suppress when the picture was first exhibited.(29)

Initially Walters chose to number the koru paintings in order to eliminate references to subject-matter and to focus attention on the formal nature of his works. Numbers also suggested the sequential aspect of the koru paintings and their relationships to one another. Besides he was aware of a tradition of using numbers to identify abstract paintings. Only after the first New Vision show did he feel confident about using Maori titles for new works. But he was still nervous about the way people would interpret Maori titles even then, because he felt the audience for his painting was unsophisticated. The last thing he wanted was for people to think he was trying to 'do Maori art'. Whereas Schoon had tried to revive ritualistic aspects of Maori art by his gourd carving and painting of decorative panels with traditional-type kowhaiwhai patterns, Walters had made modern abstract paintings designed for a European art gallery context. This distinction had to be kept.

When he first exhibited the koru paintings in 1966, Maori art had little status with contemporary painters who looked down on it as a debased art form. Part of the reason for this attitude was the exploitation of Maori art by the tourist trade for the mass production of items such as plastic tikis. Such items were crude,

coarsened versions of old Maori artefacts. They had been divorced from the culture which shaped them and in the process had lost most of their meaning. Only in recent times and, in particular with the staging of the Te Maori exhibition in New York, have serious attempts been made to show the aesthetic quality of traditional Maori art.(30) In New Zealand, museums still do little or nothing to display Maori art outside an archaeological context.

Walters' decision to use Maori titles for his new paintings in 1966-1967 was not governed by the topicality or popularity of Maori art or culture in New Zealand at that time. He knew that in drawing on ideas from Oceanic art for use in modern painting he related to a tradition stretching back to Picasso and the Cubists. But in New Zealand that tradition was little understood. Consequently no connections were made for some years between Walters' koru paintings and Maori art. His transformation of his sources was so complete that his starting point with a Maori art motif was totally disguised.

By using Maori titles he directed the viewer to consider the Polynesian as well as European sources of his art. Walters was the first New Zealand painter to use Maori titles of this type. This gave his titles a distinctive aspect which was accepted readily by his dealers and patrons. He did not restrict the titles to koru-type paintings, but also chose them for works like Waikanae, 1967, and Karu, 1967 (Plates 123 and 126).

It is obvious that the Maori titles are not intended to comment specifically on the context of individual paintings. They identify them for purposes of discussion, reference and cataloguing. For most viewers who do not know Maori the titles can have no specific meaning anyway, as Walters well knew. His usage is like that of Maori words for street names in New Zealand cities and towns. In fact, such street names are an acknowledged source for his Maori titles: "I began to use other Maori titles from my environment in Wellington where I had grown up. Most place-names there were Maori ones and these names



had a strong emotional significance for me."(31)

However, the relationship between specific pictures and titles is arbitrary and not based on a system. In all cases Walters titles his paintings retrospectively and reluctantly, usually because of exhibition requirements. The title, and whatever subject associations it may have, are not present when the work is created. Therefore it is incorrect to see a relationship between painting and title as having existed a priori.

In some cases Walters has given two paintings the same title even though they are formally distinct. In others, he has changed the title of a work between exhibitions; or the title has been allocated to a work by his dealer, Peter McLeavey. McLeavey's titles exclude the artist entirely from the decision-making process.

The dangers of imagining direct connections between image and title are demonstrated by Kahukura.(32) In the 1968 New Vision catalogue this painting was given the title Tawa. Tawa is a species of New Zealand tree. Using a figurative association, the viewer could imagine a tree with outstretched branches - the trunk being in the centre of the painting. But, when this work was exhibited again at the Peter McLeavey Gallery in 1969 it was titled Kahukura. Kahukura is a personified form of the rainbow said to be composed of two arches, a double bow, a darker one (the male) embracing a lighter one (the female).(33) However, Walters had painted the work at least two years before it was given this title, almost certainly by McLeavey.

Walters' readiness to allow McLeavey to allocate titles is indicated by a letter of August 1971. "Dear Gordon, I opened the show this afternoon...I titled and priced the works as follows."(34) He goes on:"Do hope these titles meet with your O.K...they just serve as handles for the current show."(35) In a reply, dated August 26, Walters wrote:"I was most impressed with the titles you had chosen for the paintings, rather better than my own efforts in this direction."(36) Even though this remark

was not entirely honest, for Walters had misgivings about McLeavey allocating titles to his works, he did not change the titles. The Auckland City Art Gallery exhibited the work now known as Hautana under McLeavey's title Oriori for some ten years. In many cases it is not possible to distinguish Walters' own titles from McLeavey's. This in itself points to the arbitrary connection between titles and images. However, with his knowledge of Maori language and custom Walters would be careful not to use titles which would be offensive or inappropriate for this purpose.

By using Maori titles and identifying them with specific works Walters appropriates them for his own purposes. In doing so his intention is not to exploit but to acknowledge a people and culture he admires. In a statement about titling he wrote: "By using them. [Maori titles] I was able both to pay tribute to the Maori tradition which has meant a great deal to me, and to re-interpret it in terms of my own art and my immediate environment." (37)

In the 1968 New Vision show Walters exhibited a number of non-koru paintings. Of these works he noted in the accompanying catalogue: "Some of the works depart from the figure-ground ambiguity to present a curved motif which also functions as a module. Here again form becomes meaningful because of repetition, activating the plane of the canvas with a sense of movement." (38)

The form Walters used is geometric and hard-edge. It is curving and segmental in shape and recalls the paintings of Sophie Taeuber-Arp of the mid-1930s where circles and circle segments were used. Taeuber-Arp tried to achieve an effect of movement with the circle segments by composing them so that the curved forms echo or oppose one another in varied and asymmetrical groups. (39) See figure 26, page 174. Walters knew and admired her painting so the resemblance is not coincidental. But, his usage differs from hers in a number of respects.

Two of Walters' paintings, Hika, 1967 (Plate 127, and Karu, 1967 (Plate 126), were designed by the artist

to be hung on the diagonal. Being square in format, they become diamond shape when hung like this. They were not his first diamond paintings - Black and White, 1966 (Plate 121), was also intended to be hung this way. His choice of the diamond format is noteworthy and contrasts with Taeuber-Arp's preference for the rectangle.

There was, of course, ample precedent for this format in European abstraction, notably in the works of Mondrian who first used the diamond as early as 1918.(40) By its nature the diamond calls attention to its literal shape more than is the case with the rectangle. For this reason it had been used along with other shaped canvases by artists such as Noland, Kelly and Stella in the 1960s.(41) The shaped canvas reaffirmed the flat, literal quality of abstract painting advocated so strongly by the influential American critic Clement Greenberg.(42) Undoubtedly Walters was aware of the literalist emphasis in American hard-edge painting and the thinking behind it with which he was in sympathy.

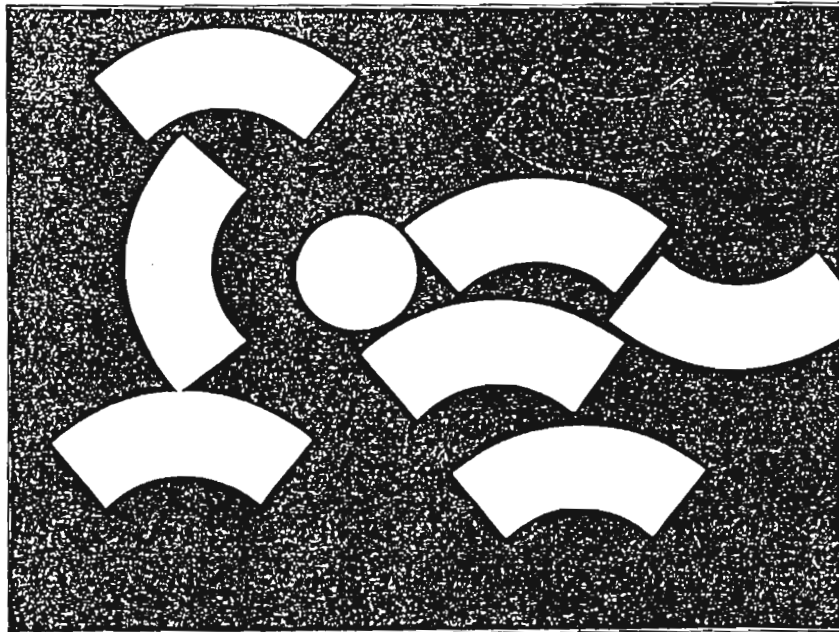


Figure 26. S.Taeuber-Arp, Composition with Circle and Circle Segments, 1935.

In the diamond paintings Walters related the segmental forms very closely to the format. Both paintings are divided into two triangular shapes by a division across the central horizontal axis. By dispensing with vertical divisions the artist allows no drawn form to conflict with the literal shape of the support. Hika painted in red and white is the bolder of the two in that Walters has largely dispensed with the complexities of relational composition. The two halves, centred on the horizontal axis, are symmetrical and a mirror image of one another.

Walters used a strong red as a field colour in Hika. The red is shaped by the diamond format, and in turn emphasizes its literal nature. The artist further reinforced the diamond shape by leaving each corner free of drawn imagery. He drew the segmental forms so that the large ones curve strongly towards the central axis where they almost touch. He contrasted these with the smaller ones, by making them curve the other way. As a result the image has a degree of movement despite its literal, self-referential quality.

Karu (Plate 126) is not as simple in structure as Hika. The upper and lower halves of the picture are differentiated by colour and tone. In addition, by making the two upper curving forms black, and the lower ones white, Walters retained a degree of positive-negative interplay in the imagery. Also, the introduction of a bright blue band at the centre left of the image (not visible in the plate) gives it an asymmetrical, relational aspect quite different from Hika.

Apart from the diamond works, Walters also used the segmental form in a rectangular painting Kupu, 1967 (Plate 128). Like Hika and Karu it was shown in the 1968 New Vision exhibition. Kupu was on the new large size, 60 x 45 inches. Again the literal quality of the painting is noteworthy. In particular, the composition is radically different from his earlier paintings. It is much more systemic and depends on a repeated unit.

Walters organized the work on a rectangular grid.

The grid divides the canvas into twelve fifteen inch squares. In the squares Walters drew two segmental forms on the diagonal axis, one large, one small. This unit, or module as he calls it, is repeated with no structural change throughout the painting with the exception of the lower-right corner. The final square is left empty; the expectation of total symmetry is frustrated.

In Kupu Walters did largely abandon relational composition. He used colour changes to vary the modular units. But the painting is important because it introduces a new kind of structure to his work. This leads on to his interest in serial art which is discussed in the following chapter.

One final painting from the 1968 New Vision show also deserves a mention. Entitled Oriental, 1967 (Plate 124), it was painted in black and white on hardboard. The imagery is reductive and geometric in character. It has a similar literal emphasis to the works with the segmental forms. The imagery also has a clear relationship to the format. Walters painted the rectangular board in black, and then divided the black at the far left by a white vertical band. Inside the black rectangle he painted a white one reduced in scale by twenty-five per cent. He divided it by a black band in the same ratio as he had used for the black rectangle. There is thus a geometric relationship between the two aspects of the image, as well as the positive-negative ambiguity. Walters achieved a remarkable simplicity and logic in the structure of Oriental.

The severe reductive quality of Oriental emerged from Walters' search for an economy of means. This search continued into his work of the late-1960s and early-1970s as a distinct direction in his art.

With the 1968 New Vision exhibition Walters proved that he was a painter of originality and power. If still not a commercially successful painter, he was now a known one who was given a degree of respect in an environment basically hostile to abstract art.

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Footnotes:Chapter Eight

1 Walters to Hos, April 15, 1966. New Vision Gallery, Walters' files.

2 ibid.

3 Walters to Hos, September 16, 1966.

4 Walters to Hos, June 1, 1967.

5 Walters to Hos, September 9, 1967.

6 Peter McLeavey has kept a file of correspondence relating to his dealing in Walters' paintings. This provides the fullest and best account of his sales, prices, patrons etc. for the period from 1967 onwards. I am grateful to Peter McLeavey for having made this file available to me despite the fact that it contains material of a personal nature.

7 Walters to Hos, no date, circa October 1967.

8 Hos to Walters, October 25, 1967. There is no information about the purchaser of this drawing or record of payment in the New Vision files. Possibly the sale was never finalized.

9 See G.H.Brown and H.Keith, New Zealand Painting: An Introduction, Auckland, 1969, p. 172. The work was reproduced with the title Painting, 1965. Unfortunately the commentary on Walters was minimal and the reference to the effect of "the harsh quality of New Zealand light" on his work misleading. No attempt was made to discuss his koru paintings or even to make the connection between his work and Op art.

10 The show was intended to represent recent developments in New Zealand painting. It was shown at the Auckland City Art Gallery between November and December. Walters' Painting Number One was catalogue number 45; Painting Number Two was number 46.

11 In a letter to Hos, undated but circa October 1967, Walters refers to a painting "smashed to bits in transit". If the hardboard was scuffed the artist had to totally re-work the picture.

12 The second New Vision show was held between May 27 and June 8, 1968. There was a printed catalogue reproducing one work in black and white, and listing the fourteen works in the show. Unfortunately the medium is not given nor is the support identified.

13 These were catalogue numbers 1, 2, and 9. The larger paintings were made possible by the change to canvas.

14 See Walters' exhibition catalogue, New Vision Gallery, May/June 1968.

15 See the retrospective catalogue, Gordon Walters, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983, plate 37, for a reproduction of this work.

16 Name changes of this kind occur in a number of instances with Walters' works and can cause confusion. See below for a fuller discussion of this matter.

17 Many of the works in Mrkusich's Elements series measure only 30 or 40 inches high, though the major examples like Four Elements Above (Crimson), 1965, Auckland City Art Gallery, can be 69 inches high.

18 Walters described the process briefly in a letter to the author dated December 12, 1982: "I make a full size drawing on paper in outline and then transfer it to a prepared canvas. The canvas is prepared with three coats of acrylic gesso lightly sanded and then three or four coats of white acrylic or PVA or whatever the ground colour is."

19 See Walters' catalogue, op. cit. p. 39.

20 For a discussion of The Field show see Jenny Zwimmer, "Memories of Dulux and Masonite", Abstract Art in Australia, Melbourne, 1983, pp. 21-25. The Fontana reference comes from Walters' comments on a draft version of this thesis made in October 1984.

21 Walters to the author, June 11, 1984, p. 1. The word random is sometimes used in reference to Op art structures.

22 Walters did not use cropping as American painters like Noland did. Noland, for example, would mark off the size of a painting after it had been finished, thus achieving a real sense of extension beyond the frame or edge of the work. See K. Moffett, Kenneth Noland, New York, 1977, p. 70. However, Walters was aware of this approach and his works like Tahi reflect aspects of it. This contributes to the slight American feel of his work from 1967 on.

23 The work was purchased for the Fletcher collection in October 1968. The price paid was \$200.. This is discussed in a letter from Hos to Walters dated October 31, 1968.

24 The painting was exhibited in the 1968 New Vision show with the title Tawa, catalogue number 2. The title was changed to Kahukura for its exhibition in Wellington the following year. In a note Walters recalls: "It is possible that Kahukura was called Tawa in the 2nd exhibition. I can't remember now, but I think McLeavey gave the work the title Kahukura." Walters to the author, December 2, 1983, p. 2.

25 See Walter's catalogue, op. cit. p. 39.

26 *ibid*, p. 125. This statement by the artist is dated October 14, 1982.

27 See note 2, page 152 for a discussion of this matter. In a short note about the painting Walters states: "Very likely Te Whiti was shown as Painting, 1965, in the Hay's Prize. I can't remember details...I remember I was a bit nervous initially in using those Maori titles and wavered between using numbers and titles finally I came down on the side of titles." Walters to the author, December 1, 1982.

28 See note 9, page 177. Brown and Keith were unaware that the painting had the title Te Whiti.

29 It is now impossible to know when the title Te Whiti was first made public. Only with the retrospective exhibition in 1983 did it gain wide currency because the painting had been in private collections and for a period was in New York.

30 See the catalogue, Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections, editor Sidney Mead, Auckland 1984.

31 See Walters' catalogue, op. cit. p. 125.

32 See note 24, page 178.

33 See E. Best, Maori Religion and Mythology, Part 2, Wellington, 1982, p. 414. I am grateful to Ronald Brownson for bringing this reference to my attention.

34 McLeavey to Walters, August 16, 1971.

35 *ibid*.

36 Walters to McLeavey, August 26, 1971.

37 See Walter's catalogue, op. cit. p. 125.

38 See Walters' exhibition catalogue, New Vision Gallery, May/June 1968.

39 See Carolyn Lanchner, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1981.

40 See H.L.C. Jaffé, Mondrian, New York, 1970, p. 128; and reproductions p. 36. See also M. Seuphor, Piet Mondrian: Life and Work, New York, 1970, pp. 152-154, and figures 297, 298, 299, and 300, p. 383; also figures 400-411, p. 392.

41 See K. Moffett, Kenneth Noland, New York, 1977, p. 61 for a discussion of this aspect.

42 See D.B. Kuspit, Clement Greenberg: Art Critic, University of Wisconsin, 1979, for an account of his art theories.



THE YEARS 1968-1972

In the period from 1968 to 1971 Walters continued to evolve his koru paintings. He explored a new range of colour in paintings with narrow bands, and in the construction of some works he moved away from relational composition towards repetitive structures. This direction had been anticipated in his paintings using circular segments of 1967. It is found in his Genealogy series and also in paintings based on a geometricized version of the Maori rauponga motif. These new works show Walters still restricting himself to a limited range of forms but continuing to develop fresh ideas.

Throughout these years he benefited from the enthusiasm of his Wellington dealer, Peter McLeavey, who held the first of what was to become a series of shows of Walters' work in the capital in May 1969.(1) The Wellington shows provided an outlet needed for his art in order to compensate for the poor sales at the New Vision Gallery in Auckland. (2) McLeavey proved to be a successful dealer who managed to sell paintings not only from shows but also from stock during the year.(3) Consequently Walters was encouraged to spend more time on his painting with a view to devoting himself to it full-time.

Among his strongest work of the period 1968-1971 is a series of koru paintings in which colour becomes a dominant element. The majority of these paintings have narrow bands so that the colour is organized in horizontal stripes rather than in blocks. In most cases he used only two colours. Instead of employing colours derived from traditional Maori art, like black and white with red ochre, Walters chose to explore a new range.

Tahi of 1967, as we have seen, marks a shift in his choice of colour. In that work he used a strong yellow in combination with black. The colouring of new paintings like Tamatea (Plate 136) and Mahuika (Plate 135) of 1968 continues this direction in his art. Both these works were exhibited by Peter McLeavey in his 1969 show.(4)

In these paintings the colouring itself becomes a strong presence in the work and not just in a decorative sense. Walters assigned colour to the positive and negative aspects of the imagery. Colour enabled him to reduce tonal contrast from the stark black and white, familiar in the earlier koru paintings, down to a subtle, almost imperceptible transition without losing clarity. Colour could substitute for tonal contrast in such circumstances. This enabled Walters to achieve something he wanted, a new and distinctive type of koru painting.

At first the compositional nature of the new works remains much the same as before. It is the use of colour which adds newness. For example, Mahuika (Plate 135) is a vertical koru painting with narrow bands not unlike earlier works such as Hiwi, 1966 (Plate 118) in composition. Both paintings are organized by the regular alternation of narrow bands of light and dark: black and white in Hiwi, blue and black in Mahuika. But the blue used in Mahuika is a deep ultramarine which is strong visually. We are always conscious of the bands of blue alternating at regular intervals down the surface of the canvas. The blue has a depth and resonance compared with the white of Hiwi. The blue is deep and rich, yet not much lighter in tone than the black. This eliminates the dazzle of Hiwi where tonal contrast is used to give maximum force to the positive and negative aspects of the work. In Mahuika the blue provides an equally clear distinction between the positive and negative aspects of the imagery without any loss of the "visual punch" Walters sought at this time.

Obviously Walters was starting to see the potential for varying the koru paintings by a more considered use of colour and by giving colour a greater role in his art. This development leads on logically from the approach he had taken with Tahi the year before. But in Tahi the yellow, though powerful, was sufficiently light in tone to preserve the tonal contrast typical of the earlier pictures. Mahuika is a departure because in it Walters

explored low-tonal contrast with dark colours for the first time in the series.

In Mahuika Walters also employed colour to achieve a firmer relationship between the imagery and the format of the painting. At the top of the painting he used blue for the positive reading of the koru-derived imagery, at the bottom black. This means that there is a necessary relationship in figure/ground terms between the upper and the lower parts of the imagery. By using colour to establish the two poles of the work, and by establishing them in direct relation to the upper and lower zones of the painting, he achieved a feeling of logic and inevitability in its structure.

This allowed him to empty the central area of the painting of koru motifs so that the blue and black bands can run uninterrupted, row after row. The colour thus achieves a high degree of freedom. The colour helps to make the painting function as an all-over image in a way that Hiwi and other paintings of the first series do not. There is a superficial resemblance between the blue and black bands of Mahuika and the use of stripes of colour by American painters like Kenneth Noland.<sup>(5)</sup> Although Walters knew their work in reproduction, his treatment is different. Apart from the differences of scale, Noland's stripe paintings do not depend on a regular alternation of dark and light bands. Noland's stripes of colour vary greatly in width and the colours determine the structure not the drawing. Noland used a wide range of colour in each painting whereas Walters employed only two or three colours in the same work. Frank Stella's stripe paintings, which Walters admired, avoid internal relationships and echo the format of the canvas, often shaped to emphasize its literal nature. With Walters, no matter how reductive the work, drawn and formal relationships are always retained.

In his disposition of the koru-derived forms in Mahuika, Walters avoided obvious references to the central vertical axis and to the sides. None of the breaks in the bands

and none of the circles occur at clear-cut geometric divisions of the canvas. For example, the vertical axis is not demarcated, nor are any other simple fractions of the width used to position motifs. There is an element of the random placement Walters had used in Tahi, but in Mahuika Walters applied the principle to restricted parts of the canvas.

A new feature of Mahuika is so slight that it might escape the casual viewer. In the lower part of the painting Walters left a gap between two band terminations just large enough for a circle. Its 'absence', if it may be called that, is unexpected because in the upper blue koru-derived forms no such gap occurs. There is a blue circle in the equivalent position. Viewers familiar with earlier paintings in the series would expect to find a circle in this gap. Its absence introduces a somewhat puzzling aspect to Mahuika and contributes to its novel character.

