An Artistic Wasteland?
Visual Images of the 1920s in New Zealand

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Contents

Abstract

Commentary in art history and criticism about the art of the 1920s in New Zealand is limited, with contemporary discussion focusing on art education and La Trobe scheme teachers, local admiration for British Victorian art and the rejection of modernist painting, as well as the work of some of New Zealand's most talented artists as expatriates in Europe. The most egregious verdict about art in the 1920s was that of Auckland Art Gallery Director Peter Tomory in the 1950s, subsequently endorsed by some influential art historians, that fine arts in New Zealand was a "wasteland" in the 1920s. This view provided the motivation for this thesis.

The thesis uses a visual culture approach, supplemented by Foucauldian discourse analysis, to investigate the broader arts environment of the 1920s. This provides a much broader and more diverse position and data set than if the analysis was limited to fine art alone. Visual material created by cartoon artists, commercial artists and photographers, as well as fine artists, enhances an understanding of the discourses covering an important period in New Zealand's art history.

The 1920s were a period of significant societal change. Having emerged from a period of war and pandemic, New Zealand embarked on a sweeping process of social, economic and political development. In chapters on Society, the Economy, Politics and Art and Culture, a number of common themes are evident such as immigration, economic change including land ownership, recession, meeting infrastructural needs, and uncertainties in New Zealand's relations with Great Britain.

Political discourses explored in the thesis include politicians grappling with recession and working class demands, quality and effectiveness of political leadership, the rise of the Labour Party and debate over "Bolshevist" allegiances. All these issues appear to have stimulated socially-conscious artists to develop a range of imagery that tells a compelling story of the time.

Examples of the art being created by New Zealand artists here and overseas are reviewed with visual evidence supporting the rejection of the criticism that the 1920s were a wasteland for art. With new art galleries opening, modernism becoming more widely accepted, and the large number of amateur artists unwilling to accept the critics' judgement that their art did not fit in the pursuit of a national cultural identity, a firm foundation for the future of New Zealand's art was laid in the 1920s.

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Finally I am grateful for the support over the years from Marion, Virginia, Claire, and Jenny. I value your ongoing friendship.

List of Illustrations

Introduction: An Artistic Wasteland?

Do you know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember—Nothing?[1]

FIGURE 1: THE DEFENCE MINISTER'S TELEGRAM 1921, A. H. O'KEEFFE

It is known as "The Roaring Twenties" — an apt term for the excesses of prohibition America. Internationally, the 1920s decade was one of excitement, innovation, confusion and ultimately tragedy.[2] As part of their revenge for World War One, the allied governments demanded compensation from Germany which led inexorably to the Great Depression and the Second World War. It was also a turbulent time for art: Andre Breton published the Surrealist Manifesto; Dada events criticised the stupidity of war; George Grosz and the

[1] T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), 55.

[2] For many people the tragedy of the First World War was still being felt. A. H. O'Keeffe painted this very poignant description of an event in the lives of many New Zealand families. O'Keeffe himself suffered the loss of two sons in the war.

German Expressionists painted Germany's agonies; and artists from many countries created images that reflected their own realities. This latter point is relevant to the creation of images in New Zealand. Buffeted by the same events that were playing out in Europe and North America, New Zealand participated in international efforts to establish an enduring peace and, at home, took advantage of consumer and manufacturing modernism. But it was not much involved in developments in modern art—in fact most New Zealanders appeared to have an active dislike of it and there seemed to be a deliberate rejection of artists using modern techniques and subjects in their art.

Artistic representation of modernity was certainly recognisable in the work of New Zealand artists living and working in Europe. For those remaining in New Zealand, however, there was little or no reflection of the modernity that Charles Baudelaire had recognised in the mid-19th century:

> That the conditions of life were going to change faster and faster, and that the duty of modern art would be "to express that specific duty which is intrinsic to our new emotions." (Russell 1981, 15)

In 1846, Baudelaire also made the important call "for artists to be of their time." Richard Brettell has commented that Baudelaire's call to arms was heard by very few artists when it was made and it was his "later criticism", particularly the essay *The Painter of Modern Life*, that had the major impact "on world art" (1999, 5). In this essay, Baudelaire stressed the ephemeral nature of modernity compared with immutable nature of tradition and, even though he was primarily focused on modern life in Paris, his concept of modernity and the need to respond to rapid change was also applicable in post-war New Zealand in that the decade of the 1920s was a period of social, economic, and political turbulence. Although photographers and cartoonists were well-placed to capture the ephemeral events of modern life, the same cannot be said of the "fine" artists. As Peter Tomory later opined in the 1950s, the "years between the First World War and the depression were indeed a wasteland," a comment that Gordon Brown and Hamish Keith thought "in some ways, a justifiable, though over-simplified assessment of the general artistic situation found in New Zealand" (1992, 97).