About the same time that he painted Mahuika in 1968, Walters also completed Tamatea (Plate 136), a vertical canvas of the same size.(6) In Tamatea Walters used two colours, a blue and a yellow-green. Both these colours have a sharp acidic quality to them and continue the new emphasis on colour in the koru paintings at this period.

Tamatea is a narrow band painting and employs what Walters has called:"...a controlled scattering of the motif down the centre of the canvas."(7) The idea goes back to the earliest koru drawings but is given much the same freedom of treatment as the motifs in Mahuika. The bands run in towards the centre of the work where terminations and circles create breaks and points of focus or tension. But the disposition avoids any feeling of rigidity or geometrical placement. Instead the emphasis is on freedom and intuition. The artist did not allow the koru-derived forms to continue all the way up the surface, even though they do occupy the greater part of it. Near the top there are seven uninterrupted bands

that provide a hiatus which breaks what could have become too strong a centralizing emphasis.

In this canvas colour performs some of the same functions as in Mahuika. Colour organizes the surface in combination with the drawn imagery and contributes to its overall unity. The interaction between the pale yellow-green and the blue ensures a vibrant surface with considerable visual impact. By keeping his colour flat, undiluted and within a hard-edge framework Walters achieved a confrontational quality that was unique in New Zealand art of that period.

Colour also plays new roles in Tamatea. Neither the blue nor the yellow-green differ much in tone. By eliminating black Walters freed the colours to interact in a type of optical mixture. He created an image with reduced tonal contrast that nevertheless retains its legibility because of clear colour differences between positive and negative. This introduced a further range of possibilities to the work. In a slightly later painting, Makaro, 1969 (Plate 140) he took the reduction of tonal contrast even further so that the pale pastel blue and grey colouring hardly registers in a black and white photograph. In both Tamatea and Makaro he explored a close tonal range in light colours.

Using colours like the blue and yellow-green of Tamatea had its attractions for Walters. It provided a means of further varying and developing the koru paintings. At the same time it also presented problems. One which is noticeable in Tamatea is the occurrence of shimmer across the coloured bands, and also an apparent lightening of the yellow-green when it is in the positive and a darkening when in the negative. This creates optical effects that destabilize the imagery. While problems of this sort are not major, and can be balanced against the advantages, Walters came to regard them as disruptive.

Undoubtedly at the time Walters was attracted to the colour effects achieved by Op artists. Also, he liked the colour combinations being used by artists like the

American painter Larry Poons, familiar to him in reproductions.(8) Close-value colour was used by Poons and others to cut down internal hierarchies and emphasize the whole. This appears as a direction in Walters' painting of this time.

Makaro (Plate 140) is painted in subdued pastel colours. Of it Walters has written:"Utilising the centre of the canvas with close colour contrast typical of my approach in the late 1960s."(9) There is none of the colour interaction of the kind noted in Tamatea. Instead the feeling is muted and harmonic. This contributes to the unified effect of the painting which has the all-over quality he was concerned with at the time. Makaro contrasts markedly with the stark black and white works Walters was painting in 1965-1966.

Compositionally Makaro is related to Tamatea, but there are some differences. Although the majority of the koru motifs occur roughly near the central vertical axis, and although they run almost from top to bottom of the painting as in Tamatea, Walters carried some of the motifs to the very edge of the canvas at the right. These motifs are placed at the very top of the painting and are stacked in a row so that they contrast with the random arrangement of the koru motifs elsewhere in the composition. This introduces a variety which contributes to the interest of the work.

The coloured paintings with narrow bands continue into the early-1970s and culminate with the large canvas entitled Koru of 1971 (Plate 166). Koru measures 72 x 54 inches and is a vertical painting executed in pale grey and white. The grey has a mauve tint and the white has now discoloured so that the tonal difference between the grey and white is very slight. Walters originally regarded this canvas highly. He wrote to McLeavey in August 1972:"I rate this work as one of the best of the koru series and was intending to keep it for myself."(10) He described its composition in 1982:"An all-over random scattering of the motif made by cutting up and re-arranging

earlier studies."(11) Koru is a painting in which Walters effortlessly overcame the problems of controlling and defining a large image with bands of alternating colour and randomly placed koru motifs. Its size and pale colouration, combined with the open expansive quality of the motifs, give it a unique feeling of lightness and strength.

By using the narrow bands on this scale Walters achieved a more spacious effect than in Tahi which has a more compact and monumental character. The difference between the two works indicates the range Walters was now able to obtain in his koru paintings. Tahi (Plate 122) has a bold strident colouring, strong tonal contrast and an assertive aspect. The whole painted surface is busy and aggressive. By contrast, Koru is muted. The subtle harmonic colouring and relatively sparse use of the koru-derived forms make it seem more ethereal. The long sweeping movements of the bands across the surface have a slow rhythmic beat very different from the short sharp movements in Tahi. Yet both paintings have an effortless feeling of control and a sense of scale that seems inevitable and right.

Like Tahi, Koru is based on a random scattering of motifs. But the variation achieved is greater. Ignoring completely any rigid structure, Walters allowed the motifs to cluster near the centre at one point, then to open and shift to the extreme right. Then there is a gap followed by a swing to the extreme left. The variations are bold and are handled with confidence. The scale of Koru is also noteworthy. Because the painting is large, some six feet in height, up close it is hard to see it properly. Instead it requires that the viewer stands back to see it in its entirety. From that vantage point the narrow bands and pale atmospheric colouring give the forms a sense of greater size. It is as if we are seeing a large object from a great distance. By contrast with Tahi the broad bands and strong tonal contrast give the impression of the close-up. Even though Koru is equally sharp and even in focus, its muted colour, low tonal contrast and

narrow bands all reinforce the impression of greater size and distance from the viewer. This contributes to the quality of remoteness and calm characteristic of Koru and so different from Tahi.

With these paintings using colours and narrow bands Walters achieved some of his finest works in the period 1968-1971. They were, however, only part of his output in these immensely creative years.

In 1970 he continued to paint a few koru works on canvas using wide bands. Tautahi, 1970 (Plate 151), and Rongotai, 1970 (Plate 152), both in the vertical format, are good examples. Although his main focus at this period was on the narrow band works, the wide band alternative remained viable. In Tautahi and Rongotai Walters retained black and white, but in combination with colour, thus providing a link with the colourist interests in the narrow band paintings. Also, there is considerable emphasis on repetition of elements and vertical stacking of the terminations.(12) This emphasis can be found in the narrow band paintings, and especially in the Genealogy series he was painting at approximately the same time.

Walters divided both Tautahi and Rongotai into two zones, an upper and a lower one. In both instances he used colour to demarcate the zones and divide the paintings in two. This follows on from his usage of colour in Kahukura (Plate 130), where the image is divided into halves and Walters used colour to further clarify the division. But, in Kahukura the drawn structure of the work already establishes the division whereas in Tautahi and Rongotai colour plays the main role in demarcating the zones.

Viewed in relation to trends already seen in the narrow band paintings of the period 1969-1970, the greater use of colour in the koru works and its importance in the way they function emerges as a leading development. Walters used colour to generate new types of paintings with reduced tonal contrast and zonal changes.

Tautahi is also noteworthy for the pronounced repetition of motifs in its structure. Walters stacked koru-derived



terminations one above the other from top to bottom of the work at the left, and carried the same repetitive structure from the top of the image at the right, only breaking it in a few bands. He used the beige colour in the upper zone to provide some variation and relief from the repetitive and near symmetrical drawing of the forms. Significantly he dispensed with the circle altogether in this painting and carried the imagery from top to bottom of the canvas without any blocks of colour to break it up. What makes the repetition appear so emphatic is not simply the stacking of the terminations but also the separation of the positive and negative aspects of the imagery. All seventeen rows of stacked motifs at the left are positive - there is no changeover to black to relieve the pressure as occurs in the earlier series of koru paintings from the mid-1960s.

Rongotai (Plate 152) is superficially similar to Tautahi; it is of the same size, is also divided into two zones and has a colour change between the upper and lower. It, too, has the vertical stacking of motifs. Here, though, the resemblance ends.

Rongotai is noteworthy in a number of ways. In its drawn structure Walters achieved an unbroken repetition of alternating bands from top to bottom of the image on the right-hand side, free from koru-derived motifs. This introduced the repetitive band structure we have seen in works like Mahuika to the wide band format. The colour change from blue to black in the upper zone to white and black in the lower introduces the only variations in an otherwise repetitive and emphatic all-over treatment of this side of the canvas.

Walters boldly moved all the koru motifs to the left-hand side of Rongotai, stacking them in two vertical rows. The contrast between the empty side of the work and the side filled with drawn motifs is dramatic and unprecedented. This creates a powerful movement from right to left which is checked and held by the stacked koru motifs. Apart from the contrast between left and

right sides of the painting, there is also a scale difference between the motifs in the upper blue and black zone and those below. The blue and black bands above are larger in actual dimensions but fewer in number than the black and white ones below. This fact, as well as the changeover in positive/negative readings between the upper and lower zones, introduces more drawn complexity to Rongotai than occurs in Tautahi. Nevertheless the emphatic emphasis on repetition of forms, and the importance of colour, link them to the main directions in Walters' art at this time.

Undoubtedly Rongotai was an experimental painting which caused the artist some problems. An earlier version was destroyed by the artist. The blue colour in the upper zone not only defines that part of the painting, but also helps to balance the composition. At first it seems that the advantages of a scale difference between the two zones of Rongotai, in terms of distinguishing them from one another and varying the imagery, might have been achieved at the expense of unity. It is difficult to see the two sizes of the koru motifs as lying on the same plane. Naturally there is a tendency to assume that the size discrepancy is due to distance from the viewer. That is that both would be of equal size if seen from the same position in space. In practice Walters does not allow this spatial disruption to occur. One reason for this is that the white and black motifs have greater tonal contrast than the blue and black which use low tonal contrast in dark colours. Although smaller, the black and white motifs are more contrasty and assertive than the larger ones above. Another reason is that the blue tends to recede rather than appear close to the eye. Consequently Walters achieves a balance between the two zones and the two scales in which drawn, tonal and colourist aspects are all calculated in relation to one another.

There remains a difficulty with using a two zone system in a vertical painting like Rongotai. A horizontal demarc-

ation, particularly one with a colour difference as in this example, does create associations with landscape, with horizon lines and sky/land divisions. The choice of blue in the upper zone makes some connection with landscape inevitable. The title Rongotai, derived from an area of Wellington where Walters once lived, and now known for its airport, tends to reinforce rather than reduce this association.

In most of the paintings of the period 1968-1971 Walters preferred to achieve a unified all-over quality in his work. Perhaps for this reason the two-zone structure of Tautahi and Rongotai is not typical of his work of those years.

In August 1971 Walters exhibited five new paintings in Wellington at the Peter McLeavey Gallery.(13) By then he had already made the move to Auckland. The reasons for shifting from Wellington were various. One consideration was the need of his wife, Margaret Orbell, to attend Auckland University while she completed her Doctorate in Anthropology. Another was Walters' own desire to leave the Wellington art scene for the larger centre of Auckland. Up to this time his contacts with other abstract painters had been few. While he had proved his ability to work intensively with virtually no stimulus from other artists, he undoubtedly looked forwards to the opportunity to discuss his work and ideas with like-minded painters and critics.

At first the move to Auckland reduced his ability to paint because he had no studio during the latter part of 1971. It was not until he accepted the position of Temporary Lecturer in Painting at the Elam School of Fine Arts in 1972 that the problem was solved.(14) Consequently the new work he showed at McLeavey's as well as four paintings he showed at New Vision Gallery in October 1971 all dated from his last year in Wellington.(15)

The most important development in these works, leaving aside pictures like Rongotai already discussed, was the evolution of a series of narrow band paintings where

he used an alternative motif to the koru. In total Walters was to paint only three large works using the new motif. These paintings are important because they carry his interests in repetition and symmetry to a new degree of intensity. The greater simplicity of the new motif compared with the koru made it suitable for achieving optimum focus on band alternation from top to bottom of the new paintings.

Two of these paintings were shown both at Wellington and Auckland. Titled Black and Red, 1970 (Plate 153) and Hautana, 1970 (Plate 155), both are in the vertical format and both measure 60 x 45 inches in size. The motif Walters used in these paintings was, like the koru, derived from Maori art. Its source is in the carving pattern rauponga which Walters simplified and re-worked in a similar way to the koru motif.(16) He stripped away the three-dimensional aspect of the rauponga and made it into a simplified geometric form.

Used by the Maori in the decoration of feather boxes and weapons such as clubs, the rauponga pattern was often repeated many times in the one work. Its essential design character involves incised parallel grooves in the wood ending in a sharp curve. The curve flows down or up and

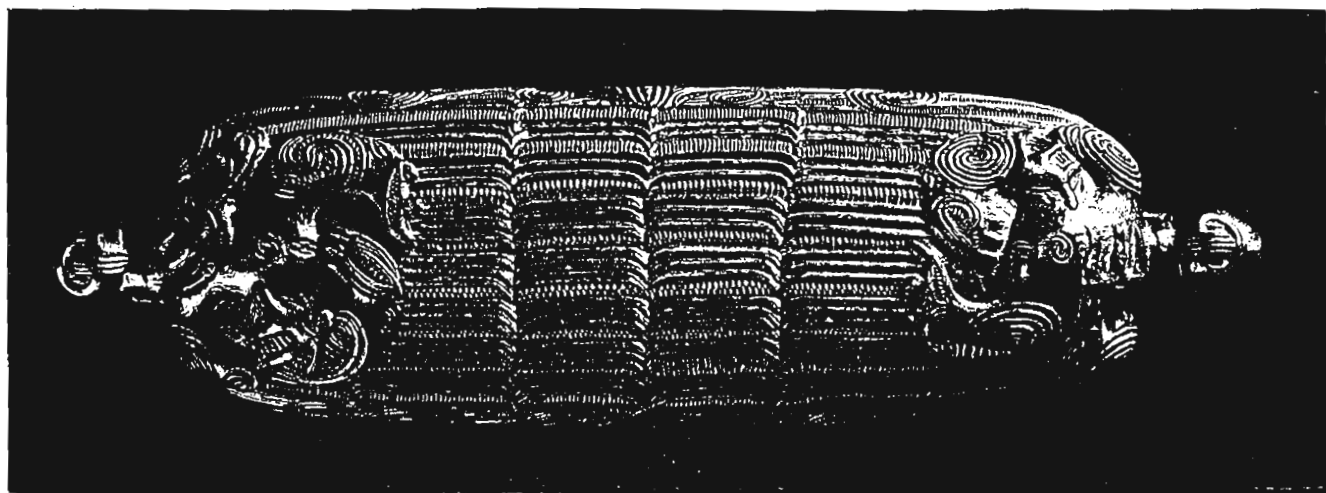


Figure 27. Maori rauponga design.

is cut off by the grooves of the next motif. By varying the length of the incised grooves and the direction of the motif, the Maori carver could generate numerous variations on rauponga. As always in Maori art, the rauponga is hand-drawn and is not aligned exactly with the vertical and horizontal axes of the artefact it adorns. Instead the grooves tend to follow the form of the surface they decorate, or to cut across it on an angle.

Walters' use of rauponga in his paintings is extremely severe and geometric. In the completed paintings he employed only one type of composition. He divided the painting into even narrow bands of light and dark that alternate down the picture surface with complete regularity. While this division of the surface relates to the alternation of light and dark in rauponga, where incised parallel grooves create lines of shadow and the raised surfaces between them make alternating light bands, it also relates directly to the narrow band koru paintings of 1968-1971. There is an undeniable link between the two groups of work. The use and type of colour is similar, too. Black and Red (Plate 153) is painted in two colours; Hautana (Plate 155) in pale blue and grey with the reduced tonal contrast in light colours seen in koru paintings of the same period, like Makaro, 1969 (Plate 140).

Black and Red and Hautana are almost exactly the same composition. The main difference between them is the choice of colour and tone. Yet, when hung side by side, the paintings assume completely separate identities. In taking this step Walters was moving into the territory of series art, in which a number of versions are made of the same image differing only in the choice of colour and tonal relationships. The scope for picture-making of this kind is large, as Albers among others has shown.(17) For Walters this marks an extreme position and one from which he later withdrew. His ongoing commitment was not to an art in which changes are made systematically and mechanically to a given composition. Rather his central concern is with working in series so that the relationships

can be made between works because of their common formal language not because of their common structure.

Black and Red and Hautana also carry the principles of symmetry and repetition further than in the narrow band koru paintings discussed so far. Because Walters made the rauponga motif so simple, a downward or upward curve to the bands sufficing to draw it, he was able to achieve a greater consistency and regularity in the alternating bands than seemed possible with the koru. The effect is of more insistent and repetitive all-over structure. By placing the rauponga curves on the central vertical axis of the paintings, by restricting their numbers Walters preserved the alternating light dark sequence throughout the entire work. In this sense, as well as the serial usage, the rauponga paintings take some of his ideas to an extreme. For these reasons, as well as their strength as images, these paintings are a significant development in Walters' art.

Despite his success with these works, Walters did not continue with them for long. One design, Study, 1970 (CPlate 154), was fully worked out at the sketch stage but was not transferred to canvas. In this work he was planning to use two zones demarcated by a colour change rather as in Rongotai. He also made several other drawings. There was obvious scope for further developments, but the artist returned to the koru paintings and in particular to the Genealogy series in order to explore related structures and ideas.

Among other non-koru paintings of this time is Black and White, 1969 (Plate 142) owned by the art dealer Petar Vuletic. Walters exhibited this work at the New Vision Gallery in May 1972.(18) Although based on a Polynesian lashing pattern which Walters had seen in a diagram in a Bishop Museum publication, the painting has a modern and Western appearance.(19)

The format of Black and White, a sixty inch square, is unusual for Walters. Its use relates to the underlying grid structure of the painting which it shares with a

few other works including Untitled Drawing, 1970 (Plate 156).(20) Because of its regularity the square is ideally suitable for an image based on even divisions of the surface which relate exactly to the format. In both Black and White and Untitled Drawing repetition of identifiable geometric forms is carried insistently across the entire surface. This continues the tendency already seen in the rauponga-based paintings to reduce or dispense with relational composition in favour of an all-over repetitive structure. As Walters was well aware, many European Op paintings were based on a grid of repeating geometric elements where the elements are virtually anonymous but the effect of the total image is complex.(21)

Black and White is centred on a white square that is aligned at right angles to the corners of the canvas not to the sides. From this centre Walters drew several larger squares alternating in black and white that echo and enlarge the central motif. From the outer sides of the third white square bands radiate towards each corner. Walters established a repeated series of squares which divide the work evenly, but are cropped at the edges of the image. Despite the simplicity of the motif and its exact repetition, the effect is complex. Because of positive/negative interplay and linking between motifs a variety of effects is produced. For example, there is the impression of depth despite the flatness of the imagery. There is also a pulsating movement produced by the push and pull between the centre and sides of the image.

At this period Walters was undoubtedly questioning his singleminded focus on the koru paintings. Even in 1971 he was concerned about continuing to use the motif. His increasing recognition as a painter may have helped him to realize the futility of such doubts. In 1971 he received a grant from the Queen Elizabeth the Second Arts Council, and the same year he was asked to accept the Temporary Lectureship in Painting at the Elam School of Fine Arts. These considerable votes of confidence

in his work, plus his move to Auckland, mark a change in his artistic status. From this point on he was recognized as one of two or three leading abstract painters in New Zealand.

Moving to Auckland brought him into contact with a few painters who shared some of his interests, and also strengthened his friendships with several art critics and dealers. He met Milan Mrkusich for the first time.(22) At that stage Mrkusich was a better-known painter of abstraction than Walters. During 1972 the Auckland City Art Gallery held a retrospective show of his paintings. Despite different temperaments and backgrounds the two painters were of similar age and had shared years of struggle in developing their painting far from the main centres of European abstract art. Unlike Walters, Mrkusich had no apparent interest in Maori or Oceanic art. His painting was based exclusively on the models of European and American painting available to him through reproductions. Mrkusich had a subjective and philosophical background to his art, unlike the pragmatic and objective attitude of Walters. Mrkusich was a regular exhibitor at the Peter McLeavey Gallery in Wellington so his recent works were familiar to Walters.(23)

Apart from painters at Elam, like Robert Ellis, Walters met and became friends with a number of younger artists. Of these Rick Killeen, then holding his first shows, was the most supportive of his outlook on painting.(24) Killeen for a time drew on Melanesian and Polynesian designs for his painting which entered an abstract phase during Walters' stay in Auckland. Ian Scott, a fellow student with Killeen in the mid-1960s, also became friendly with Walters and an admirer of his work.(25) His move to Auckland also brought Walters into closer contact with Petar Vuletic who opened a new dealer gallery specializing in abstract art.(26) After Vuletic had opened his gallery, Walters wrote to Peter McLeavey to tell him he was shifting his work from New Vision:"...all my new work from now on will be handled exclusively by Petar



Vuletic (in Auckland, of course)."(27) His relationship with Vuletic later became unsatisfactory, but, at first, Vuletic was one of the keenest supporters of his art and a buyer of his paintings.

Walters' move to Auckland was not immediately conducive to a change of direction in his painting. Naturally there was a continuity with ideas he had been exploring in Wellington. This is true of the Genealogy paintings which he began in Wellington and continued during his first years in Auckland. These are koru paintings in which the artist used insistent repetition of the motif to give an all-over effect and lessen the role of relational composition. They form a distinct group in the koru series and are serial in character.

The first of these works, Genealogy Number One (Plate 147) is dated November 1969 and was exhibited at the New Vision Gallery in September 1971.(28) The title Genealogy brings to mind the oral tradition of the Maori and other Pacific peoples who can recall their ancestry in a chant which involves a repeated verbal structure with only name changes. Walters constructed the image by repeating the same forms in narrow bands over and over again. They fill the canvas entirely. By stacking the repeated forms in rows he achieved a predictable structure to complement the alternation of the horizontal black and white bands. The relationship of the imagery to the format is reinforced by the precise horizontal and vertical divisions which are equal and echo the shape of the canvas. Everything is predictable and contained within the painted area with the exception of the motif in the lower-right corner. There Walters broke the pattern and introduced a black circle like a full-stop. This is the only concession to asymmetry and composition in the work.

In other Genealogy paintings he continued to explore the potential for this kind of disposition. Genealogy Number Two, 1969/1970 (Plate 150), goes further still towards a systemic approach. Walters was deliberately exploring this aspect. With reference to this painting he has noted:

"Basic unit is stated at the top of the canvas and repeated throughout."(29) The unit is shown in a large scale at the top of the canvas extending right across the painting. Below, Walters reduced the motif to half the size and repeated it no fewer than thirty-two times. In addition to the insistent repetition he also alternated the figure/ground relationship from black to white and back again giving a regular quick beat to the work.

Genealogy Number Two is completely symmetrical. Walters removed the last traces of relational composition from the work. This is true also of Genealogy Number Three, 1971 (Plate 164), and Genealogy Number Six, 1971 (Plate 165). Number Five and Number Six even dispense with the scale differences used in Two and Three. Apart from the colour band at the bottom of Genealogy Number Six, and the break in Number Five, both paintings are completely systemic, built up from a known and predictable unit. Given that unit we could proceed to make the image. In all the Genealogy series the basic unit, or module, is the same; only the scale differs. Indicative of Walters' approach in these works is the choice of the square format for Genealogy Number Five, one of the few times he used it in the koru series. All the Genealogy paintings except Number Six are in black and white.

These paintings and the rau-ponga-based works, as well as his grid paintings of the same years, show Walters coming his closest to the ideas of serial art. This had been defined in the late-1960s by the American artist Mel Bochner in an influential essay later reprinted by George Battcock in Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology, 1968.(30) In serial art simple, uniform elements are assembled in accordance with a known principle, such as repetition, to make the work. Much the same principle applies to Lawrence Alloway's definition of Systemic Painting first used by him for an exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 1966.(31) In Systemic Art simple, non-representational, usually geometric forms, can be repeated according to a clear and recognizable system.

The system itself becomes the means by which we approach the art work. Alloway extended the term to embrace modular system painting and unmodulated grid painting. The common feature is a clear principle of organization, not an underlying composition. There were obvious links with the repetitive imagery of Pop Art, for example, Warhol's soup cans.

For Walters the Genealogy series and the rauponga-based works were his closest approximation to these principles. Even in the Genealogy paintings themselves, at times, he tends to hold back from completely accepting a serial type of construction. For example, Genealogy Number Four, 1971 (Plate 163), retains aspects of relational composition and assymetry. Undoubtedly in these years he was considering alternative ways of deploying the koru and the Genealogy paintings point in a new direction. But, he began to feel that the potential of this series was limited. The last of the series (Plate 173), a work in a horizontal format, was done as a commission with some misgivings by the artist. That was in 1973.

Later he saw his position as belonging more properly with the older compositional type of painting: "To me it is painting in series with a limited range of elements rather than serial art. I think that serial art is a bit different, the sort of thing that Sol le Witt does for example, working through all the possible permutations, and not worrying how they look. I don't do this. I'm more old-fashioned if you like, my work is always relational, one part balanced against another and usually assymetrical. That differentiates me also from the true Op artists such as Vasarely and Riley, perhaps not early Vasarely though, which are the ones that interested me." (32) These compositional principles run right through Walters' work, including the Genealogy series. But, as the series shows, he was able to adjust his approach considerably and produce a wide range of types of work.

Three of the later Genealogy paintings were exhibited at the artist's one-man show at the New Vision Gallery

in May 1972. Walters was justifiably pleased with the exhibition which included nine paintings and one drawing. In addition to Genealogy Number Four, Five and Six, the show included the large coloured painting Koru (Plate 166), the two rau-ponga-based works Black and Red and Hautana (Plates 153 and 155), as well as the grid painting Black and White, 1969 (Plate 142). He was able to write to Peter McLeavey in May 1972: "The show looks very good and is by far my best to date." (33)

In terms of range and ideas the show was undoubtedly a milestone in Walters' career. For the first time there were few works on paper. In the Genealogy series itself there are only a handful of ink drawings; for example, Genealogy Study, 1971 (Plate 161), which was purchased by the Auckland City Art Gallery. The reduced number of drawings in the show reflects Walters' gradual concentration on paintings. He found that the time taken to complete the ink drawings was as great as that needed to do a painting on canvas. In 1973 he expressed the view to McLeavey that he would not be doing many more of them: "...there won't be many more ink drawings of the 'koru'. In fact, most of the new ones are really final versions of early ideas." (34)

Instead he was concentrating on his paintings for which he used coloured studies on paper that were more in the nature of working drawings than finished pieces for exhibition and sale. His increased sales of paintings helped him to focus on larger works. Also, the improved liaison with other painters in Auckland must have helped him to direct his energies towards the completion of larger works. Another factor affecting his output of finished ink drawings was his interest in printmaking. This emerged in the period 1972-1973, and was to become an important part of his work in later years. This aspect of his art, which will be discussed in a later chapter, provided a better return financially for his time spent in developing small works on paper, and suited his style.

In 1973 Walters was able to shift into a new house

at Glenfield, on Auckland's North Shore, with a basement studio. From that point on he began developing works that take on the stylistic characteristics of his late period. The productive last years in Wellington saw an outpouring of consistently high-quality paintings and the production of several important series of work. It marks his attainment of the status of a recognized full-time painter, and a leader of the abstract movement that was to emerge strongly in New Zealand in the 1970s.

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Footnotes:Chapter Nine

1 The exhibition opened on May 6, 1969. It included nine works, among them Kahukura and Mahuika. There was a printed catalogue for the exhibition listing all works. The show was a considerable commercial success. The reviewer for the Dominion noted:"...Walters shows abstract paintings of an optical or 'op' art nature."Review, May 14, 1969.

2 The New Vision Gallery was unable to sell Walters' work with any degree of success. Walters observed to McLeavey:"But Tina [Hos] can't sell paintings and they are losing artists all the time because of this." Walters to McLeavey, June 11, 1973.

3 From his first show of Walters' paintings in 1969 McLeavey was able to sell major works to the Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth, and to Victoria University, Wellington. Tim and Sherrah Francis, who later became major supporters of Walters, were among buyers from the 1969 show.

4 They were catalogue numbers 4 and 3 respectively. Mahuika was priced at 300 dollars, Tamatea at 400 dollars.

5 See K.Moffett, Kenneth Noland, New York, 1977. Walters had a reproduction of one of Stella's early stripe works in one of his scrapbooks indicating his interest in them. For Stella, see W.S.Rubin, Frank Stella, New York, 1970, and Robert Rosenblum, Stella, New York, 1971.

6 Walters sees a relationship between the two paintings. He has noted:[Mahuika]"Relates to Tamatea and was completed about the same time." See the retrospective catalogue, Gordon Walters, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983, p. 39.

7 *ibid*, p. 40. Walters notes that the compositional type developed from earlier paintings of the first koru series. But, he does not comment on the differences.

8 Larry Poons (b.1937) received considerable critical attention in the late-1960s. His paintings with pale discs of colour made a considerable impression not only on Walters but also on Theo Schoon. The use of a repeated unit, with variations within a limited range of forms undoubtedly appealed to Walters.

9 Walters catalogue *op. cit.* p. 40.

10 Walters to McLeavey, August 30, 1972.

11 Walters catalogue, *op. cit.* p. 42.

12 Walters uses the term 'stacking' for this deployment of the motif. See Walters catalogue, *op. cit.* p.42.

13 There was a printed catalogue for the show which opened on August 24, 1971.

14 This meant that he had the use of a studio at Elam during the Academic Year. See S.Franks, Elam:1950-1983, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983, p.6.

15 These paintings were shown at the exhibition, Wellington '71, held at the New Vision Gallery between September 27 and October 8, catalogue numbers 12 to 15.

16 See Augustus Hamilton, The Art Workmanship of the Maori Race in New Zealand, Dunedin, 1896, p. 250 (facing).

17 See Werner Spies, Josef Albers, New York, 1968.

18 Black and White was catalogue number 2 in the exhibition, held between May 8 and May 19.

19 The original design was small in scale and drawn in outline. Walters transformed it into a large painting.

20 Walters' grid paintings are discussed by A.Bogle in the catalogue, The Grid: Lattice and Network, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983, p. 19 and plates pp. 54-57.

21 See C.Barrett, Op Art, London, 1970, p. 38, for a short discussion of this aspect.

22 For Mrkusich, see M.Dunn and P.Vuletic, Milan Mrkusich: Paintings 1946-72, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1972, with chronology p. 30.

23 *ibid*, p. 31 for a list of Mrkusich exhibitions.

24 Killeen was born in 1946 and had attended the Elam School of Art between 1964-1966. For a note on his early work see Gil Docking, 200 Years of New Zealand Painting, Wellington, 1969, p. 202. Some of Killeen's abstract work is discussed by A.Bogle in the catalogue, The Grid, *op. cit.* p. 12.

25 Ian Scott was born in 1945. He studied at Elam between 1964 and 1967. Like Killeen he owns work by Walters.

26 Petar Vuletic was born in Auckland in 1946. He studied Law at Auckland University, and was a member of the Visual Arts Panel of the Queen Elizabeth the Second Arts Council between 1970 and 1973.

27 Walters to McLeavey, May 26, 1972.

28 It was exhibited at the show Wellington '71, held between September 27 and October 8, 1971, catalogue number 12.

29 See Walters catalogue, *op. cit.* p. 41.

30 See "Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism", in Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology, edited by G.Battcock, New York, 1968.

31 The essay was published in the exhibition catalogue of 1966 and reprinted in Minimal Art, 1968, op. cit.

32 Walters to the author, August 23, 1978, notes on a draft of the article on Painting Number One, 1965.

33 Walters to McLeavey, May 26, 1972.

34 Walters to McLeavey, August 18, 1973.

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THE YEARS 1973-1983

In 1973 Walters was established at his Glenfield studio and able to paint full-time. He continued with the koru paintings but began to make modifications. The narrow band paintings which preoccupied him until 1972 gave way to images built up from larger and fewer formal elements. For a time in 1973-1974 he concentrated on paintings with no reference to the koru or any motif derived from Oceanic art.

These paintings are composed of rectangular divisions of the picture surface and painted in tones of grey and black. The divisions are few and comparatively large making the works stable optically. A representative example is Painting, 1974 (Plate 180), which was first shown at the Peter McLeavey Gallery in April 1976.(1) Walters divided the image horizontally into five broad bands of tone. The painting would have been symmetrical if the artist had not bisected the second band from the top making two rectangles, one painted white, the other black. Three of the remaining bands, including those at the top and bottom of the painting, are a uniform pale grey. The second band from the bottom of the canvas is painted black.

In appearance Painting, 1974, is closer to the hard-edge abstract paintings of American artists like John McLaughlin (1898-1976) than to the more complex relational compositions of geometric abstraction.(2) The few large elements are neutral in appearance; the colouring harmonic and austere. McLaughlin's work was well-known to Walters and was discussed by him with fellow painters like Rick Killeen, and with the dealer Petar Vuletic. Like Walters, McLaughlin had been much influenced by Mondrian and his theories. His choice of rectangles as neutral forms relates back to that source.(3) Gradually McLaughlin reduced the number of elements in his painting and the colours, allowing symmetry to replace the dynamic equilibrium sought by Mondrian. In Painting, 1974, Walters shows

the influence of American painting of the type known as Post-Painterly Abstraction.(4) He sympathized with the cool planned feel of such works, the clear defined areas of unmodulated colour, and the emphasis on the literal nature of the painting, as paint on canvas free from associative overtones. There is a link here with his interests in serial art in the Genealogy series of the preceding years. In both instances there is a questioning of his method and a revision of his system of painting in the light of recent, particularly American approaches.

At that time he had been looking critically at his achievement, especially at the koru paintings. His contact with painters like Mrkusich, who were involved in the theory of abstract painting caused him to think deeply about his own position. He found himself in the midst of animated discussions about directions in modern painting. In particular the problems of isolation and of working in a provincial situation were talked about, as well as the difficulty of getting patronage for abstract painting.(5)

His concern about the koru paintings was temporary, mainly a product of his own self-critical faculty. He did not want to repeat himself. Also, he sometimes considered that his version of the koru was still too much "a particular form", to use his own expression, and not sufficiently neutral.(6) Despite these doubts he did not persevere with the reductive works like Painting, 1974, for very long. But a continuity can be established with earlier non-koru paintings, like the works with circle segments of 1967 (Plates 126-128), and Oriental, 1967 (Plate 124), discussed in Chapter Eight. Oriental in particular is reduced to a comparable study of rectangular forms painted in monochrome. However, Oriental involves a relational type of composition which the artist avoided in the 1974 canvas.

Nuku, 1973 (Plate 177), is another work of this kind. It is symmetrical and drawn on a square format. The segmental forms in the corners relate back to the works of 1967

but are used here in a new way. It is possible that there is some connection with Mrkusich's Corner paintings of about the same period which Walters admired. Mrkusich's paintings were serial in character in that the structure was the same, only the colours and handling were changed. Walters obtained one of these paintings at about this time in exchange for one of his koru paintings, Muritai, 1967-68 (Plate 131). Walters preferred the paintings with hard-edge corner motifs forming triangles of colour, and with flat non-gestural handling of paint in the central field. In Nuku Walters replaced Mrkusich's corner accents with drawn segmental forms which shape and tense the black central field.

In 1974 Walters agreed to exhibit some of his early gouaches from the mid-1950s at Wellington and Auckland. These exhibitions were held in September and October that year at the Petar/James Gallery and at the Peter McLeavey Gallery.(7) In both exhibitions he showed some thirty gouaches from the period 1954-1956 - nearly all for the first time. The demand for these exhibitions was indicative of a growing awareness of his importance in the development of abstract painting in New Zealand.

The printed check-list of works for the Petar/James Gallery show announced that it was:"The first in a series of exhibitions surveying the origins of New Zealand abstract painting."(8) This statement points to the concern in some circles for more knowledge about the historical development of abstract painting in New Zealand - an area that had not been much discussed by the few local critics and historians up until that time. Those interested included writers like James Ross who was then contributing art reviews to the Sunday Herald; collectors like Tim and Sherrah Francis; and younger painters including Geoff Thornley, Philip O'Sullivan and Ian Scott.

In a sense the exhibitions were an attempt to show that Walters had a place in the forefront of local abstraction in the mid-1950s. Because his gouaches had not been shown previously to any extent, his claims had not been

recognised. Most people knew only his post-1965 paintings.

With his Wellington show of the gouaches Peter McLeavey not only printed a check-list of works but also a statement by the artist himself explaining a little of the background to the show. This statement is worth quoting in full because it casts light on how Walters saw his position at that time.

"This exhibition represents approximately half of a series of gouaches which were done between 1953 and 1959. With one or two exceptions, they have not previously been shown. Together they represent the themes which occupied me during this period. Mostly they were preliminary studies for larger works, and they incorporate a wide range of stylistic influences, from Oceanic art to European abstraction of the period. They were not shown at the time I did them because I considered the artistic climate to be too unsympathetic, if not downright hostile to abstraction. Some of the themes still interest me and I frequently take up and re-work ideas which were not fully realized at the time."(9)

Walters' comment about the unsympathetic climate for abstraction indicates the difficulties he had encountered in pursuing his chosen field of work. If anything the experience of Mrkusich in Auckland during the same period, and even at the time of his retrospective, was worse. The hostility came from artists as well as from gallery staff and critics.(10)

This situation reflected the provincialism of the New Zealand art scene and the defensive barriers against criticism of insularity. In the mid-1970s no New Zealand painter, except Frances Hodgkins, had achieved any reputation outside the country. The sculptor Len Lye had emerged as a leading Kineticist in the United States during the 1960s, but was then almost unknown in New Zealand.(11) Local art rarely if ever received attention from critics outside New Zealand.

By 1974 there had been a slight but definite change of attitude towards Walters' gouaches of the 1950s. Critics

were cautious but deferential. Some galleries, dealers and private patrons bought a few of the gouaches at bargain prices.(12) Younger painters like Rick Killeen, Ian Scott, Geoff Thornley and Philip O'Sullivan increasingly came to see Walters and his struggle to achieve his own style in abstract art as a model for them. His example helped to encourage them to try and achieve a similar degree of dedication to their work despite discouraging circumstances.

During the years 1974-1975 Walters was linked loosely with a group of painters who were united in their determination to improve the status of abstraction with the New Zealand art public. However, divergences of outlook, extreme differences of character and troubles over sale of works ultimately caused friction. Breakdown of any semblance of a cohesive group soon followed. Mrkusich's attempt to set up a new dealer gallery limited to showing abstract painting occurred in 1976. By that time Walters had already left Auckland for Christchurch, and had made it clear that he did not want to be involved with the sale and promotion of his own paintings.(13) Mrkusich's venture, the Data Gallery, had a brief and financially unsuccessful life in downtown Auckland before it was forced to close.(14) Walters did not want to be coerced into a group situation when he knew his art was an independent and individual achievement.

Viewed in retrospect, the years from 1973 to 1976 were not as productive or as peaceful as Walters would have liked. His difficulties with Petar Vuletic as his Auckland dealer meant that he lost track of paintings sold by him through the Petar/James Gallery. He did not get paid promptly either, making him reluctant to hold a one-man show of new works in Auckland. This was a considerable drawback considering Auckland's status as the largest city in the country with many potential buyers for his paintings.

Apart from the small exhibition of gouaches from the mid-1950s discussed above, Walters did not hold a

one-man show with Vuletic's gallery. Instead he chose to exhibit paintings there at irregular intervals in stock shows or in group exhibitions. Consequently the break with the New Vision Gallery in 1972 did not mean an increased visibility for his paintings in Auckland. If anything, he exhibited less often.<sup>(15)</sup> Wellington became and was to remain the main centre for exhibitions of his new paintings. This was due to the enthusiasm of Peter McLeavey who was able to sell his paintings on a regular basis to private patrons. Sales to public art galleries remained few and far between.

In his new koru paintings of 1973 to 1976 Walters began to introduce stylistic changes. He looked back to earlier compositions with the intention of revising and improving them. The new paintings of this period can be represented by two black and white works, Tohu, 1973 (Plate 173), and Maho, 1974 (Plate 172). Both paintings seem austere and geometric compared with the narrow band works that preceded them.

In these new paintings Walters favoured black and white again. He had used black and white for the majority of the Genealogy series, and was to continue with it during his first years in Christchurch. In May 1978 he wrote: "The koru works best in black and white or in one colour on white and I am limiting all my new ones to this range."<sup>(16)</sup> This rejection of the strong and varied colours he had been using demonstrates Walters' constant search for purity in his art. Also, his experiments with the reductive paintings had led him to concentrate on essentials in the koru works. He concentrated on matters of scale and drawing rather than colour.

In both Tohu and Maho there is a stable feeling to the forms and a considerable increase in the scale of the bands and koru-derived motifs. From now on Walters stopped painting works with narrow bands. It is as if he had decided that he had taken that direction as far as it could go. Tohu (Plate 173) is a revision of ideas that originate with the earliest koru studies of 1956.

The name is intended to bring to mind Te Whiti, the Maori prophet and friend of Tohu. In this case Walters intended the title to suggest a connection with the first black and white koru painting of 1964, called Te Whiti (Plate 103). Both works were painted on the same format, Tohu on canvas, Te Whiti on hardboard. Both have the black and white koru bands and motifs drawn above a rectangular base. The resemblance continues in the handling of the koru-derived forms as well. The composition depends on a contrast between the centre and the sides. In both works Walters stacked the black band terminations in vertical rows that are just contained by the literal edges of the support. In both there is a changeover from black to white between the centre and sides of the image.

Despite the resemblances, in Tohu Walters achieved a more monumental image than in Te Whiti. He stressed the central vertical axis more by aligning motifs with it and eliminating the two black circles in the upper-left corner of Te Whiti. He increased the scale of the koru-derived forms slightly and made them more optically stable by changes to the spacing. If we compare Tohu with Te Whiti, it is apparent that the space between each circle and band termination has been reduced. The reduction is such that there is now the finest possible gap between each form - just enough, in fact, to allow clear definition of the drawing without loss of sharpness. This significant stylistic change appears in the Auckland period, and Tohu seems to be the first major painting in which Walters made it.

Tohu has a very different feel from the much earlier Te Whiti. In Te Whiti the larger gaps between the forms allow a degree of movement and opticality which the artist reduced greatly in Tohu. Each part of Tohu has been adjusted to the finest tolerance, like a well-machined engine, so that nothing can move out of position. Each part is held so tightly together that the image takes on a new intensity. Compared with Te Whiti, Tohu seems enlarged and more sharply focused. Even at the sides of the work

Walters brought the drawn imagery very close to the literal edges of the canvas so that the slight tapering between the black base of Te Whiti and the koru-derived forms above is largely eliminated.

In Maho, 1974 (Plate 172), Walters developed a new compositional idea in which the koru bands are disposed vertically rather than horizontally, reinforcing the vertical axis in a more direct and clear fashion than before. Maho, also in black and white, is a severe and minimal image closely related to the reductive abstract works like Painting, 1974 (Plate 180). A large area of black occupies the left-hand side of the work, a white area of similar size lies at the right. The two vertical koru bands, one in black, one in white, dovetail the sides together in the simplest yet most effective way. The economy and beauty of this painting is unexpected and impressive. Walters had not previously achieved such a lucid statement of the motif, nor one in which the unity of the image is so complete. There is a perfect balance between the monumental lines of the vertical bands and the expansive forces of the black and white fields on either side.

By using a new large scale for the koru bands and terminations Walters was able to hold the whole surface of the work with just the two elements. This goes beyond his earlier reductive koru works, like Painting Number Two, 1966 (Plate 117) where four elements are used and are separated by the vertical expanse of the board. Comparatively Maho is a more daring, mature and cohesive image.

In 1976, before he shifted to Christchurch in April, Walters completed a large horizontal work called Oreka. In Oreka (Plate 184) Walters deployed the koru-derived forms across a horizontal canvas more than twice as wide as it is high. His few horizontal koru paintings of the 1960s, like Painting Number One, 1965, or Painting Number Eight, 1965 (Plates 105 & 110), were much nearer the square, and in his standard format of that time 48 x 36 inches. In fact, the only precedent for the proportions of Oreka



is found in a work like Genealogy Number Eight, 1973 (Plate 171) in which an extreme horizontal format was used to allow the repetition of the motif in a row.