In his 1940 essay introducing the National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art Catalogue, the writer A.H.McLintock, treated 1920s' art with scant regard. He asserted that New Zealand was "not a country with urgent and deep-rooted social problems crying out for

redress" and it was fortunate, "perhaps, there was little experimenting with the fantasies of the more extreme schools of painting" (1940, 15). This salute to traditional approaches to artistic style and substance, seemed to rule out modernism, at least in McLintock's mind, and stressed for him and many others a continuing concentration on the "eternal and the immutable".

What were the reasons for an obsession with traditional subjects and painting styles, and an apparent disinterest in contemporary developments in New Zealand? Ignorance is a possibility but the innovative and insightful writing of poets and authors like Denis Glover, A.R.D Fairburn and John Mulgan put a lie to that suggestion. Public disinterest in modernist expressions of art is also a possibility, and the laws of supply and demand may have played a role with artists concerned about the difficulty of selling new or politically-inspired art. Definitions of quality and what painting styles and subjects were considered acceptable, which were nourished through an umbilical link to England, may also have been a determining factor.

Part of the Tomory argument and the earlier position taken by McLintock relates to a judgement about the nature of art. In New Zealand in the 1920s, an elitist might judge the acceptability of an artwork, its style and content, by standards derived from their veneration of the Royal Academy, of British painting traditions and grand master paintings from a relatively circumscribed number of countries. The question then, and that addressed by the thesis, relates to the acceptability of this "traditional" view of high quality art. The definition of an "artist" will also be considered as the work of many art society painters is damned by faint praise from the connoisseurs.

Literature Review: Art in New Zealand

As far as New Zealand painting in the 1920s was concerned, was The Roaring Twenties an appropriate descriptor; did our fine arts roar and justify the title; did they show the excitement and innovation of modernism; did they show a scintilla of the brilliance and commentary that was associated with overseas art of the period? In an article about a 1933 Canterbury Society of the Arts Exhibition, a perceptive sculptor (Francis Shurrock) summed up the situation:

> There is much human participation in this Dominion in many forms of sport, of civic, commercial, and domestic activity, of agricultural and intellectual endeavour, yet, with very rare exception, all these activities are conspicuous by their absence on the

walls at our annual exhibitions—of imaginative works there have of recent years been fewer and fewer exhibited.[3]

The 1920s were a time of great turbulence in art internationally—though not it seems in New Zealand. Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism, Dada, De Stijl, Neue Sachlicheit and Surrealism had all, to a greater or lesser extent, provided images reflecting positive and negative aspects of a modernising world (albeit with a very European and American focus). It is reasonable to assume that a number of New Zealand artists were aware of some of the art being created internationally. *The Studio*, a conservative but informative British art magazine for keeping abreast of art trends, was circulated in New Zealand; expatriate painters were in contact with New Zealand friends and/or families; the La Trobe scheme attracted well-trained (but not avant-garde) art teachers, and art schools of varying quality and approach to art education were operating in various parts of the country. There were also semi-regular and popular exhibitions of mainly British art organised, it seems, for largely commercial reasons. Unfortunately, the works brought out to New Zealand were often dated and had proved difficult to sell in the United Kingdom. They did not represent the best of European modernist painting, and they probably reinforced the prejudices of both the elite connoisseur and the viewer who "liked a good picture", about the "gold-standard quality" of late-Victorian British art.

A reductionist conception of an artist would envisage a painter working at their easel or in their sketch book. By mimicking what they saw as the beauty or magnificence of nature; by condemning modernism and what they understood (and judged critically) as happening in European art; by seeming to ignore, or at least failing to interpret in their art the process of social, economic and cultural development that was occurring in New Zealand, the apparent majority of NZ artists were not (if the outcomes are any indication) moved by contemporary developments to explore the social environment. New Zealand was modernising in the 1920s even if many of its artists felt unable or ill-equipped to use their art to interpret this process.

If we widen the definition of artist and add contributions from photographers, cartoonists and commercial artists to the mix of commentary and critique, however, the visual landscape becomes enriched and the portrayal of events much more evocative.

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[3] "There are 338 works hung and catalogued, of which 254 are landscapes, 41 still life, 20 portraits." *Art in New Zealand* (1933, 204)

At the core of relatively recent discussions about the ability of images to convey messages that have an impact on a viewer's understanding of contemporary events, the concept of visual culture occupies an important position. A brief review of the arguments for and against visual culture will be set out in a later section. The use of a wider definition of significant images than would be used in traditional art-historical commentaries is at the heart of this thesis and, with relevant examples, will make it apparent that artists, in the wider definition of the term, made a significant contribution by conveying images of the turbulent times to New Zealanders around the country.

Discourse Analysis

In this thesis, Discourse Analysis supports the investigation of the major issues in the 1920s impacting on New Zealand's cultural and economic life. Discourse, and the analytical research techniques that utilise it, are rooted in linguistics and focus on interpreting written or spoken texts.