Normally Walters avoided the horizontal format. There are difficulties of structure and association. If the bands are made to stretch too far using the positive and negative interplay the tension is lost and the surface organization is compromised. This was especially true with the narrow band paintings. The tendency of the image to fragment is greatly enhanced in the horizontal format. Another difficulty with the extended horizontal shape is the ready intrusion of landscape associations, or horizon lines, of waves breaking on the shore and the like. Walters tried hard to avoid these difficulties. By not using the horizontal he kept such pitfalls to the minimum. The cohesion of the imagery is also a cause for concern if the picture extends so far that it is difficult to view both sides in rapid alternation.

In Oreka Walters felt able to grapple with these difficulties. His solution was a bold one that involved treating both sides of the canvas as busy areas totally filled with koru-derived forms, whereas the centre is left almost empty. He divided the painting into thirds. The left third and the right third are filled with stacked bands and terminations. He split the work clearly down the middle leaving a hiatus between the two sides. By doing this he separated the left and right sides but set up a visual relationship between them that tends to contradict and cancel out the separation of parts. To help create a pull between the two sides of the imagery, Walters deployed three white circles in the central zone; two are near the left side towards the top, and one near the right, towards the bottom. This seems just enough to activate the space and charge it with energy. It is as if the circles are gripped in a magnetic field that makes them adhere to one side or the other. Because the gap is quite large the effect is dramatic and bold in conception. By using this kind of composition, Walters

avoided the landscape references. At the same time he created a striking new type of koru painting,

Undoubtedly his new style of drawing the koru-derived forms with broader bands, larger terminations and circles, and with very tight spacing, helped the legibility of the imagery. Although the distance between the extreme left and the extreme right of the painting is considerable, it is possible to quickly compare one with the other and see the relationships.

At the same time there are some problems with Oreka. The two sides of the painting are sufficiently separated physically to be viewed independently of each other. If viewed this way the sides of the painting seem self-sufficient and do not imply or require the other. To some extent Walters counters this objection by attaching circles in the central zone to each side of the image. Viewed with the circles attached, the two sides of the painting are incomplete and each needs the other. However, this is only one of several interpretations. If we choose to view the central zone as a separate section, and Walters' geometric division of the painting encourages this, we again see the side imagery as separate and complete. Compared with Maho, Oreka is less unified.

In 1976 Walters shifted to Christchurch. His move was brought about in part by his wife, Margaret Orbell, obtaining a lectureship in Maori Studies at Canterbury University. For a time, while he was living at Konini Road in Riccarton, Walters was again without a proper studio. It was not until the following year that his production as a painter resumed properly. But the point should be made that the number of paintings he completed in Christchurch between 1977 and 1983 was considerably smaller than in earlier years. Especially in the period 1980 to 1983 his output was down to a handful of works per year. Despite this, the quality of the painting in this late phase of his career is extremely high, and a definite development can be traced.

In the years 1977-1978 Walters was working on a group

of black and white koru paintings in the vertical format. A selection of these was shown in 1978 at the Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland, and the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington. The size Walters used was no larger than 60 x 45 inches. The new paintings incorporate the stylistic features first developed in works like Tohu and Maho of 1973-1974. Each form is large in scale, clear and sharp. The imagery is optically stable and has a high degree of calculation and control. In these paintings Walters did not make radical departures from earlier ideas. In fact, some of the works, like Karakia, 1977 (Plate 188), are revisions of compositions conceived in the mid-1960s. But, the re-working of each aspect of the compositions gives them a different feel, and marks them clearly as products of his late style.

Karakia is representative of several works of 1977-1978 in which Walters returned to the compositional idea of having alternating black and white bands organizing the centre of the image with the koru terminations and circles pushed to the sides. Waiata, 1977 (Plate 191), is another example. Both these paintings were exhibited by Peter McLeavey in July 1978. (17)

Karakia can be compared with the 1965 painting Black on White (Plate 108), a hardboard picture shown in Walters' first exhibition at the New Vision Gallery, and still in the collection of the artist. Black on White is a narrow band painting with sharp contrast and a lot of optical movement. There is an effect of shimmer across the central bands and of movement at the band terminations caused in part by the spacing between motifs and the irregular alignment of the imagery at the sides of the work. Instead of stacking the terminations one above the other, in Black on White Walters created a fluid effect by moving some band terminations back, others forward closer to the edge of the support. He allowed a generous amount of space between the end of the motifs and the edge of the board so that the forms can float and appear to move out of a rigid vertical and horizontal

alignment. By comparison Karakia is a more stable and monumental image.

In Karakia the bands are broader and fewer in number, fourteen of black and white instead of twenty and twenty-one in the 1965 work. There is almost no optical movement in the central bands so that the surface of the picture is stable unlike Black on White. The tension across the painting from left to right is effortlessly sustained in Karakia, helped by the increased legibility of the forms and the elimination of the staggered edge. In Karakia Walters stacked the band terminations directly one above the other in a vertical row and brought them as close as possible to the literal edges of the canvas. Unlike the forms in Black on White they are held firmly in position. Where Walters has shortened some of the bands and introduced the circle motifs these, too, are kept in position one above the other so that the irregular effect at the perimeter of Black on White is eliminated. The reduction of motifs also assists the legibility and makes connections on the diagonal much easier to see. For example, Walters related the black motifs in the lower-left corner to white ones of an identical disposition higher up the canvas on the right. In Black on White surface tensions of this type are hard to trace because of the complexity and irregularity of the image.

The matter of the apparent size discrepancy between white and black motifs is also less of a problem in Karakia than in the earlier work. Walters discussed this aspect in a letter of August 1978: "The whole work is outlined first and then filled in, so actually the black circles are larger by the thickness of the line used, thus - the white circle reads from the inside of the line, the black from the outside, the line being incorporated in the filling in both cases. This is one of the problems associated with the work which has bothered me most. It is why I have slowly enlarged the circles in relation to the lines or bars until they almost touch. This I find largely eliminates the problem and...keeps the work

very firmly on the surface. In this respect, over the years, my concept of the work has changed somewhat because originally I thought in terms of the gaps between the motifs as playing an important part in the work, but not now as much as before."(18)

By his refinements to the drawing Walters was able to achieve a much closer balance between white and black than in the earlier paintings. The tendency of white forms to appear larger is countered by drawing them a slightly smaller actual size, and by the tight spacing between forms so that the terminations and circles are wedged into position.

Walters' reference to enlargement of the size of the circles in relation to the bands is noteworthy. If Karakia is compared with Black on White the change is quite noticeable. The band terminations are also enlarged so that more of the full curve of the circle is visible. However, the radius of the circle remains fractionally smaller than the band widths. It has to be smaller to allow for the separation between the forms. In the earlier paintings the gap between band terminations and the band above was considerably greater. For example, in Painting Number Two, 1966 (Plate 117), the band width is one and a half inches and the radius of the circular terminations is one and five sixteenth inches. This creates a gap of three eighths of an inch between the terminations and the bands above them. In Karakia the gap is less than a third of this, on a larger format.

The change in Walters' attitude to the gaps between motifs is indicative of his new style in the koru paintings. He has moved from a freer disposition of motifs to a tighter more controlled one. There is a gain in monumentality. His paintings of 1977-1978 using the koru are among his most assured and confident work. Though few in numbers these paintings have an air of finality about them, and were probably intended to bring the koru series to a close.

During this same period in Christchurch, Walters began

to make a series of paintings based on an alternative motif. This was the geometricized rock art figure he had used so successfully in his gouaches of 1955-1956. He had shifted to a new house in Camrose Place, near the University, in February 1977. The house provided a moderately large studio space in the basement where he was able to paint with minimal disruption to family life. The new paintings, called the Parade series were quite consciously retrospective. Parade Number One, 1977 (Plate 186), is a horizontal work based on a gouache of 1955. Its small size recalls the early works, though its colouring is much more subdued. Painted in black, white and yellow ochre it has an austere quality compared with the lively colours of the early gouaches. The arrangement of the stylized figures in a row is geometric and precise. All the figures are in black with white centres making the repetitive aspect of the forms more insistent. Walters introduced variation by the greater width of the left-hand figure. A small rectangle placed across the upper-right corner is the only relief from the repetitive nature of the imagery. In technique Parade Number One incorporates the same smooth application of paint and hard-edge precision he had developed in the koru series. He ruled the lines to make them geometrically exact. This contrasts with the free-hand quality of the gouaches using the same imagery dating from the mid-1950s.

Several later paintings in this series, Numbers Three and Four, also of 1977, were shown at the Peter Webb Galleries in April 1978. Both these paintings are restricted to the black, white and yellow ochre range. In both Walters placed a black rectangle in the central area to break up the row of figures and divide the image into a number of parts. This is particularly pronounced in Parade Number Four, 1977 (Plate 190), where the central black rectangle is framed by pairs of figures at left and right sides. In this example, the symmetry is broken by the use of a yellow ochre field behind one of the figures at the left of the centre, and the drawing of a small white

square on the central black field.(19)

Compared with the gouaches of 1955 based on the rock art figures, the Parade paintings are more reductive and geometric. The bright primary colours of the 1955 works have been totally eliminated. The forms are proportionately larger and more monumental in character. A few related works, like Untitled Painting, 1978 (Plate 198), show a similar austerity in the approach to colour and form.

Despite these alternative paintings, it remained clear to Walters and his patrons that the koru paintings were his major achievement. Undoubtedly his best works of the period between 1978-1983 remain koru paintings. He was reluctant to continue with them, though, unless he could introduce some new ideas or refinements. The most recent koru paintings, few in number, reveal tonal as well as colour and scale changes. Taken as a group the koru paintings of this period are some of the most subtle and distinguished of Walters' career.

One of the most noticeable features of Walters' work since 1977 has been a move away from the sharp tonal contrast of black and white which preoccupied him in his first years at Christchurch. Instead his koru paintings since that year have been painted in a softer, more harmonic tonal scale featuring charcoal grey instead of black, and off-white instead of white. The beginnings of this stylistic move were present in the paintings at the Webb show in 1978 with the reductive painting Muritai Two, 1977 (Plate 187). In this work Walters returned to a composition he had used in the late-1960s, with one koru motif in the upper area of the image balancing another in the lower. Otherwise the painting consists of alternating light and dark bands. Muritai One, owned by Milan Mrkusich, is painted in bright colours including a lemon yellow. Muritai Two is in two shades of grey with very reduced tonal contrast.

This preference for harmonic greys instead of harsh black and white contrast becomes pronounced in the years after 1978. In 1981, for example, Walters painted a revised

version of Painting Number Nine, 1965 (Plate 215). In the revised version he avoided the black and white contrast of the first version (Plate 111). He changed the black to a deep grey and modified the white slightly so that the tonal contrast is softened. At the same time other changes help to transform the revised version into a work of his late style. He reversed the black and white forms so that the white motifs occur in the centre not at the sides of the painting. Taken in combination with the larger scale of the circles, triangles and band terminations, the whole image is refined and stabilized. The wide gaps found in the 1965 painting allowed a movement which is not possible in the 1981 version. A harsh quality in the early work which is full of tonal contrast, optical effects and movement, gives way to a more harmonic stable and refined image. Comparatively the 1981 painting is more compact and less ambiguous in its presentation.

Even in the 1960s Walters was concerned about what he saw as the harshness of his koru paintings. He recalled in 1978:"...it was still hard going as there was no precedent locally for my way of working and often the directness and brutality of my way of painting scared me. To counter this brutality of method (or so I saw it) I became fanatical in adjusting the relationships between forms, all the time looking for the ultimate in refinement..."(20)

Significantly Walters made these observations at the time he was applying precisely these criticisms to his contemporary work. His new paintings with dark grey and off-white of the years 1980-1981, like Karaka Two, 1980 (Plate 207), and Maheno, 1981 (Plate 212), show this subtle harmonic style in paintings with the random all-over scattering of motifs he had first used with Tahi in 1967. These works are refined developments of the earlier compositions. In both these works the all-over character of the imagery is enhanced by the reduction of tonal contrast, as well as the larger scale of the motifs and the even surface tension.

Interestingly in both Karaka Number Two and Maheno,



paintings with much in common, Walters releases the tension slightly at the lower-right of the painting by widening the spacing between the two final motifs at that point. This occurs in the white in Karaka Number Two, and in the dark grey in Maheno. The effect is more pronounced in Maheno because the spacing is wider. This adjustment to the spacing provides a little release from the otherwise perfectly even and consistent tension across the surface of both paintings.

Apart from using dark grey with off-white, Walters has also introduced a soft red into his most recent koru paintings. As with all his colouring in the last few years it is a carefully mixed tint that moves towards grey rather than full chromatic colour. This is consistent with the muted, harmonic tones of the late phase of his work. This red colouring occurs in two horizontal paintings of the years 1981-1982, Te Oti and Taraki (Plates 213 and 216). Te Oti, titled by Peter McLeavey and exhibited in Wellington in November 1981, measures 21 x 60 inches, almost the same size as Taraki. Both paintings show Walters returning to the long narrow format he had last used in Oreka of 1976. In these new compositions, though, the artist achieved a greater control of the whole picture surface and exploited the format.

In Te Oti the alternating bands run across the painting to terminate in most cases near the centre of the work. There is a sweeping movement that culminates in the central area, but is spread across the painting by the diagonal disposition of the forms. Walters had first experimented with the diagonal in some of his works for the 1968 New Vision show. In those instances he used the vertical format with unsatisfactory results. There were compositional problems as well as awkward discrepancies between band lengths and shapes where they intersected with the edges of the support.

With the horizontal format these problems are no longer apparent. There is room for a diagonal deployment in Te Oti, and sufficient length in the bands to establish

their structural identity. In addition, Walters established a relationship between subsidiary motifs detached from the main group at upper-left and lower-right, so that there is a major diagonal movement and a minor contrasting one cutting across it which gives the surface a controlled rhythmic quality. At the lower-right Walters again used the slight widening of spacing between band terminations to give an expansive movement to that area of the canvas. Some recollection of Noland's horizontal stripe paintings occurs in Te Oti, but Walters organized the picture more by relational composition than by colour.

Taraki, 1982 (Plate 216) uses a familiar compositional idea with the white motifs in the positive towards the left of the work, alternating bands in the centre, and the deeper red tone in the positive at the right. The novelty is the adaptation of this compositional principle to the extended horizontal format. Walters' solution has much in common with Te Oti. In both works the band terminations are placed on the diagonal, and two single motifs are detached from the main group but related to each other, also on the diagonal. Whereas in Te Oti the red and the white terminations are brought close together near the centre of the image, in Taraki they are forced apart and polarize to the left and right sides. The detached motifs lie above and below the diagonal groupings and have been pushed slightly into the central zone helping to bridge without disrupting it; and also introducing an additional tension across the bands. By using the diagonal to help spread the forms across the horizontal format, Walters exploited the shape of the canvas so that it reinforced his composition.

Encouraged by the success of Taraki, Walters completed a large vertical canvas at the end of 1982 in which he used the diagonal again. Called Aranui (Plate 217), this canvas is in a blue grey and white. It is on the largest size Walters has used, six feet high. Compared with Koru, 1971 (Plate 166), of the same large size, it is more reductive and has a different sense of scale. There are

only fifteen grey bands whereas in Koru there are thirty. The scale difference contributes to the monumental calm of Aranui.

The upper part of the canvas is organized by alternating grey and white bands. Walters introduced the koru terminations only in the lower part of the painting and to the left-hand side. The effect is unexpected, and the composition unprecedented in the series. Walters has contrasted the upper and lower parts of the work. However, Walters has calculated the effect of the koru motifs placed on the diagonal so that they interact with the bands above them. They set up a movement that leads across the bands to the upper-right corner of the painting.

Aranui and Taraki were painted by Walters to hang in the retrospective of his works organized by the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1983. The show paid tribute to his achievement over the period from 1943 to 1983, some forty years. It showed a considerable number of his koru paintings from various periods of his career in the same gallery. The diversity of compositions within his deliberately restricted range of forms was striking to those who were prepared to look past the obvious similarities of motif.

Although it is probably safe to say that the major statements with the koru-derived forms have now been made, Walters has continued with the series. A recent development, projected in Untitled Painting, 1980 (Plate 209), is the use of a large scale motif with a much smaller one. This has been developed more in the prints of 1983 than in the paintings and will be discussed in the following chapter. Walters' production as a painter, low in 1982 when only a handful of paintings was completed, further declined in 1983.

Walters is unique in New Zealand contemporary painting. His style has not been imitated by younger artists, even though some of the finest of them have a deep respect for his art. Among these Rick Killeen stands out. His friendship with Walters began in 1971 when the older painter arrived in Auckland. Killeen has shown considerable

interest in the ethnic motifs used by Walters, and also a sympathy with his methodical manner of working. Killeen has bought a number of paintings by Walters indicating his interest in his art. He was closest to Walters in style during the period 1972-1975. At that time Killeen created paintings using chevron patterns and other motifs derived from Polynesian art. His recent manner of working with cut-out shapes has procedural points in common with Walters. He also places importance on intuition like Walters.

Ian Scott, who also met Walters in the early-1970s, has evolved in his Lattice series paintings that explore the possibilities of a limited range of forms. Like Walters he used a hard-edge style and was interested in the positive and negative aspects of his imagery.

The popularity of figurative painting in New Zealand has worked against the full appreciation of Walters' work. Although respected, his work is not liked by the majority of painters and patrons who associate art with expressionistic philosophies and styles. The formal emphasis in Walters' work and its classic reserve, while not denying a deep feeling, removes it from popular taste. Nevertheless the status of Walters' art has risen noticeably in the past ten years in relation to that of near contemporaries. His activity as a printmaker has played a part in making his style known to a wider audience. Printmaking has gradually assumed more prominence in his artistic production and deserves separate treatment in the next chapter.

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Footnotes:Chapter Ten

1 It was exhibited as Painting B, catalogue number 4, in the show held between April 27 and May 14. The price was \$1,200..It was unsold.

2 For McLaughlin, see J.Coplans, "John McLaughlin: Hard-Edge and American Painting", Artforum, vol. 11, 1964, January, p. 28, June, p. 42. See also J.Harithas, John McLaughlin Retrospective Exhibition: 1947-1967, Corcoran Gallery, Washington, 1968, and J.Langsnier, Four Abstract Classicists, San Francisco Museum of Art, 1959.

3 See Harthas op. cit. p. 9. "McLaughlin calls the type of abstraction which he achieves neutral form. It consists of the most economical combination of elements, usually two or three basic colours enclosed by rectangles. Rectangles are chosen as the artist's basic form because they are unlike anything else in nature."

4 The term was used by the influential American art critic Clement Greenberg in the catalogue of his exhibition of contemporary painting held at the Los Angeles County Museum in 1964 with the title Post-Painterly Abstraction. Among artists included were Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, Elsworth Kelly, Frank Stella and Leon Polk Smith. Walters was interested in all these painters.

5 A number of meetings were held by the painters at their homes. Among the artists involved were Killeen, Mrkusich, Walters, Thornley, Roy Good and Philip O'Sullivan. Petar Vuletic also attended these sessions.

6 "I would be seen in the koru series to be still involved with particular form and as a consequence still impure and perhaps not completely abstract. I have thought a lot about this." Walters to the author, November 28, 1983.

7 The Petar/James show was held between September 4-20. The McLeavey show between October 15 and November 1.

8 Statement by Petar Vuletic, September 1974.

9 Statement by Gordon Walters, dated October 2, 1974.

10 This took the form of obstruction while the show was being organized, and refusal by the Director to pay for the catalogue printing costs unless they were subsidized by Petar Vuletic.

11 For Lye see the book, Figures in Motion, edited by W.Curnow and R.Horrocks, Auckland University Press, 1984. Recognition for Lye in New Zealand came mainly about

11 cont. the time of his death in 1980. A memorial number of the magazine Art New Zealand was published that year and an exhibition of Lye's work, curated by Andrew Bogle, was shown at the Auckland City Art Gallery.

12 Among buyers were the Hocken Library and the Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North. The price for the gouaches was \$190..

13 Walters wrote to McLeavey on October 3, 1976:"I am feeling increasingly luke-warm about Milan's plans for a gallery. On the whole I am glad to be out of the place [Auckland] while things settle down."

14 The Data Gallery was located in Durham House. It was run by Mrkusich's son, Lewis, but funded by contributions from artists involved in supporting the venture. The shows were poorly attended and sales were few. The gallery opened in 1977 and closed in 1978, without any official notice of its closure.

15 Admittedly Vuletic sold a considerable number of Walters' paintings to private collectors, many of them lawyers like John Gellert. But his failure to inform the artist when sales were made or to whom led to serious problems and lack of confidence. Vuletic continued to deal in Walters' work after the artist had shifted to Christchurch. He did so without Walters' cooperation. Walters' note to McLeavey on the matter is informative: "I see that Petar Vuletic is advertising an exhibition of my work for this month. This show has nothing to do with me. I have not given him any work since I left Auckland." Walters to McLeavey, November 11, 1977.

16 Walters to the author, May 1978.

17 The show was held between July 25 and August 12, 1978. Karakia was catalogue number 1, price \$1,800.. Waiata was catalogue number 5, price also \$1,800.. It is interesting to note that both works were purchased by public art galleries. Karakia was bought by the National Art Gallery, Wellington, Waiata by the Dowse Gallery, Lower Hutt.

18 Walters to the author, August 8, 1978.

19 In 1978 Walters applied to the Arts Council for a grant to help him develop new work free from financial pressure. He applied for \$1,000.. in August but was given \$3,000.. in October. "I have just heard from the Arts Council that they have awarded me \$3,000.. against expenses for forthcoming exhibitions. I asked for only \$1,000.. and was rather astonished at the amount of their grant." Walters to the author, October 16, 1978. This response from the Arts Council shows the respect his work was now receiving in official circles.

20 Walters to the author, May 1, 1978, p. 3.

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GORDON WALTERS: PRINTMAKER

During his early career as a painter Walters showed little interest in printmaking. It was not until 1969 that he was associated with a published screen-print and, even then, the work was a multiple not a signed edition. His serious interest in printmaking belongs mainly to the period after 1977 and the works to his late style.

Initially Walters was fully occupied with his development as an abstract painter, a process that was slow and for many years far from the public eye. Printmaking is by nature a public-oriented art form involving editions that are designed to reach a wide audience. It was not until the late-1950s that Walters felt that he had much to offer as a painter. Even then he had no reputation as an artist so that sales of prints would have been few and far between.

Another factor to take into account is his lack of interest in the traditional kinds of printmaking techniques. Media such as etching or lithography and their processes have no appeal to him. When he finally decided to make prints his decision was dictated by the suitability of his imagery for reproduction by screen-printing medium. Also, he was attracted by the fact that he would not personally have to print the editions. His role would be mainly as the designer, not the artisan.

The separation of these roles is a necessary background to his acceptance of printmaking as part of his recent work. As his style as a painter evolved, Walters increasingly viewed the technical execution of the final painting as a process quite separate from the invention of the image. As early as his first show of the koru paintings at the New Vision Gallery in 1966, he was using ideas for paintings he had worked out years before. As his style of painting became more geometric and precise, the major decisions about the drawing, the tones and colours had to be made in advance. During the painting process the artist himself must work rather like a skilled



technician following specifications very closely. To a large extent this is an automatic task, a job that does not of itself require artistic decisions. Presumably it would be possible for Walters to employ an assistant to execute the painting to his requirements.

Throughout his career Walters has always executed his final paintings himself. Unlike Vasarely or Bridget Riley, he has not had the resources to set up a studio with trained assistants able to take over and complete paintings to his specifications.(1) That would require a greater volume of production and sales than he ever achieved. However, the option would be available to him if he wanted to take it at any stage in the future.

With printmaking, however, he has taken the logical step and allowed collaboration. His designs are suited to screen-printing techniques. The hard-edge shapes of his motifs and their two-dimensional nature lend themselves to translation into stencils. Also, Walters' economy with colour means that his images can be printed with a minimum number of inkings - usually two. The flat surface available with screening as well as the impersonal quality in the printing suits Walters' work more than is the case with that of some painters who are used to achieving effects peculiar to painting and unsuitable for screen-printing. The loss of quality between a screened Walters' print and a hand-painted ink is very slight. Once under glass, the two types of work are virtually impossible to distinguish from each other.

Even so, there can be problems. Quality control has to be tight to allow the precision of shape and the exactitude of tone indispensable to Walters' style. Registration of the prints has to be controlled closely. Any stretching of the paper due to moisture can cause distortion of the bands and irregularities of shape in terminations or circles. The technical standard required for a Walters' print is high.

Walters has never made an edition of his own prints. In all cases, his work has been printed for him. His

role has been to provide art-work and to supervise the production. In recent years, even the supervision of printing has been entrusted to Mervyn Williams, a fellow artist and master of screen-printing. Walters provides the printer with a scale drawing for the print along with notes about tone and colour. The matching of the precise tone he wants is always a matter of the utmost importance. The print only proceeds once the artist is fully satisfied that his specifications have been met.(2)

The first print by Walters was published in 1969 with the title Tawa (Plate 218). Unlike his later prints Tawa was an unsigned multiple issued by the Barry Lett Galleries Auckland. It was one of a group of prints by contemporary New Zealand artists commissioned by the gallery as a commercial venture. The concept for the multiples was new at the time and seemed a good way to publicize the works of painters who would not normally have considered printmaking. The gallery planned to sell the prints in sets of twelve with standardized frames so that purchasers could rotate them and have a collection of contemporary New Zealand art available for display. The majority of the artists represented in the multiples were not print-makers.(3) In most cases these prints were the only ones they made and did not lead on directly to greater involvement with the medium.(4)

Although the multiples as a set were quite successful, the quality of paper and printing was poor. There was variety in the prints to make them as representative as possible. Strong prints were mixed in with weak ones, name artists with relative unknowns, figurative art with abstract. At the time, Walters was among the least known of the painters. In fact, considering he did not exhibit his work at the Barry Lett Galleries, his inclusion as one of the artists is at first surprising. He was included because of his unique style of abstraction and its suitability to screen-printing.

Compared with Walters' later prints, Tawa is not of high technical quality. Mervyn Williams supervised the

printing of the multiples and was brought into working contact with Walters' designs for the first time.(5) As a technician Williams was fastidious in his approach. But in the multiples his concerns for quality were overridden by the need to supply a cheap product that everyone could afford.

Born in Whakatane in 1940, Williams had served an apprenticeship as a commercial silk-screen printer. He had not taken the Diploma Course at the Elam School of Fine Arts, a matter he did not regret. He later found that his knowledge of the technical side of screen-printing was superior to that of the Elam staff employed to teach printmaking. As a practising painter himself, he was favourably placed to liaise with artists interested in making screen-prints. In the late-1960s Williams published several editions of his own prints based on chromatic variations. Abstract in conception and hard-edge in style, they are some of the few New Zealand works of that era which share Walters' interest in optical effects. Williams had seen Walters' work in the first New Vision show of 1966 and had been impressed by the quality of the koru paintings and their geometric style. At that time, though, the two men had not met each other. Subsequently the relationship between Walters and Williams was to provide the basis for the screenprints Walters published in the late-1970s and early-1980s. Williams provided the technical skills to realize Walters' designs successfully. Equally important was his admiration for Walters' work and his determination to make the best prints possible.

In 1969 when the Barry Lett Galleries issued the multiples there was little public awareness of contemporary New Zealand art. The multiples were intended to publicise and promote New Zealand art to the widest possible audience. A sheet of information issued with the multiples contained information about them helpful to buyers who wanted details about the artists and their works. A prefatory note makes the purpose of the set quite clear. "...because of the low price and the large number able to be produced they

become generally available and thus achieve wide distribution."(6)

Because of this emphasis, Williams had to be satisfied with a relatively light-weight paper and a rather lenient attitude to print quality. For these reasons the irregularities in the definition of forms in Tawa were allowed to pass. The hand-cutting of stencils also resulted in some departures from accurate drawing. For example, some of the circular motifs in the print are not true to shape. Consequently the print has a crude quality that contrasts with the care lavished on paintings of the same period. Walters had no personal say in the production of Tawa. In this case his involvement ended with the supply of art-work to the Barry Lett Galleries.

Tawa is a koru-type image printed in black onto the paper. The white forms are produced by the colour of the paper itself. Where the image opens at top and bottom there is a spill over into the margin areas. At the top of the print this is pronounced and creates a bond between image and paper. But, it also leaves some uncertainties as to the boundaries of the print. Walters had used this spill over effect in some of the early koru paintings, but in those the literal edge of the paper or board had controlled and defined the image. In Tawa the standard size of the paper meant that the margins are wide so that any control or pressure at the top of the image is dissipated.

Walters used a composition for Tawa that relates to his koru paintings. He contrasts the stacked white motifs at the sides of the print with irregular placement of the black band terminations and circles near the centre. A feature of the print which is not found in any of the koru paintings is the use of a bright red for five of the circular motifs. To my mind these red circles appear rather heavy-handed compared with the subtlety usually found in Walters' work. They stand out as bright colour accents and detract from the unity of the image. Probably the print would have worked better in black and white.

Considering the undistinguished quality of his first screen-print, it is not surprising to find that Walters did not continue with further prints for some years. Even though printmaking was beginning to flourish in the late-1960s, and his Auckland dealer Kees Hos was a promoter of prints, Walters returned to painting. (7) Only in 1972 did he again produce designs for screen-prints. He was commissioned along with other artists to make two prints for the Zonta Club of Wellington.(8) He was to supply a small image and a large one. The commission intrigued him and resulted in two deliberately contrasted works. Amoka (Plate 220) is the larger image. Printed in blue on white paper it is vertical in format and uses the koru imagery. So does Maho (Plate 219), the smaller image, which is square in format and is printed in black and red. Maho relates to the painting of the same name (Plate 172), which was completed in 1973.

Amoka is an unusual work for Walters because of its proportions. Over twice as high as it is wide, this print departs from the usual proportions found in his paintings with the exception of a few horizontal works. Compared with his other koru works, Amoka appears somewhat elongated. The bands look short, as if they have been cropped, while the print as a whole feels too tall. Printed like Tawa on cheap paper, Amoka is a superior work in artistic terms. At the sides of the print Walters allowed the white bands to flow out into the margins. This gives an expansive feeling to the forms and relieves the cramped effect caused by the short bands. By deploying the koru motifs randomly across the narrow width of the print, he avoided any emphasis on its shape. By making some diagonal relationships between the motifs he also generated the optimum feeling of width. However, like Tawa, Amoka cannot be regarded as a total success. The small size of the edition, twenty-five signed and numbered prints make it the rarest of Walters' screen-prints.

Maho is a small image placed on a large sheet of paper. The strong design and rich colour help to make it a success-

ful work. Despite its small size there is a sense of scale and proportion which is impressive. Maho suggested the potential for using the koru-derived forms for a series of prints made to a higher technical specification. Like Amoka it suffered from poor paper quality and indifferent execution. It was issued in a signed and numbered edition of fifty.

After these early experiences with printmaking, Walters did not use the medium again until 1977. The establishment of the Print Club by the Auckland art dealer, Peter Webb, who was then handling Walters' work, resulted in a new commission.(9) Webb founded the Print Club in 1976 in association with the magazine Art New Zealand, where the prints were advertised.

The aims of the Print Club were made clear in the advertisements: "The Print Club now offers a unique opportunity to build a collection of original works of contemporary New Zealand art both for enjoyment and investment, at a comparatively small cost. Each year the Print Club will publish two or three original graphics in small editions, individually signed and numbered, offering them to Art New Zealand subscribers at approximately half of the published price."(10)

The first work commissioned by the Print Club was Robin White's Allan's Beach, Otago Peninsula; the second was Gordon Walters' Tama (Plate 221). Tama published in 1977 was reproduced in colour with an advertisement in Art New Zealand of May that year.(11) In the advertisement the emphasis was placed on the quality of the production and the limited size of the edition. "This print will be issued in an edition limited to fifty, individually signed and numbered. The printed image measures 652 x 470 mm. It is being printed on an imported Fabriano, hand-made paper at the Helensville workshop of master screen-printer Mervyn Williams in association with the artist. After the edition has been printed the screens will be cancelled."(12)

Compared with the multiple Tawa and the Zonta prints,

Tama is technically a much finer work. It is also the first of Walters' screen-prints to be a complete success in terms of design, scale and printing. Unlike the earlier prints, Tama belongs to Walters' late style. He used black with off-white so that the tonal contrast, while strong, is softened and the print area is separated from the margins. This gives the image a more solid and unified feeling - a quality which is enhanced by the thickness and opacity of the paper. The spacing between the koru motifs is very finely adjusted, as in the paintings of the same period, so that the looseness of Tawa and Amoka in terms of spacing is replaced by a tighter arrangement of the forms. In Tama the proportions and size of the print relate closely to those of his ink drawings which gives it a familiar and assured sense of scale.

With Tama Walters established a number of procedures which apply to all the subsequent prints. He has outlined the procedure as follows:"...I supply exact information to the printer with regard to colour and to the method of transferring the image to the silk screen. I supply colour samples to be matched as well as a half-size colour rough of the print to show how the colour should be registered. Then, as is the case of the koru image, I make a full-size drawing in black ink for camera copy. Because the koru is a complex image I prefer to use a photo stencil so that my spacing is exactly as I want it. I always discuss the print and show the printer my rough design so that before hand any technical problems can be dealt with."(13)

In the case of Tama, Walters made the trip to Helensville specifically to discuss the printing with Mervyn Williams. He also supervised its production before checking and signing the edition. This ensured that the print met his standards of quality at all stages. From beginning to end the production of a screen-print is a major undertaking. Walters has noted:"I find there is more work in all this than in doing a painting."(14)

By making the stencil photographically in Tama, Walters

achieved the same degree of sharpness as in his ink drawings. The irregularities of the multiple Tawa were eliminated as well as any inconsistencies in registration. With the koru prints the bands must lie perfectly straight and the printer must keep exact vertical and horizontal alignment. To achieve this in the home workshop conditions at Helensville was far from easy. An edition of fifty prints might well require double that number of proofs before the right number of good ones was produced. However, the working relationship between Walters and Williams was so trouble free that the exacting task of printing Tama was carried out with no friction between artist and printer.

Tama was an immediate commercial success. The edition sold out within weeks of publication proving that there was a demand for Walters' work from a wider audience than that reached by his paintings. Despite the low prices charged for his paintings, Walters was far from being a popular painter in 1977. Sales of his work, while steady, were insufficient to provide him with an adequate income. In September 1977 the artist wrote to Peter McLeavey requesting an increase in prices for his work. "I want you to increase everything of mine you have in the gallery by 50 per cent. This means that the four small works on paper are now \$150.. plus the cost of the frame...This is getting closer to a realistic price for my work; compared with almost anyone else my work has been ridiculously cheap and I have to do something about it."(15)

Taking this situation into account, the much better return on a print compared with a work on paper sold separately, undoubtedly influenced him to do more screen-prints. Later in 1977 the Print Club was able to announce a second Walters' print. This new work, Kahu (Plate 222), would be available by late November.(16) Kahu would be in an edition of seventy-five prints, half again the size of the Tama printing. Its price, though, remained the same at seventy-five dollars. These prints, as he soon realized, would help to promote his art by making



it available to a wider public. Walters was satisfied that the high standard of the new prints ensured that the standards set in his paintings were maintained. From this time on, screen-prints were to assume a new importance in his artistic output.

An indication of the new status of screen-prints in his art is the originality and strength of the new print, Kahu. Until this print, Walters has used ideas that were already developed in earlier paintings or drawings. Kahu is a new composition. It is severely reductive and asymmetrical. Walters designed the print for three colours, red, black and white. The composition depends on blocks of colour balancing the vertical motifs at the extreme right. It is a relational composition relying on an equivalence between the parts, none of which are the same. The red accent at the far left echoes the vertical bands of the koru motifs at the far right. Walters used colour here to counteract the drawn imagery at the far right and achieve a dynamic equilibrium.

Kahu is one of the few koru-derived images in which Walters chose to use a vertical disposition of the bands. Interestingly the early screen-print, Maho (Plate 219), also has this deployment. In both cases Walters related the imagery very closely to the format. In Maho the motifs are aligned with the central vertical axis. In Kahu they are related to the right-hand edge of the image, and the terminations are contained by the corners.

In Kahu Walters drew the koru-derived forms to a large scale relative to the surface area of the print. There would be room for only six bands and terminations if the motifs were carried across the print. This scale is quite different from that used in Tama (Plate 221) or any of the images where the koru bands are deployed horizontally. Walters adjusted the scale to compensate for the reductive nature of the imagery and its position to the far right of the print. These factors contribute to the novel quality of Kahu amongst Walters' koru works.

By the end of 1977 Walters could see the advantages

of printmaking as a supplement to his paintings and drawings. Unlike some of the other painters who had been asked to supply designs for the Barry Lett Galleries for their set of multiples, Walters felt comfortable with the medium. From his commercial art background he had a knowledge of the limitations and pitfalls of screen-printing which was helpful to him in preparing designs for screening. Only the prints of established workers in the medium, like Robin White, really compare with Walters' works.(17) Later excursions into screen-printing by younger painters like Rick Killeen and Ian Scott also proved to be shortlived. Awareness of the suitability of his work for screen-printing, plus confidence in the quality of Williams' printing, led Walters to issue new prints on a more or less annual basis after 1977.

In 1979 Walters produced another design for the Print Club. Called Karaka (Plate 223), it was issued in an edition of fifty. Karaka was printed in two colours, a soft grey and off-white. The subtle harmonic tones reflect the style in his paintings of the same period. In Karaka Walters used the broad bands and close spacing of forms creating a stable image of precision and optical stability. Walters spread the motifs across the whole surface of the print, but varied their disposition. Basically the off-white motifs are placed towards the left-hand side of the work, the soft grey ones to the right. There is a movement back and forth across the surface. At times Walters allowed both off-white and grey motifs to extend across the central axis to add variety to the composition.

Seen in comparison with the preceding prints, Karaka introduces a different kind of design. The contrast with the reductive Kahu is obvious. It is as if Walters was consciously varying the prints so that seen collectively they would indicate something of the range of his koru work. Accordingly the introduction of an alternative motif in 1980, his stylised version of a Maori rock art figure used in his Parade series of 1977-1978, is not surprising.

Entitled Then (Plate 224), this print was based on a gouache of the mid-1950s. Then was also commissioned by the Print Club.

Unlike the koru designs, Then was made into a print on the basis of a painting prepared specifically for that purpose. Walters explains: "In the case of a print like Then I make a full size colour painting on paper which is used by the printer to cut the stencils from as the design is not as critical with regard to spacing as the koru." (18) The painting was destroyed after the completion of the print.

Then was the first Walters' print on a horizontal format. Printed in a large edition of 125 it was also the first image to meet with some resistance from buyers. It lacked the distinctive appeal of the koru-based works which many people associated with Walters. Also the reductive nature of the print and its restrained colouring made it a more difficult work to sell to people without a specialized knowledge.

For his next two prints Walters returned to the koru imagery. The first of these Arahura (Plate 225) was designed in 1980, but was not issued until 1982. (19) Also commissioned by the Print Club, Arahura was in an edition of 125 copies. Arahura is a vertical image with a clear structure. Walters divided the work at the central vertical axis, and also marked the horizontal axis by a changeover from off-white to grey motifs. Effectively he divided the image into four quarters, no two of which are the same, despite the feeling of order and balance. He marked the centre of the print by the convergence of band terminations on either side of the vertical axis where they are stacked in vertical rows. There are seven off-white bands with terminations in the upper zone and seven in blue-grey in the lower one so that the two areas are evenly weighted.

The composition of Arahura relates to paintings Walters made in the years 1977-1978. However, the tonality is similar to works like Maheno (Plate 212) of 1981. Arahura is a refined image handled with total assurance. The

spacing between forms is adjusted to the finest of tolerances. As in the late paintings, there is the introduction of some variation in the spacing. For example, the circle in the upper-right and its adjacent band termination are spaced slightly wider apart than is the case with the other motifs. This draws attention to this part of the work and indicates the uniqueness of the circle in this composition. The circle is held firmly in position despite the extra spacing because it is aligned with the edge of the print.

Arahura is one of the finest of Walters' prints. It brings to the medium most of the refinement and control of the koru-derived forms that Walters had achieved in his late paintings. It belongs to his late style. His next screen-print, Kura (Plate 226), returns to one of the earliest types of koru composition first used by the artist in the late-1950s. Kura is based on bilateral symmetry with variation being achieved by colour changes down the work which divide the image into seven zones. Walters used a charcoal grey as an organizing colour for the work. He begins the image at the top with the grey and ends it at the bottom with the same colour. He used the grey to separate the coloured zones from one another, so that the grey becomes a constant reference for the eye. It is like a steady beat running through the whole composition.

Compared with the early drawings on which it was based, Kura is a very refined and subtle image. Tonal contrast is greatly reduced. The charcoal grey substitutes for the black of the early drawings, and the off-white removes the rawness of plain white paper. The colours, too, are not primaries but muted red and yellow ochres and a grey blue. The result is an understated image rather than an aggressive one. It has the close spacing of forms typical of his late style, as well as the precise geometric construction lacking in the examples from the late-1950s.

Unlike Arahura and Then, Kura was not published for the Print Club. In fact, the Print Club seems to have

gone into dissolution by 1982 when this print was commissioned. Instead it was made as one of a set of works for the Landfall Press. Mervyn Williams supervised the printing of the work but did not actually do the job himself. Instead he employed an English-trained commercial screen-printer who worked to his specifications. The edition required for this print, 150 copies, had become so large that Walters had reservations about continuing with an arrangement where he had no control over the numbers of prints issued.

In 1983, after his retrospective exhibition had finished its showing in Auckland and Wellington, Walters decided to commission two new screen-prints himself. He arranged to have them printed under Mervyn Williams' supervision. He initiated the project by letter from Christchurch. "I want to do another print, two if I can afford it and would like you to look after the production of it for me." (20) Williams agreed, and by August Walters was able to supply the specifications, again by letter. "Here is a rough of the first print I would like to do. The details are: Image size 61 x 46 cm. Paper, Arches Satine (56 x 76 cm.) 2 colours. Photo stencil for the dark colour. Edition of 50 numbered prints plus the usual overs." (21) He continued: "Art work is ready and I am now getting exact colour tabs for you to match. If Arches paper was not available I would accept an equivalent if you are satisfied it would give a good job." (22)

This sample of correspondence shows the procedure Walters was able to follow by this stage when he was confident in the professionalism of Mervyn Williams. The rough he sent to Williams for this print is in acrylic on paper. It is half the size of the finished print. It is inscribed in pencil: "Rough only - colour approximate" with the date May 30, 1983. (23)

The rough gives a very accurate idea of the planned print, later called Tamaki (Plate 228). When photographed the rough looks almost indistinguishable from the final design, except for slight unevenness in the drawing and

some marginal alterations to the spacing. The design was fully worked out but the exact colours had not been chosen. Instead Walters indicated that he wanted a warm grey as the lighter tone, though he had not yet finalized it. In this case Walters later sent a colour tab mixed to the exact colour, along with a full-size study from which the photographic stencil was to be made. It was then up to Williams to mix his ink to give as close a rendering of the chosen colour as possible. Because Walters visited Auckland in October he was able to discuss the colour with Williams. However, he allowed Williams to have the work printed in November free from any supervision so that the final colour mixing was done later.(24)

The other print, later called Rauponga (Plate 227), was discussed in the same correspondence."I want to follow this print with another one, but I want it to be one of the new ideas I am developing, so I am not sure when it will be ready. I don't want to start repeating what I have done in the past, and I don't want to rush things." (25) The following day he wrote again advising a change of plans:"...I have decided on the design of the second print and can have this ready very shortly so that if you wished you could proceed with both of them together. I realize that given the fact of having to shift the printing table this would probably suit you best. The prints will be similar in that they will both require only two printings, in each case a colour on a printed white ground. Absolutely simple and straightforward."((26)

These remarks indicate the artist's knowledge of the practical problems of small-scale printing, and his consideration for the greatest economy in production of the prints. As it turned out, though, neither of the prints was made with one colour on a white ground. Tamaki is in two tones, a light warm grey and black; Rauponga is also in black and a warm grey on a white ground.

In the same letter he added:"I have made a start on the art-work for the second print today and could have it completed within a fortnight."(27) His care in selection

of colour is shown in a note sent to Williams in October. "This is the colour I want for the 2nd print. I've tried it out on the rough sketch I have here and it is just about right. I mixed it from yellow ochre, white, a little black and very little red oxide."(28)

Both these prints, Tamaki and Rauponga, have the subtle tonality typical of much of Walters' late work. In both cases, in the end, the stencils were made photographically in order to give maximum accuracy. In both cases, too, the designs Walters supplied were of a kind not much used in his paintings. This possibly reflects the increased importance he attached to the screen-prints and a desire to use them to project some of his best designs. Considering his very slow rate of painting in 1983, these prints represented an important part of his output that year. This had been caused by the disruption of the retrospective exhibition and other problems during the year. Because

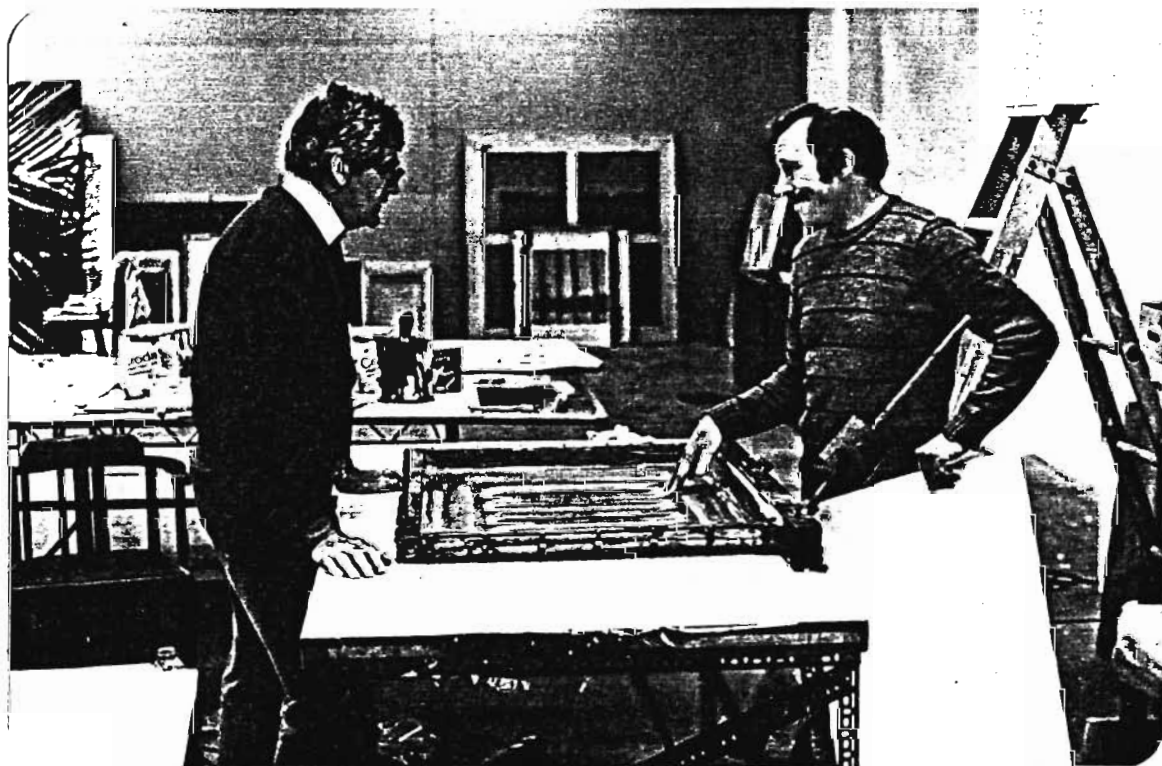


Figure 28. The printing of Rauponga, Auckland, 1983.

he was publishing the prints himself for the first time, Walters undoubtedly wanted to ensure that the works were of the highest calibre.

Tamaki (Plate 228) is a koru work with a difference. In this print Walters used two scales for the koru-derived forms. The smaller motifs are one fifth the size of the large. This scale discrepancy had a precedent in the poster he had designed for the retrospective exhibition in 1983. Previously when he had introduced scale changes in a painting, as in Genealogy Number Two, 1969-70 (Plate 150), the large motifs were no more than twice the size of the small ones. Consequently the appearance of the large motif was not distorted or transformed. In Tamaki this is not the case. The scale of the large motifs is such that the forms take on a new character.

Because of the giant scale Walters can only accommodate the band terminations in his print. Compared with the normal visibility of the motifs, the large forms appear cropped and truncated. They appear like enlarged details of the familiar forms. The contrast with the small bands and terminations around them is dramatic and striking. Walters placed the two large motifs so that they relate to one another on the diagonal across the print. There is one in the lower-left corner and one in the upper-right. The relationship between the two large forms, one in light grey the other in black, is balanced by the disposition of the more numerous small motifs.

An unusual feature of the work, brought about by the introduction of the giant motifs, is the treatment of the smaller-scale bands of grey and black. At the centre of the work where they confront the large motifs Walters simply cuts them off. By doing so he disrupts the consistency and cohesion of the surface. He creates a confrontation between the severed bands and the giant motifs. With Tamaki Walters was charting new territory for the koru series. This print suggests possibilities that could be followed up in later paintings.

Rauponga (Plate 227) uses an alternative motif,



also derived from Maori art, which was discussed in connection with the narrow band paintings of 1970, like Hautana (Plate 155), where the motif was deployed horizontally. In Rauponga, Walters aligned his geometric version of the motif with the vertical axis of the paper. The print is made on a white ground that defines the image against the paper. The tonal difference between the ground colour and the paper is slight but perceptible and helps to give a solidity to the light forms. The other colours used are black and a warm grey.

The organization of the image is based totally on positive/negative interchanges that bind the forms together into a tight, interlocking unit. Walters stated the initial motif in black on white at the left and right sides of the print so that the theme is stated, varied, then returned to again. The black motifs frame the work at either side providing a beginning and end.

Inside the framing motifs Walters repeated the theme five times with variations. The first variation at the left is a reversal of the black and white. The black now frames and encloses the light motif which is coloured a warm grey to provide a further variation. The next motif repeats the first exactly. Then follows the expected white on black inversion which Walters avoided in the second motif, preferring to introduce the warm grey at that point. The next variation of the rauponga motif is a combination of the previous ones. Walters defined the motif in black on white but outlined it with a broad black band. This enabled him to use the warm grey inside the band making a related but new form. The final two motifs are white on black and black on white, the simple inversion.

Like all Walters' best work, Rauponga has an apparent simplicity which disguises its subtlety and refinement. Works of this quality show Walters to be a master of the screen-printing medium. His progress as a printmaker can be gauged by the difference between this work and his first screen-print Tawa of 1969. At that stage he

had not seriously considered the role of printmaking in his art. By 1983, screen-prints had become an important aspect of his artistic production matching his paintings and drawings in quality and significance. It seems likely that printmaking will continue to be an important part of his output as an artist.

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Footnotes:Chapter Eleven

1 Both Vasarely and Bridget Riley had trained assistants who produced works from their designs. Vasarely observed: "The masterpiece is no longer the concentration of all the qualities into one final object but the creation of a point-of-departure prototype having specific qualities perfectible in progressive numbers." See V.Vasarely, Vasarely, Paris, 1965, p. 36.

2 I am grateful to Gordon Walters and Mervyn Williams for discussing the details of their working relationship with me, and for allowing me to be present while the prints Rauponga and Tamaki were being produced.

3 One of these was Colin McCahon. For a discussion of his work for the multiples see G.H.Brown, Colin McCahon:Artist. Wellington, 1984, pp. 67-68.

4 For a brief account of New Zealand printmaking see P.Cape, Prints and Printmakers in New Zealand, Auckland, 1974. Most of the printmakers he mentions were not practising painters but specialists in their chosen field.

5 For Williams see Cape, op. cit. pp. 217-225. This account is based on interviews with Williams as well as information in his Walters' file.

6 Prefatory Notes, Multiples, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland, 1969.

7 Hos helped to found the New Zealand Print Council. He also assisted various artists with printmaking, including Theo Schoon who made screen-prints under his direction in 1965. Among printmakers whose work he promoted were Stanley Palmer and Barry Cleavin.

8 The Zonta exhibition was held in March 1973, at Wellington. It later toured various galleries throughout the country.

9 Peter Selwyn Webb was born in Auckland in 1933. He worked as an assistant in the Auckland City Art Gallery from 1953 to 1957. In 1957 he opened one of the first Auckland dealer galleries, the Argus Gallery. Between 1972-1974 he was Exhibitions Officer at the Auckland City Art Gallery. In 1977 he was operating his own dealer gallery, the Peter Webb Gallery, in Lorne Street. Walters exhibited with him in 1978, after he had ceased to show with the Petar/James Gallery.

10 Advertisement, Art New Zealand, 2, 1976, p. 36.

11 Advertisement, Art New Zealand, 5, 1977, pp. 2-3.

12 *ibid*, p. 2.

- 13 Walters to the author, November 27, 1982, p. 3.
- 14 *ibid*, p. 4.
- 15 Walters to McLeavey, September 24, 1977.
- 16 Advertisement, Art New Zealand, 7, 1977, p. 60.
- 17 For Robin White, see G.H.Brown and A.Taylor, Robin White: New Zealand Painter, Martinborough, 1981.
- 18 Walters to the author, November 27, 1982, p. 3.
- 19 The print was announced and reproduced at the same time as Then in Art New Zealand, 16, 1980, p. 58.
- 20 Walters to Williams, July 19, 1983, p. 1.
- 21 Walters to Williams, August 8, 1983, p. 1.
- 22 *ibid*.
- 23 Walters to Williams, September 15, 1983.
- 24 I was present when Williams mixed the colours to match Walters' colour tabs. In both prints the black was a mixture of several inks, not an unmodified colour.
- 25 Walters to Williams, August 8, 1983.
- 26 Walters to Williams, August 9, 1983.
- 27 *ibid*.
- 28 Walters to Williams, October 14, 1983.

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CHRONOLOGY

- 1919 Gordon Frederick Walters was born in Wellington on September 24. He was the son of Henry Frederick and Ethel Constance Walters. His father was employed by a tailor.
- 1931 Walters attended Rongotai College. Art was not part of the curriculum.
- 1935 He left Rongotai College and worked as a trainee commercial artist. He enrolled as a part-time student in the Art Department of the Wellington Technical College. His art teachers were F.V. Ellis, Roland Hipkins and T.A. McCormack.
- 1939 He was developing an interest in Oceanic art which he could study at the Museum. He read books about art in the local libraries, including Roger Fry's Vision and Design. He exhibited work at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts.
- 1940 Having been rejected as unfit for military service, he was given a job as illustrator and lay-out artist for the Ministry of Supply.
- 1941 He married Pamela Alexander. They separated later that year. About July/August he met Theo Schoon, an Indonesian-born artist of Dutch descent.
- 1942 He began to take photographs of dead trees, driftwood and stones.
- 1943 He studied art with Theo Schoon. He became interested in a Surrealist style of drawing and painting.
- 1945 He taught part-time at the Art Department at the Wellington Technical College.
- 1946 In January he went to Australia and lived for a while in Sydney. He also visited Melbourne. In April he returned to Wellington. About August he visited Schoon in South Canterbury where he was making a study of Maori rock art. In December he travelled to South Canterbury again to see Schoon.
- 1947 In early January he was still in South Canterbury studying the rock art. On returning to Wellington, he painted works influenced by the rock art. He exhibited paintings at the French Maid Coffee Shop in July/August. In December he travelled to Sydney.
- 1948 He stayed in Sydney for the year. He studied copies of the magazine Cahiers d'Art, and read art books in Sydney libraries. He became friendly with several Australian artists, including Charles Blackman.

Chronology:

- 1949 In late February Walters returned to Wellington with the intention of saving money for the trip to Europe. He exhibited some recent paintings at the Wellington Public Library. These were not well received by the public.
- 1950 Walters left for Europe by ship on March 3. He spent most of his time in London, but was able to visit France and Holland. In Paris he saw works by Vasarely, Herbin and others at the Denise René Gallery. In Holland he studied paintings by Mondrian and members of the Bauhaus.
- 1951 Early in the year he returned to Australia. He settled in Melbourne and began painting in a geometric style of abstraction. In July he visited Wellington to see his parents.
- 1952 Lived and painted in Melbourne.
- 1953 In August he returned to Auckland for a visit. He renewed his acquaintance with Schoon. Instead of going back to Australia he decided to stay in New Zealand. He left his works behind in Melbourne. These paintings have been lost. At Christmas time he shifted back to Wellington to live.
- 1954 He stayed in Wellington for three or four months, and then returned to Auckland for six months. After obtaining a good position at the Government Printing Office, he returned to Wellington to live. He painted in his free time and kept in touch with developments in the arts by reading magazines like Art d'Aujourd Hui. He made gouaches influenced by schizophrenic art.
- 1955 He travelled to Auckland occasionally to see Schoon and other painters. He had regular contact with Denis Knight Turner, Peter Webb and a Greek painter, John Zambelis. He started using motifs from Oceanic art in his work.
- 1956 He made a close study of Maori art. Late in the year he made his first studies based on the koru motif from Maori decorative art. He tried to evolve his own style by limiting his art to a few forms which he could use as the basis of a series of paintings.
- 1957 He continued with his gouaches and ink studies based on motifs from Maori art. He showed his works to Schoon when he was visiting Auckland. At this time Schoon was making his own study of Maori art and crafts.
- 1960 He evolved his personal version of the koru by making it more geometric. As yet his imagery was

Chronology:

- 1960 cont. still painted by hand. He made gouaches and ink paintings on hardboard. He did not exhibit his paintings at this period.
- 1963 He married Margaret Orbell on May 14. They lived at a flat in Tinakori Road where Walters had a studio. He continued work on his koru paintings trying to solve the problems of scale and technique. His style was becoming more hard-edge.
- 1964 He painted several versions of Te Whiti, his first major painting in the koru series. He did not exhibit the final version until 1966. However, he had it in the studio to show to friends and visiting artists.
- 1965 He painted the first series of koru paintings in PVA on hardboard. He and his wife moved to Rutland Flats in Brougham Street. He established a studio there.
- 1966 He held his first one-man show of the koru paintings at the New Vision Gallery in March. During the same month he exhibited Te Whiti at the Hay's Prize at Christchurch. For a while after the exhibition he painted full-time.
- 1967 He continued with the koru series but with technical changes. He began using canvas instead of hardboard. Also, he painted several works on a larger scale. With Tahi he introduced random composition for arranging the koru motifs. He was awarded second prize in the Manawatu Competition for Contemporary Art at Palmerston North.
- 1968 He held his second exhibition at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland. He visited Sydney and Melbourne and saw the exhibition The Field, an important show of abstract painting by young Australian artists.
- 1969 In May he exhibited new paintings at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington. His daughter Anna was born.
- 1970 He exhibited one of his paintings at the Expo Arts of Mankind exhibition in Osaka, Japan. He painted a series of paintings using the rauponga motif derived from Maori decorative art.
- 1971 He moved to Auckland. His address at first was in Selwyn Avenue, Mission Bay. He was awarded a grant in aid by the Queen Elizabeth the Second Arts Council.
- 1972 He was appointed Visiting Lecturer in Painting at the Elam School of Fine Arts. He made prints for the Zonta Club of Wellington.

Chronology:

- 1973 He bought a house with a studio in Parkhill Road, Glenfield. The house had a basement studio. He painted a number of reductive works using a black/white/grey scale. He met various artists associated with the Petar/James Gallery including Killeen, Scott, Thornley and Philip O'Sullivan. He also developed a friendship with Milan Mrkusich.
- 1974 He held two exhibitions of gouaches from the mid-1950s, one at the Petar/James Gallery, Auckland, the other at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington.
- 1975 He visited Melbourne and Sydney. While in Melbourne he saw the Modern Masters exhibition.
- 1976 He moved the family to Christchurch with a temporary address in Konini Road, Riccarton. His wife, Margaret Orbell was appointed to a lectureship in Maori at the University of Canterbury. In January his son David was born.
- 1977 He built a house with studio space at 21A Camrose Place. He became interested in making screen-prints.
- 1978 He was awarded a grant of \$3,000.. by the Queen Elizabeth the Second Arts Council to help him with preparing new work. He held an exhibition with the Peter Webb Galleries in Auckland.
- 1979 In August he visited Australia to view the retrospective exhibition of works by Bridget Riley. In October, he visited New York to study contemporary developments in painting. He stayed with Tim and Sherrah Francis, friends and patrons of his work.
- 1980 He exhibited new work at the Peter McLeavey Gallery.
- 1982 During May he travelled to Sydney to see an exhibition Vision in Disbelief at the Biennale. Preparations were made for a major retrospective exhibition of his works at the Auckland Art Gallery. He painted several major works for the occasion.
- 1983 The Walters' retrospective exhibition was held at the Auckland Art Gallery. It was subsequently shown in full at the National Art Gallery, Wellington, before going on a national tour in a reduced form. He designed and published two new screen-prints late in the year.

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EXHIBITIONS AND REVIEWS

- 1941/1942 Wellington, French Maid Coffee Shop, December /January.
- 1944 Wellington, French Maid Coffee Shop.
- 1947 Wellington, French Maid Coffee Shop, July/August.
- 1949 Wellington, Public Library, November.
- 1966 Auckland, New Vision Gallery, March 7-12.  
Reviews: New Zealand Herald, 5.3.66, 11.3.66.  
Auckland Star, 9.3.66.
- 1968 Auckland, New Vision Gallery, May 27-June 8.  
Review: Auckland Star, 30.5.68.
- 1969 Wellington, McLeavey Gallery, May 6-20.  
Reviews: The Dominion, 6.5.69, 14.5.69.  
Evening Post, 26.6.69.
- 1971 Wellington, McLeavey Gallery, August 16-31.  
Review: Evening Post, 21.8.71.  
Wellington, University Library, September 6-26.
- 1972 Auckland, New Vision Gallery, May 8-19.  
Review: Auckland Star, 13.5.72.
- 1974 Auckland, Petar/James Gallery, September 4-20.  
Reviews: New Zealand Herald, 8.9.74.  
Auckland Star, 7.9.74.  
The Sunday Herald, 15.9.74.  
Wellington, McLeavey Gallery, October 15-31.  
Review: The Sunday Herald, 27.10.74.
- 1976 Wellington, McLeavey Gallery, April 27-May 14.  
Reviews: Evening Post, 24.4.76.  
Salient, 17.5.76.
- 1978 Auckland, Peter Webb Galleries, April 1-14.  
Reviews: New Zealand Herald, 12.4.78.  
Auckland Star, 13.4.78.  
Wellington, McLeavey Gallery, July 25.5.78.  
Review: Evening Post, 5.8.78
- 1980 Wellington, McLeavey Gallery, July 1-18.  
Review: The Dominion, 4.7.80.
- 1981 Wellington, McLeavey Gallery, November 10-27.  
Reviews: The Dominion, 26.11.81.  
Evening Post, 26.11.81.
- 1983 Auckland, The City Art Gallery, March/April.

- 1983                   Reviews: New Zealand Herald, 4.4.83.  
                              Auckland Star, 11.4.83.
- Wellington, The National Art Gallery, June/July.  
Review: The Dominion, 28.6.83.
- 1984                   Dunedin, The Public Art Gallery, June/July.  
                              Review: Otago Daily Times, 25.6.84.
- Christchurch, The Robert McDougall Art Gallery,  
July/August.  
Reviews: Christchurch Press, 1.8.84, 8.8.84.  
                              Christchurch Star, 24.7.84.

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CATALOGUE

Note: Catalogue numbers correspond with plate numbers of works reproduced in volume two. Measurements are given in millimetres, height before width. Where the works were not sighted by the author measurements are approximate and are those supplied by Gordon Walters himself. In the case of works on paper, the size given is that of the image not the support.

- 1 Benin, 1943  
Pencil on paper, 304 x 229  
The artist

This drawing is from a sketch-book and is punched along the left margin. It is inscribed with the date 1943 in the upper-right corner. The drawing reflects Walters' interest in non-European art. He was attracted to the formal qualities of the Benin sculptures known to him from reproductions.

- 2 Beach Still-Life: Stones and Dried Seaweed, 1943  
Conté on paper, 610 x 410  
Present whereabouts unknown

This composition was based on photographs Walters took at Waikanae. The group was arranged on the beach by Theo Schoon. It reflects Walters' interests in found objects and his knowledge of photographs by artists like Edward Weston and Paul Nash.

- 3 Dead Tree, 1943  
Conté on paper, 685 x 532  
Present whereabouts unknown

One of a number of works based on the subject-matter of dead trees. Such trees were a common feature of the North Island landscape at that period. They had provided the source for paintings by many New Zealand artists, most notably Eric Lee-Johnson. Walters has given the dead tree an anthropomorphic aspect, as did Lee-Johnson with his well-known work The Slain Tree of 1945.

- 4 Dead Trees, Waikanae, 1943  
Photograph, 194 x 128  
The artist

This is one of a series of photographs of dead trees taken by Walters about 1943. It was printed from a roll of film supplied to me by the artist. The photographs were taken while Walters was working with Schoon and he cannot remember now whether specific photographs were his or Schoon's. It hardly matters. They shared the same interests and Walters had prints of the photographs to study.

- 5 Dead Trees, Waikanae, 1943  
 Photograph, 195 x 154  
 The artist

One of a series of photographs Walters made at Waikanae in 1943. It relates to the conté drawing of the same subject, catalogue number 6.

- 6 Dead Trees, Waikanae, 1943-1944  
 Conté on paper, 609 x 509  
 Present whereabouts unknown

Walters based this drawing closely on the photograph, catalogue number 5, but made changes. The conté suggests associations with animate forms. The tree branches resemble tentacles and seem to writhe with movement. Walters used the photograph as the basis for a composition influenced by Surrealist art.

- 7 Study for Waikanae Landscape, 1944  
 Pencil on paper, 304 x 228  
 The artist

This work comes from a sketch-book and is punched along the left-hand side. It is inscribed with the date 1944 at the lower-right. The drawing is a study for catalogue number 8. It was based on photographs and sketches made at Waikanae. The forms in the background were based on sand-dunes.

- 8 Waikanae Landscape, 1944-45  
 Conté on paper, 560 x 381  
 G.H. Brown, Auckland

Based on catalogue number 7, this conté is one of the major surviving works from the Waikanae series. Walters emphasized the surreal aspects of the imagery by depopulating the beach and by exaggerating the perspective to give a disorienting quality to the scene. The bone-like form at the lower-right and the egg-shaped rock in the background imply presences in the otherwise uninhabited landscape. Walters was influenced in this example by the works of Yves Tanguy, known to him in reproductions.

- 9 Composition Waikanae, 1943-44  
 Conté on paper, 545 x 698  
 Present whereabouts unknown

Like catalogue number 8, this work shows a strong influence from Surrealist art, especially the works of Tanguy and Dali. The soft forms in the foreground are especially indebted to Surrealist influences.

- 10 Waikanae Landscape, 1944  
 Oil on canvas, 605 x 480  
 The artist

- 11 Still-Life with Driftwood and Pelvic Bone, 1944  
Oil on canvas, 830 x 505  
The artist

The work is signed and dated lower-right. It was painted under artificial light which contributed to the effect of strong shadows.

- 12 Chrysanthemum, 1944  
Oil on cardboard, 647 x 522  
The artist

This work was painted over several times before he was satisfied with it. It marks a change of style towards a simplified and less naturalistic drawing of forms. Walters recalls that he was influenced by the works of Paul Klee when he painted Chrysanthemum.

- 13 Untitled Painting, 1944-45  
Oil on cardboard, 458 x 711  
Present whereabouts unknown

One of Walters' first abstract paintings, again influenced by the works of Paul Klee which the artist knew through reproductions.

- 14 Figure Drawing, 1945  
Pencil on paper, 248 x 311  
The artist

A life drawing made at the Art Department at Wellington Technical College, Wellington. Walters had a part-time teaching position there during 1945.

- 15 Figure Drawing, 1945  
Pencil on paper, 248 x 310  
The artist

A life drawing which the artist has interpreted freely in terms of outline and shading. The low viewpoint recalls the Surrealist works of a year or two earlier.

- 16 Still-Life, 1945  
Oil on canvas, 508 x 406  
Present whereabouts unknown

In this work Walters shows some influence from Cubism. His return to the conventional studio still-life in this work is noteworthy. While he was a student at the Art Department at Wellington he had painted a number of still-life pictures of similar subject-matter.

- 17 The Lovers, 1945  
Oil on canvas, 410 x 505  
The artist

- 18 Untitled Drawing, 1946  
Pencil on paper, 248 x 313  
The artist

The drawing is built up on a system of parallel figurations, similar to those used by Klee in some of his drawings and paintings. Of some interest is the occurrence of the koru form at the lower-left.

- 19 Untitled Drawing, 1946  
Ink on paper, 250 x 314  
The artist

This drawing was based on the example of a work by Joan Miro, called The Lasso, known to Walters through a reproduction.

- 20 Untitled Drawing, 1946  
Pencil on paper, 314 x 250  
The artist

- 21 Untitled Drawing, 1946  
Pencil on paper, 250 x 314  
The artist

The work is signed and dated in the lower-right.

- 22 Untitled Painting, 1946  
Oil on cardboard, 610 x 508  
Present whereabouts unknown

This is one of Walters' first non-figurative paintings.

- 23 Untitled Drawing, 1947  
Pencil on paper, 314 x 250  
The artist

- 24 Study for Pallas, 1947  
Pencil on paper, 247 x 311  
The artist

This is a study for the oil painting Pallas, in the artist's collection. He exhibited the painting at the French Maid Coffee Shop in 1947. The lines and symbols of the study can be related to the works of Miro whose paintings were still influential on Walters' style. Miro sometimes used letters on his works as Walters does here. The work is signed and dated at the lower-right.

- 25 Untitled Drawing, 1947  
Pencil on paper, 250 x 313  
The artist

This drawing was composed as the artist drew it. To some extent it depends on the example of the automatic drawings of artists like André Masson.

- 26 Study for South Canterbury Landscape, 1947  
Oil on strawboard, 352 x 405  
The artist

This is a study for catalogue number 27. It is a studio work based on sketches made in South Canterbury. There is a clear influence from the art of Paul Klee, but also from the Maori rock art. This is noticeable in the pictographic treatment of the trees.

- 27 South Canterbury Landscape, 1947  
Oil on canvas, 460 x 560  
The artist

A finished version of catalogue number 26. The warm colouring derives from the limestone country where the rock art was found. While studying the rock drawings he made sketches of the landscape nearby. Back in Wellington he tried to present the landscape in the simplified fashion of the rock drawings.

- 28 Study of a Rock Face, 1947  
Oil on strawboard, 315 x 385  
The artist

An abstract work based on Walters' South Canterbury studies.

- 29 New Zealand Landscape, 1947  
Oil on cardboard, 330 x 426  
The artist

Walters based this work on his study of Klee and Maori rock art. He painted the pictographic signs on a warm ochre ground to suggest an unrevised style of working. In fact, he painted the work a number of times to get it right. Some of the signs are derived directly from primitive art; for example, the chevron shape at upper-right which usually represents moving water.

- 30 The Poet, 1947  
Pencil and oil on canvas, 410 x 511  
The artist

Walters exhibited The Poet at the French Maid Coffee Shop in 1947. It was painted over another drawing which is showing through the background. The figure is drawn with a system of parallel lines. Walters arranged the figure so that it is ambiguous and can be seen either as two figures in profile, or one front on. The undulating line is intended as a symbol for inspiration.

- 31 Drawing, 1947  
Pencil on paper, 271 x 375  
The artist

This drawing relates closely to catalogue number 30.

- 32 Untitled Painting, 1947  
Pencil and oil on canvas, 406 x 517  
Destroyed

This work was based on a Maori rock art figure but interpreted freely by the artist. Walters combined the flat figure with a meandering line. Similar lines are often found in rock art shelters adjacent to drawings of figures. The work was signed and dated beneath the figure at the left. The artist regarded it as one of the better works of 1947.

- 33 Black Figure, 1948  
Oil on cardboard, 500 x 400  
The artist

Walters painted this figure in Sydney. It was loosely based on a life-class study which he simplified and stylized by painting the figure as a flat shape outlined with white. The work is signed and dated 1948.

- 34 Old Houses, Sydney, 1948  
Oil on paper, 504 x 378  
The artist

The painting of old houses was made while Walters was attending classes at East Sydney Technical College. It is painted in a style derived from Cubism, and is reminiscent of Braque's famous Houses at L'Estaque. It has a warm colouration and the forms are tilted towards the picture plane.

- 35 Drawing with Aboriginal Designs, 1949  
Mixed media on paper, 387 x 506  
The artist

A study based on Aboriginal art. There is another drawing on the verso dated 1949. The forms are drawn in black on a textured ground made by using greasy crayon with ink in the resist technique. This technique was used at the time by artists like Henry Moore.

- 36 Jug and Leaf, 1949  
Mixed media on paper, 420 x 345  
The artist

One of a small series of works made in September 1949. Walters used a scraper to expose the light underpaint. The work is signed and dated at the lower right.

- 37 Jug and Leaves, 1949  
Mixed media on paper, 410 x 350  
The artist

The work is in black and white. The leaf in the upper zone is drawn on a piece of paper that has been cut out and pasted onto the sheet below.



- 38 Jug and Leaf, 1949  
Mixed media on paper, 410 x 345  
The artist

This work is unsigned and undated but was executed in September 1949, the same date as catalogue numbers 36 and 37. The jug is a yellow/green colour, the background deep red.

- 39 Variation on Plant Forms, 1949  
Oil on canvas, 460 x 390  
The artist

Walters divided the work into two zones, the upper black the lower red. He used the scraper technique to draw the symbolic forms with an unrevised line. The work is signed and dated June 1949.

- 40 Air and Earth, 1949  
Oil on canvas, 558 x 405  
The artist

This composition relates closely to catalogue number 39. Walters contrasted the open expansive form in the upper zone with the embryonic enclosing one below. The use of contrasts and polarities seen here was to become an enduring feature of his art. The work is signed and dated June 1949 at upper-right.

- 41 Study of Leaves, 1949  
Mixed media on paper, 380 x 510  
The artist

- 42 Untitled Painting, 1952  
Oil on canvas, 482 x 360  
The artist

The artist painted this work in Melbourne after he had returned from his trip to Europe. It shows the development of a style of geometric abstraction based on the model of painters like Vasarely and Herbin. The composition is based on vertical and horizontal divisions of the picture surface. This was to become a feature of Walters' mature style. Walters applied the paint in dabs with a palette knife giving a textured surface. The bright red and yellow colours mark a change in his approach reflecting the influence of European geometric abstraction.

- 43 Painting Number Two, 1953  
Oil on canvas, 482 x 356  
The National Art Gallery, Wellington

This work relates closely in style to catalogue number 42. It was begun in Melbourne and finished by Walters on his return to New Zealand. It is painted in a more subdued colour range with red accents to the left of the central vertical axis.

- 44 Untitled Painting, 1952-53  
Oil on canvas, 482 x 360  
Margaret Orbell, Christchurch

Walters began this work in Melbourne. He completed in in New Zealand. The colours are blue, black and white.

- 45 Untitled Gouache, 1953  
Gouache on paper, 305 x 411  
The artist

- 46 Copy of Schizophrenic Drawing, 1953  
Ink on paper, 101 x 151  
The artist

This drawing is one of a group Walters made after designs by a patient at a mental hospital. The patient's designs had been copied by Schoon who made his copies available to Walters for study. This drawing shows the open rectangle motif which Walters was to modify and use in his own works of 1954-1955.

- 47 Copy of Schizophrenic Drawing, 1953  
Ink on paper, 161 x 102  
The artist

Like catalogue number 46, this copy is in a scrapbook owned by the artist. It includes reproductions of works by contemporary abstract painters and Oceanic artists. Schoon made use of this drawing for a large painting in 1965.

- 48 Copy of Schizophrenic Drawing, 1953  
Ink on paper, 88 x 100  
The artist

- 49 Copy of Schizophrenic Drawing, 1953  
Ink on paper, 79 x 98  
The artist

This drawing shows the division of the surface into rectangular compartments, an arrangement Walters used in some of his own works in the years 1954-1955. The small rectangles can also be found in some of Walters' later gouaches and oils.

- 50 Copy of Schizophrenic Drawing, 1953  
Ink on paper, 102 x 151  
The artist

- 51 Untitled Painting, 1954  
Gouache on paper, 280 x 210  
The artist

Walters painted this work in May 1954. It is signed and dated at upper-left. The motifs are arranged in compartments similar to those used by the schizophrenic.

- 52 Untitled Painting, 1954  
Gouache on paper, 211 x 281  
The artist

The work is signed and dated May 23, 1954. Walters painted the image in red, blue and green over pencil.

- 53 Untitled Painting, 1954  
Gouache on paper, 179 x 246  
The artist

One of a series of works based on the open rectangle motif derived from the works of a schizophrenic. Walters used the motif as the basis for his composition which has a mandala-like configuration.

- 54 Untitled Painting, 1954  
Gouache on paper, 343 x 299  
I. Buchanan, Auckland

This is a relational composition based on the open rectangle motif, but also incorporating the geometric forms of the triangle, square and circle. The strong colouring and precise drawing recall the French artist Herbin, whose works were an influence on Walters for a time.

- 55 Untitled Painting, 1954  
Gouache on paper, 300 x 365  
The artist

This work is painted in a subdued colour range of black, white and yellow ochre. The forms look as though they were cut out and then arranged on the paper. This was a method Walters sometimes used to compose his paintings.

- 56 Study for Composition, 1954  
Gouache on paper, 180 x 245  
The artist

It is a study for catalogue number 57 and a similar work owned by the artist Rick Killeen. Walters dated the work February 23, 1954, at the upper-right.

- 57 Composition, 1954-55  
Gouache on paper, 315 x 439  
M. Dunn, Auckland

This large gouache was completed on October 29, 1955; but Walters had been working on the composition in 1954. It relates closely to catalogue number 56. For the finished gouache Walters used a larger size and better quality paper.

- 58 Untitled Painting, 1955  
Oil on canvas, 510 x 606  
The University of Auckland

59 Untitled Painting, 1955  
Gouache on paper, 212 x 277  
The artist

60 Untitled Painting, 1955-56  
Oil on canvas, 461 x 611  
The artist

This work was the last of the series in which Walters used the open rectangle motif.

61 Study for Blue/Green, 1955  
Gouache on paper, 392 x 316  
The artist

Walters made two almost identical versions of this work. Both are still in the artist's collection. He based the composition on rectangular divisions of the surface. This reflects his search for neutral geometric forms in his painting at that time.

62 Study for Grey/Pink, 1955  
Gouache on paper, 435 x 326  
The artist

The work is a study for an unfinished oil painting. It is signed and dated at lower-right.

63 Untitled Painting, 1955  
Gouache on paper, 212 x 283  
The artist

The work is based on a motif derived from Maori rock art, a stylized figure which Walters transformed into a geometric form. The gouache is painted in primary colours and reflects the influence of Herbin and Mondrian.

64 Untitled Painting, 1955  
Gouache on paper, 208 x 273  
The artist

Like the preceding example, the painting was based on a rock art motif. Walters was interested in the principle of repetition found in primitive art which he uses as the basis of his composition.

65 Untitled Painting, 1955  
Gouache on paper, 280 x 210  
Private collection, Auckland

66 Untitled Painting, 1955  
Gouache on paper, 183 x 234  
The artist

The meandering line found in this composition was derived from Australian Aboriginal rock art. Walters contrasted the undulating line with the rectangles behind it.

- 67 Untitled Painting, 1955  
Gouache on paper, 229 x 285  
The artist

Walters has signed and dated the work April 13, 1955. It relates to catalogue number 68.

- 68 Untitled Painting, 1955  
Oil on muslin, mounted on hardboard, 510 x 622  
The National Art Gallery, Wellington

There is a gouache study for this work in the artist's collection, dated July 7, 1954. Walters derived the linear element from Australian Aboriginal rock art. The work is remarkable for the strong colour.

- 69 Untitled Gouache, 1955  
Gouache on paper, 270 x 205  
The artist

The work is signed and dated June 11 at the upper-right.

- 70 Untitled Painting, 1956  
Gouache on paper, 218 x 280  
The artist

The central form is based on a Maori rock art figure known to Walters from a photograph. There is another version of the composition on the verso of the sheet.

- 71 Study  
Gouache on paper, 290 x 220  
The Hocken Library, Dunedin

This gouache is one of the first studies Walters made using the koru motif. He used traditional Maori colours, red, black and white. The division of the work into zones is characteristic of one kind of composition he used in his later koru paintings of the 1960s.

- 72 Untitled Drawing, 1956  
Pencil on paper, 270 x 214  
The artist

It was unusual for Walters to make a careful pencil study of this kind. The work shows two different treatments of the koru motif in combination with a spiral also commonly used in Maori art. The work is dated October 1956, at the upper-right.

- 73 Ranui, 1956  
Ink on paper, 282 x 220  
Paris family collection, Wellington

The work is dated October 30, 1956, at the upper-right. This seems to be the earliest example of Walters using a Maori name as a title for one of his koru works.

- 74 Untitled Drawing, 1956  
Ink on paper, 285 x 210  
P.McLeavey, Wellington

This study is dated October 23, 1956, in the upper margin.

- 75 Untitled Drawing, 1956  
Ink on paper, 283 x 210  
Francis collection, Wellington

In this drawing Walters evolved a compositional type that he was to use for some of his major koru paintings. It is close to the composition of Te Whiti, catalogue number 103. Although the drawing has been hand-painted it is possible to see pencil lines indicating the positions of the koru bands and terminations.

- 76 Study for Painting, 1956  
Gouache and ink on paper, 284 x 212  
The Paris family collection

This is a study for the destroyed oil painting, catalogue number 77. It is dated November 3, 1956, at the upper-left.

- 77 Painting, 1956  
Oil on canvas, 482 x 356  
Destroyed

This was one of a number of small oil paintings made using the koru motif in 1956-1957. The artist did not find oil suitable for painting the koru imagery and subsequently changed to alternative media.

- 78 Untitled Gouache, 1956  
Gouache on paper, 297 x 234  
Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North

Walters dated the work December 2, 1956, in the upper margin. The study is executed in black, white and yellow ochre.

- 79 Untitled Painting, 1957  
Gouache on paper, 318 x 242  
The artist

This powerful composition uses a motif derived from Marquesan art. There is an obvious echo of the works by the Italian painter Capogrossi, whose paintings Walters knew and admired. Compared with Capogrossi, Walters gives a more geometric treatment to the forms and arranges them to align with the vertical and horizontal axes of the support. The gouache is executed in red, black and white. It is one of a number of works based on the Marquesan motif. See also catalogue numbers 81 and 82. The work is dated June 11, 1957, at the upper-right.

- 80 Untitled Painting, 1958  
Ink on hardboard, 509 x 407  
 Present whereabouts unknown

This was one of the early koru paintings executed in black ink on gesso-coated hardboard. The composition is based on bilateral symmetry, a common principle in decorative design and one used by the Maoris among others. However, following the usual practice in primitive art, Walters has broken the symmetry at the lower-right by introducing a black circle which has no counterpart at the left.

- 81 Study, 1958  
Gouache and pasted paper, 610 x 458  
 The artist

The motif used in the work is derived from Marquesan art. The study relates to other works like catalogue number 82 made about the same period.

- 82 Study, 1958  
Gouache and pasted paper, 609 x 458  
 The artist

- 83 Papier Collé, 1958-59  
Pasted black and grey paper, 458 x 344  
 The artist

Walters made a number of works using cut and pasted paper in this period. The technique was useful to him in working out compositions for his paintings.

- 84 Study, 1958-59  
Gouache on paper, 305 x 216  
 The artist

Walters re-worked this composition in 1976 because the original gouache had been damaged. See also entry for catalogue number 79.

- 85 Study, 1958-59  
Ink on hardboard, 609 x 457  
 Destroyed

- 86 Study, 1958-59  
Ink on hardboard, 609 x 408  
 Destroyed

Walters made a revised version of this composition in 1965, now in the Francis collection, Wellington.

- 87 Study, 1958-59  
Ink on hardboard, 609 x 458  
 Destroyed

- 88 Study for Waitara, 1959  
 Ink on paper, 250 x 356  
 The Auckland City Art Gallery

This study is based on Maori rafter pattern designs. The work has obvious connections with his papier collés of the same period. See entry for catalogue number 83.

- 89 Untitled Painting, 1960  
 Gouache on paper, 609 x 457  
 Destroyed

- 90 Untitled Painting, 1960  
 Gouache on paper, 609 x 457  
 Destroyed

In this composition Walters experimented with the idea of having the koru motifs running at right angles to one another. While the composition has a dynamic quality because of this, there are problems of orientation. He decided that the motifs worked better in their geometric form if they were aligned the same way.

- 91 Untitled Painting, 1960  
 Gouache on paper, 609 x 457  
 The artist

The composition is painted in red ochre and dark grey.

- 92 Papier Collé, 1960  
 Pasted black and grey paper, 458 x 330  
 Present whereabouts unknown

- 93 Study 1960  
 Gouache on paper, 346 x 248  
 M. Dunn, Auckland

This is a working study for a painting with colour notes written in the margin. It is a composition based on bilateral symmetry executed in black, blue and red. The koru-derived forms have been painted free-hand and vary considerably in width.

- 94 Study for Painting Number Seven, 1965, 1960  
 Gouache on paper, 345 x 246  
 The artist

One of the few surviving colour studies for a painting in the first koru series of 1965. It is the study for catalogue number 109. In the finished painting Walters followed the study closely so far as colour and composition were concerned. The final painting, though, was constructed geometrically whereas the study was painted free-hand.

- 95 Study for Painting, 1962  
 Pasted black and grey paper, 330 x 457  
 The artist



- 96 Study, 1962  
Pasted paper, 609 x 458  
Destroyed

- 97 Spiral Theme Number One, 1962-63  
P.V.A. on hardboard, 508 x 381  
Present whereabouts unknown

This is a double-sided work; the spiral is painted in white and black on one side, in red and black on the other. The painting is an early instance of Walters' interest in Op art. While based on the spiral familiar in traditional Maori art, the form is geometric and hard-edge in style.

- 98 Papier Collé, 1962  
Pasted grey and black paper, 480 x 335  
The artist

- 99 Studio, Tinakori Road, 1963

This photograph shows several works by Walters including Spiral Theme, catalogue number 97. The carved gourd on the bookcase is one grown and decorated by Theo Schoon. The extensive library of art books includes Seuphor's monograph on Modrian, visible near the fireplace.

- 100 Study, 1963  
Ink and pasted paper, 609 x 457  
Destroyed

This work is an interesting illustration of the method used by Walters in constructing some of his koru studies. He cut out pieces of paper with band terminations painted on them so that he could move them along the bands and decide where to position them in his final composition. The joins in the paper are quite visible in the plate.

- 101 Black and Yellow, 1963  
P.V.A. on hardboard, 915 x 686  
Destroyed

This painting was based on an ink study of 1959, now in the Francis collection, Wellington. The work is related to designs for rafter paintings at the Whare Runanga at Waitangi.

- 102 Painting, 1964-65  
P.V.A. and acrylic on linen-covered hardboard, 909 x 685  
Destroyed

This work was exhibited at the 1966 New Vision show. Subsequently it was damaged in storage and destroyed by the artist. There is a study for the work in the artist's collection. The painting was executed in blue, black and white. It is an early example of a reductive approach to geometric imagery.

- 103 Te Whiti, 1964  
Alkyd enamel on hardboard, 1220 x 915  
The Francis collection, Wellington

This is the first major koru painting and was signed and dated on the verso. Walters also inscribed the title Te Whiti with the date and signature. But initially the work was exhibited simply as Painting. It is possible that the title may have been inscribed retrospectively since the work was not exhibited until 1966. Walters began using Maori titles for his koru paintings during that year. The artist made at least three versions of the composition before arriving at the final painting. Although the composition relates back to earlier studies, like catalogue number 75, it is the first painting drawn with ruler and compass and painted with a hard-edge precision. The title brings to mind the Maori prophet Te Whiti whom Walters admired.

- 104 Study for Painting Number One, 1965  
Pencil on tracing paper, 230 x 302  
The artist

A design made on transparent paper so that the composition could be transferred to another support. The tracing paper allowed the artist to study the design in the reverse, as shown in the plate. Walters concentrated on the band terminations and circles, the rest of the work was more or less resolved as alternating black and white bands.

- 105 Painting Number One, 1965  
P.V.A. on hardboard, 914 x 1219  
The Auckland City Art Gallery

This work was purchased for the Auckland City Art Gallery from Walters' one-man show at the New Vision Gallery in 1966. It consequently received more attention than other works from the show which were either unsold or in private collections. The painting shows some influence from Op art in its visual ambiguity and perceptual effects, such as shimmer, auras and after-images. A preliminary ink study for the composition of about 1963 has been destroyed. A photograph of the ink study shows that Walters used the technique of cutting out the motifs so that he could adjust their relative positions.

- 106 Drawing Number Fourteen, 1965  
Ink on paper, 610 x 454  
Colin and Anne McCahon, Auckland

This drawing was shown at the New Vision show in 1966. It relates in style closely to catalogue number 105.

- 107 Untitled Painting, 1965  
P.V.A. and acrylic on hardboard, 1219 x 915  
Destroyed

- 108 Black on White, 1965  
P.V.A. on hardboard, 1216 x 910  
 The artist

This painting was based on an earlier study from the late 1950s, now destroyed. The work was exhibited at the New Vision show in 1966 under the title Painting, 1965. It is signed and dated on the verso.

- 109 Painting Number Seven, 1965  
P.V.A. on hardboard, 1220 x 915  
 The Paris family collection, Wellington

The painting was based on a gouache study of 1960, catalogue number 94. The composition is based on bilateral symmetry and depends on colour and changes of scale in the motifs for variation. It was exhibited in Walters' show at the New Vision Gallery in 1966.

- 110 Painting Number Eight, 1965  
P.V.A. on hardboard, 915 x 1219  
 P. Vuletic, Auckland

Painted in black, white and red ochre this work was shown at the New Vision exhibition in 1966. It was bought by the present owner some years later, when it was part of the gallery's stock.

- 111 Painting Number Nine, 1965  
P.V.A. on hardboard, 1220 x 915  
 Destroyed

One of the major works in the 1966 New Vision show, this painting was damaged and had to be destroyed. Walters made a revised version of the composition in 1981, catalogue number 215. In the revised version he reversed the black and white imagery and revised it in accordance with his late style.

- 112 Walters working on Painting Number Nine, 1965  
 Photograph, Margaret Orbell

This photograph shows the artist painting catalogue number 111. His method of working down over the painting is demonstrated clearly. Also, the photograph shows his method of painting the forms without the use of tape or masking.

- 113 Painting, 1965  
P.V.A. on hardboard, 1219 x 915  
 Destroyed

This painting was exhibited in the 1966 New Vision show.

- 114 Painting, 1965  
P.V.A. on hardboard, 1220 x 915  
 Destroyed

- 115 Untitled Drawing, 1965-66  
 Ink on board, 610 x 458  
 Private collection

This work relates closely to compositions of the late-1950s, like catalogue number 86. The artist made a number of finished ink drawings of this kind in the period 1965 to 1967.

- 116 Painting Number One, 1966  
 P.V.A. on hardboard, 1219 x 915  
 The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Walters exhibited this work in the show, New Zealand Painting, held at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1966. It was the first Walters' painting bought by an Australian public art gallery.

- 117 Painting Number Two, 1966  
 P.V.A. on hardboard, 1220 x 910  
 The University of Auckland

The painting is in blue, black and white. It was exhibited in the show New Zealand Painting, held at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1966. It was purchased for Auckland University from the Petar/James Gallery.

- 118 Hiwi, 1966  
 P.V.A. on hardboard, 1220 x 914  
 The Govett Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

Walters began using Maori titles for his koru works in 1966. Hiwi is one of the first to have a Maori title. For some years this painting was in the collection of K. Wright. It has received some surface damage through poor handling.

- 119 Untitled Drawing, 1965  
 Ink on paper, 610 x 458  
 Private collection

This is a revised version of a drawing of the late-1950s. It is interesting because of the variation of scale in the koru motifs.

- 120 Installation View, New Vision Gallery, 1966

This photograph shows the hanging of one wall in the 1966 exhibition. The coloured work Painting Number Seven is hung between the black and white Painting Number Nine and Black on White.

- 121 Black and White, 1966  
 P.V.A. on canvas, 915 x 915  
 Destroyed

A work showing a clear influence of Op art. This was one of the first works where Walters used canvas again.

- 122 Tahi, 1967  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1525 x 1140  
Fletcher Challenge Ltd, Auckland

This work was exhibited at the New Vision Gallery in the 1968 show. It shows a number of developments in style. The composition has an all-over disposition of elements arranged randomly. The use of canvas again indicates the artist's dissatisfaction with hardboard. Tahi is painted in yellow and black.

- 123 Waikanae, 1967  
P.V.A. on hardboard, 914 x 1219  
H. Fulton, Auckland

Exhibited at the 1968 New Vision show, this work remained unsold after the exhibition and was kept in stock for some years. It is painted in blue, black and white.

- 124 Oriental, 1967  
P.V.A. on harboard, 890 x 1206  
Private collection

Walters exhibited this work at his second New Vision show in 1968. It was later sold from gallery stock.

- 125 Tiki, 1967  
P.V.A. on hardboard, 1220 x 915  
Present whereabouts unknown

One of the last koru paintings on hardboard, Tiki was shown at the New Vision Gallery show in 1968.

- 126 Karu, 1967  
P.V.A. on canvas, 915 x 915  
Private collection, Auckland

One of a group of works based on segmental forms. It was exhibited at Walters' second show at the New Vision Gallery in 1968. The painting is designed to be hung in the diamond format. There is a blue band to the left side of the horizontal axis not visible in the photograph. The work remained in the gallery stock for some years before being sold.

- 127 Hika, 1967  
P.V.A. on canvas, 915 x 915  
Private collection

Hika belongs to the same series as catalogue number 126. It was also exhibited at the New Vision Gallery in 1968 and remained unsold. It is painted in red and white.

- 128 Kupu, 1967  
P.V.A. on canvas, 1524 x 1142  
Destroyed

- 129 Green and Pink, 1967  
Acrylic on paper, 231 x 305  
The artist

This work is a revised version of catalogue number 101.

- 130 Kahukura, 1967-68  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1140 x 1520  
Victoria University, Wellington

Originally exhibited at the New Vision show in 1968 with the title Tawa, this work was later sold by Peter McLeavey to the University. He appears to have given it the present title when he exhibited it in 1969. Unfortunately the work has suffered some damage.

- 131 Muritai, 1967-68  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1524 x 1142  
M. Mrkusich, Auckland

A reductive composition painted in yellow and grey/blue, Muritai was exchanged for a Mrkusich corner painting in the early-1970s. Walters made a revised version of this work in 1977, see catalogue number 187. The later version is adjusted to the scale and tones of his late style.

- 132 Installation View, New Vision Gallery, 1968

This view shows Kahukura, Hiwi and Karu in position on the wall. Walters has achieved variety in the hanging by placing the larger horizontal work Kahukura next to the two black and white vertical paintings. The diamond-shaped Karu is separated from the koru works on the end wall.

- 133 Installation View, New Vision Gallery, 1968

The photograph shows the painting Kupu at left, and Waikanae on the right-hand wall.

- 134 Installation View, New Vision Gallery, 1968

Oriental is shown at the left, Tahi at the right.

- 135 Mahuika, 1968  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1524 x 1143  
The Francis collection, Wellington

Painted in deep blue and black, Mahuika is one of the first works where Walters used low tonal contrast between dark colours. It was first exhibited at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, in 1969.

- 136 Tamatea, 1968  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1524 x 1143  
The Govett Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

- 137 Black and Red, 1968  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 914 x 1219  
Private collection
- 138 Blue and Yellow, 1968  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1830 x 1371  
P. Vuletic, Auckland

This painting was one of the first works on this large size. It was shown at the Expo Arts of Mankind, Osaka, Japan in 1970.

- 139 Black and Yellow, 1968  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1520 x 1150  
Private collection, Los Angeles
- 140 Makaro, 1969  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1522 x 1143  
The National Art Gallery, Wellington

An example of Walters using a low tonal contrast in light colours, typical of one direction in his koru paintings at that time.

- 141 Study, 1969  
Ink on paper, 609 x 457  
Private collection, Wellington
- 142 Black and White, 1969  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1525 x 1525  
P. Vuletic, Auckland

Walters based this design on polynesian lashing pattern known to him from a small diagram. The influence of Op art is strong in this work which generates a number of perceptual effects. The use of a repeated and predictable pattern is a departure from his usual relational type of composition. This kind of structure was favoured by Op artists like Vasarely and Bridget Riley.

- 143 Untitled Drawing, 1969  
Ink on paper, 609 x 457  
Private collection, Melbourne
- 144 Untitled Drawing, 1969  
Ink on paper, 609 x 457  
Private collection, Wellington
- 145 Untitled Painting, 1969  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 457 x 457  
Private collection

This is one of the few koru works painted in the square format. At this period Walters was experimenting with symmetrical compositions and grid structures. Instead of relational compositions, he tried using repetition and symmetry as in Serial Art.

- 146 Genealogy Drawing, 1969  
Ink on paper, 609 x 457  
Private collection, Auckland
- 147 Genealogy Number One, 1969  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1217 x 913  
D. Williams, Auckland

This was the first painting in the series. It was based on preliminary studies, like catalogue number 146. Walters exhibited the painting at the New Vision Gallery in 1971. It is dated November 1969 on the verso and was one of the new works based on the insistent repetition of the same motif. Only at the lower-right corner is the predictable pattern broken.

- 148 Drawing, 1969  
Ink on paper, 609 x 457  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch
- 149 Maihi, 1969  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1219 x 914  
Waikato Art Museum, Hamilton
- 150 Genealogy Number Two, 1969-70  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1524 x 1143  
Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North

The basic unit for the composition is stated in the large scale at the top of the work and repeated below in a smaller scale. The system of the painting, once stated, is completely predictable. Given the unit, it would be in theory possible to construct the whole image.

- 151 Tautahi, 1970  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1524 x 1143  
T. Beaglehole, Wellington

This composition was based on a study of the late-1950s. Walters divided the painting into two zones, an upper and a lower, which are distinguished by colour, ochre and black at the top, black and white at the bottom.

- 152 Rongotai, 1970  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1520 x 1150  
M. Dunn, Auckland

This is an unusual composition because of the pronounced scale change between the upper and lower zones, and the positioning of the motifs on the left-hand side of the work. It was originally exhibited at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland, in 1971 with the title Grantham. This was later changed by the artist to Rongotai, an area in Wellington where the artist lived as a boy. The painting was purchased by the present owner directly from the artist shortly after it had been finished. An earlier version of the work was destroyed by the artist.



- 153 Black and Red, 1970  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1527 x 1143  
The artist

Walters painted a small series of works based on a stylized version of the Maori rauponga design. This work was first exhibited in 1971 at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, with the title Karakia given to it by McLeavey. Walters changed the name to the present title when it was exhibited again at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland, in 1972.

- 154 Study, 1970  
Acrylic on paper, 298 x 230  
The artist

- 155 Hautana, 1970  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1524 x 1142  
The Auckland City Art Gallery

The composition is very similar to that of catalogue number 153. The work was originally shown at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, with the title Oriori given to it by McLeavey. It was exhibited with the present title, given by the artist, at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland, in 1972.

- 156 Untitled Drawing, 1970  
Ink on paper, 387 x 387  
The artist

One of the works Walters designed based on a grid structure.

- 157 Untitled Painting, 1971  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1525 x 1125  
I. Scott, Auckland

This canvas was exhibited at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, in 1971 with the title Waiata given to the work by McLeavey.

- 158 Study, 1971  
Ink on paper, 609 x 458  
Private collection, Auckland

- 159 Untitled Drawing, 1971  
Ink on paper, 609 x 458  
Private collection

- 160 Untitled Drawing, 1971  
Ink on paper, 762 x 609  
Private collection, Wellington

- 161 Genealogy Study, 1971  
Ink on paper, 585 x 457  
The Auckland City Art Gallery

162 Genealogy Number Three, 1971  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1830 x 1372  
Private collection

163 Genealogy Number Four, 1971  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1525 x 1142  
J. Gellert, Auckland

This painting, a variation of catalogue number 147, was one of the first works Walters completed in Auckland. It was shown at the New Vision Gallery in 1972.

164 Genealogy Number Five, 1971  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1524 x 1524  
P. Vuletic, Auckland

This work was exhibited at Walters' third one-man show at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland, in 1972.

165 Genealogy Number Six, 1971  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 914  
P. Vuletic, Auckland

The most systemic of the Genealogy series, this work is the only one that is coloured, the others are all in black and white. The painting is in blue and red. It was first shown at the New Vision Gallery in 1972.

166 Koru, 1971  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1830 x 1372  
P. McLeavey, Wellington

It was first exhibited at Walters' third one-man show at the New Vision Gallery in 1972. The painting is in a close tonal range and has suffered some surface damage.

167 Untitled Drawing, 1971  
Ink on paper, 609 x 458  
Private collection

This is a revised version of an earlier drawing made in 1963. The first version has been destroyed.

168 Black Centre, 1972  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1524 x 1524  
P. Vuletic, Auckland

Walters exhibited this painting at his third one-man show at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland, in 1972. It relates in composition to the earlier catalogue number 145. The design is symmetrical and looks the same from any side.

169 Pacific Motif, 1972  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 609 x 609  
Private collection

170 Untitled Painting, 1972  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1219 x 912  
H. Fulton, Auckland

171 Genealogy Number Eight, 1973  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 269 x 1370  
Private collection, Auckland

This was the last of the Genealogy series. Genealogy Number Seven, 1973, is also in an extended horizontal format. It has the unit repeated with no variation.

172 Maho, 1973  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 980  
The artist

This work was first exhibited at the Petar/James Gallery, Auckland, in April 1974. The composition relates to the screenprint of the same title, catalogue number 219. The work is unusual because of its reductive character and also because it is one of the few times Walters used the koru motif in a vertical deployment. To compensate for the fewness of the elements, Walters enlarged the scale of the bands and terminations. It takes on some of the characteristics of his late style in the tight spacing of the motifs.

173 Tohu, 1973  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1216 x 915  
The artist

With this work Walters used a larger scale for the koru motifs and reduced the gaps between them so that the spacing is tight. The title and the composition bring to mind the earlier work Te Whiti, catalogue number 103.

174 Untitled Drawing, 1973  
Ink on paper, 609 x 458  
Private collection, Auckland

175 Untitled Painting, 1973  
Gouache on paper, 306 x 229  
The artist

176 Study, 1973  
Gouache on paper, 277 x 203  
The artist

This is a re-working of a gouache of 1955 that had been damaged by damp.

177 Nuku, 1973  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 508 x 508  
Private collection

The segmental shapes in the corners of this work recall Mrkusich's Corner paintings, one of which Walters owned.

- 178 Overlap Number Two, 1973  
 Ink on paper, 609 x 458  
 The artist

This work was based on a study of 1960, now destroyed. It was exhibited at the Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland, in 1978, but remained unsold.

- 179 Untitled Painting, 1974  
 P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 457 x 609  
 Private collection, Christchurch

One of a series of works based on a geometric version of a Maori rock art figure. The painting is in black, ochre and white.

- 180 Painting, 1974  
 P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 916  
 The artist

This work was first exhibited at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, in 1976 as Painting B. It is a reductive work based on grey, black and white. Walters made a number of related compositions at the time.

- 181 Untitled Painting, 1975  
 P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 570 x 570  
 The artist

- 182 Untitled Drawing, 1975  
 Ink on paper, 592 x 455  
 Paris family collection, Wellington

This work was exhibited at Walters' one-man show at the Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland, in 1978. It is a revised version of an early koru drawing, catalogue number 74.

- 183 Mokoia, 1975  
 P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 982  
 Paris family collection, Wellington

The painting was first exhibited at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, in 1976 with the title Painting D. It was given the present title after a request from the owner for Walters to provide one. It is in black and white as were the majority of the koru works Walters painted shortly after his move to Christchurch.

- 184 Oreka, 1976  
 P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 950 x 2440  
 P. Vuletic, Auckland

- 185 Untitled Painting, 1977  
 P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 940  
 The Prospect collection, Auckland

It was shown at the Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland, in 1978.

- 186 Parade Number One, 1977  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 485 x 609  
Private collection

The composition was based on a gouache of 1955, similar to catalogue number 64. Walters used the geometric version of a Maori rock art figure as his motif. The painting is one of a series of works based on the same forms.

- 187 Muritai Number Two, 1977  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1219 x 978  
R. Killeen, Auckland

This painting is a revised version of catalogue number 131. Walters adjusted the drawing, the scale and the colours. This version is in a harmonic grey range, the earlier painting of 1967-68, though also close in tone, is more brightly coloured.

- 188 Karakia, 1977  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1525 x 1140  
The National Art Gallery, Wellington

Walters first exhibited this painting at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, in 1978. It was bought by the National Gallery from the show. The composition is a revised version of catalogue number 108.

- 189 Parade Number Two, 1977  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 736 x 914  
Private collection

- 190 Parade Number Four, 1977  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 975 x 1220  
Private collection, Auckland

This painting was exhibited at the Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland, in 1978. It is painted in black, white and yellow oxide.

- 191 Waiata, 1977  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1524 x 1142  
The Dowse Gallery, Lower Hutt

Waiata was purchased from the Walters' exhibition at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, in 1978. It is in black and white.

- 192 Untitled Painting, 1977  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1525 x 1142  
Private collection

- 193 Untitled Painting, 1977  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 914  
Private collection

- 194 Untitled Painting, 1978  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 914  
Private collection

This work is painted in two colours, blue and white.

- 195 Untitled Painting, 1978  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 915  
Private collection

Painted in black and off white, this work was completed in June and July.

- 196 Painting, 1978  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 355 x 482  
R. Killeen, Auckland

- 197 Untitled Painting, 1978  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 915 x 737  
Private collection

This painting is one of a number of reductive works made about this time. It was exhibited at Walters' one-man show at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, in 1980.

- 198 Untitled Painting, 1978  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 609 x 485  
Private collection

The work is painted in black, white and grey. The grey band at the bottom of the picture does not show up very well in the reproduction.

- 199 Study for Break Up, 1979  
Ink on paper, 740 x 572  
The artist

This composition relates back to ideas Walters was exploring in the 1960s. See catalogue number 107 for an earlier example of this kind.

- 200 Study, 1979  
Ink on paper, 609 x 458  
Private collection, Wellington

- 201 Study, 1979  
Ink on paper, 762 x 572  
The artist

- 202 Study, 1979  
Ink on paper, 558 x 426  
The artist

- 203 Tohu, 1979  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1017 x 762  
The Rotorua Art Gallery

204 Wainui, 1979  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1524 x 1142  
Australian National Gallery, Canberra

205 Study for Wainui, 1979  
Ink on paper, 609 x 457  
Private collection, Wellington

206 Tirangi, 1979  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 915  
Private collection

This work, in grey and white, was shown at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, in 1980.

207 Karaka Number Two, 1980  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1525 x 1143  
Private collection, Auckland

This painting was shown at the Peter McLeavey Gallery in 1981. Painted in dark grey and off white, it relates closely to Maheno, catalogue number 212. The composition is a variation of the print of the same name, catalogue number 223.

208 Study, 1980  
Ink on paper, 762 x 572  
Private collection, Wellington

209 Untitled Painting, 1980  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1219 x 978  
Norrish family collection, Wellington

Painted in black, grey and white this work introduces a scale difference between the upper and lower motifs. Taken with the random disposition of the elements there is an effect rather like perspectival diminution. It appears as if the larger forms are closer to the eye, the smaller ones further away.

210 Horizontal Variation, Number Four, 1980  
P.V.A. on paper, 673 x 571  
Private collection, Wellington

The design is based on the Maori rauponga motif, used also in the print, catalogue number 227.

211 Apu, 1980  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1217 x 978  
J. Gellert, Auckland

This work was bought from Walters' one-man show at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, in 1981.

212 Maheno, 1981  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1545 x 1145  
The Auckland City Art Gallery

- 213 Te Oti, 1981  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 533 x 1524  
Fletcher Challenge Ltd, Wellington

This work was exhibited at Walters' one-man show at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, 1981. It is painted in red and white. It was given the present title by Peter McLeavey.

- 214 Onepu, 1981  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 978  
Bank of New Zealand, Wellington

The painting is in blue on white. The composition relates in type to catalogue number 209.

- 215 Painting Number Nine, 1965: revised version, 1981  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 935  
J. Gellert, Auckland

This work is a revised version of catalogue number 111. It is painted in dark grey and off white.

- 216 Taraki, 1982  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 625 x 1825  
The artist

This work was first shown in the artist's retrospective exhibition at the Auckland City Art Gallery, in 1983.

- 217 Aranui, 1982  
P.V.A. and acrylic on canvas, 1829 x 1371  
The artist

This work was first shown at the artist's retrospective exhibition at the Auckland City Art Gallery, in 1983.

Prints:

- 218 Tawa, 1969  
Screenprint, 533 x 419

One of a set of multiples published by the Barry Lett Galleries in 1969.

- 219 Maho, 1972  
Screenprint, 101 x 89

One of an edition of 50 prints, commissioned for the Zonta Club of Wellington. The composition relates to the painting of the same title, catalogue number 172.

- 220 Amoka, 1972  
Screenprint, 837 x 394

One of an edition of 25 prints, commissioned for the Zonta Club of Wellington.



221 Tama, 1977  
Screenprint, 650 x 468

Tama was commissioned by the Print Club in 1977. It was published in an edition of 50 prints.

222 Kahu, 1977  
Screenprint, 380 x 285

Kahu was commissioned by the Print Club in 1977. It was published in an edition of 75 prints.

223 Karaka, 1979  
Screenprint, 512 x 406

Karaka was commissioned by the Print Club in 1979. It was published in an edition of 50 prints. The composition relates to catalogue number 207.

224 Then, 1980  
Screenprint, 406 x 536

Then was commissioned by the Print Club in 1980. It was published in an edition of 125 prints. The design is based on a gouache of 1955.

225 Arahura, 1982  
Screenprint, 507 x 405

Arahura was commissioned by the Print Club in 1982. It was published in an edition of 125 prints.

226 Kura, 1982  
Screenprint, 555 x 445

This work was published by the Landfall Press in an edition of 150 prints.

227 Rauponga, 1983  
Screenprint, 403 x 493

Rauponga was published by the artist in an edition of 50 prints.

228 Tamaki, 1983  
Screenprint, 605 x 455

Tamaki was published by the artist in an edition of 50 prints. The use of the large scale motif relates to the poster for his retrospective exhibition in 1983.

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