French philosopher Michel Foucault was a major proponent of Discourse Analysis.[4] He had a guiding principle that human subjects are not simply born but are produced entities. In his work he pursued the processes that produced this human subjectivity. He wrote important studies on mental illness and the incarceration of sufferers of mental illness, criminals, and other deviant individuals. His works on the medical and legal discourses that influenced how these individuals and groups suffered and were (ill)treated, had a significant impact on medical and psychiatric treatment (arguing for transformation of the medical discourse) and the court process and its role in criminal punishment (Foucault 1973).

Discourses and the rules operating within them are, it can be argued, of critical importance to understanding the human subject and the institutions that form the operational infrastructure of society. On this, British philosopher Gillian Rose has commented:

> The notion of Discourse is central to both Foucault's theoretical arguments and to his methodology. Discourse has a quite specific meaning. It refers to groups of statements

[4] Foucault and his work related to the human condition, is complicated, occasionally vague, but full of insight. Gillian Rose, and her book *Visual Methodologies* (2007), helped me make sense of Foucault. I have used her descriptions of major points of Foucauldian analysis in this chapter. Also valuable was Foucault's own book *The Order of Things*, particularly chapter 10 *The Human Sciences.* (2007, 375–422)

> which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words, discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it. (2007, 142)

Lynda Nead is quoted by Rose on the utility of using discourse to analyse an artwork as it would a written text:

> Nead suggests that "art" can also be understood as a discourse, as a specialised form of knowledge. She says that "the discourse of art in the nineteenth century [consisted of] the concatenation of visual images, the language and structures of criticism, cultural institutions, publics for art and the values and knowledges made possible within and through high culture." (2007, 142)

The comments about an art discourse may be considered provocative by a hardened linguist, but to an art historian it makes perfect sense; an artwork is the representation of an idea and is created by the artist to communicate with a viewer. It is, therefore, an object that can be analysed for the contribution it makes to our social world. Using a Foucauldian approach, the analysis would not be of, say, the beauty of a vase of flowers in a still-life, or sexuality of a body in a portrait of a nude, but why or how was the work was created and the impact it makes by its being. The use of discourse analysis in this way contributes to the analysis of research questions being posed in this thesis.[5]

Other elements of Foucault's concept of discourse add value to the research. These include intertextuality by which the meaning of a discursive image depends not on the image alone but meanings discursively reached in relation to other relevant images; discursive formations which can be achieved by joining various meanings together. His emphasis on the ubiquity of power is significant when the construction of the social world is being contemplated; power is not just imposed by the elite members of society but also from the oppressed members of society, in fact from wherever discourse is taking place.

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[5] It should be noted that the approach to discourse analysis in this thesis does not take critical discourse analysis (CDA) as its guiding methodology. The use of images to amplify and comment on major New Zealand discourses takes the application of discourse analysis, in this case, into the poststructuralist use of diverse statements (images) to interrogate aspects of New Zealand development in the 1920s.

Foucault was more interested in how things worked than why and, from a poststructuralist viewpoint, what it was that created a discourse. When interrogating the high art discourse and, specifically Peter Tomory and his wasteland critique, a Foucauldian analysis enables more of a focus on Tomory's education, art history research experience and his undoubted intellect than why he was prepared to write off the 1920's art as a wasteland (which could include status preservation; ambitions for the Auckland Art Gallery; dislike of amateur painting; experiencing itchy feet; frustration that New Zealand art was developing too slowly for him and so on).

Social discourses are constructed through large numbers of images and practices as well as verbal texts that enter the discourse; images which can be drawn from high and low art examples, from commercial as well as the art society painters. Discourses also compete through their lifetimes for recognition as the carrier of the truth. In the New Zealand[6] context, it is not difficult to find dominant 1920s' discourses like the "man alone", the "gentleman farmer", "rugby, racing and beer", "art is for the wealthy and the elite", "Britain (Home!) is the centre of culture", "don't want any of this modern rubbish", "the Red or Nazi menace", "every man is as good as his neighbour".

Discourses expose societal inequities as well as the "truths" people hold about themselves and their neighbours (Rose 2007, 143). Discourses and the rules operating within them are of critical importance to understanding the human subject and the institutions that form the operational infrastructure of society. Understanding them, and other discourses, makes a valuable contribution to the research undertaken in this project.

The following discourses cover the areas of research (the research questions) in this thesis:

- The Art Gallery, (including management and exhibition policies and practices)
- Elite Valuation of Art Quality, (including the consequences for the amateur artist)
- The "Art Society", (the management of "taste" and local politics)
- Modernism (in both art and society)
- Social and economic change in 1920s New Zealand, (with emphasis on land issues, class division, political tension and change)
- Visual Culture, (incorporating the growth of visuality and technological change).

[6] 'NZ' is used as an abbreviation of 'New Zealand'.

Visual Culture

In addition to Discourse Analysis, this thesis employs a visual culture methodology to contribute to the assessment of whether the period deserved the title of a cultural wasteland that some commentators have retrospectively thrown at it.[7] Various definitions of visual culture are extant but a simple definition from Lauren Schleimer states that "visual culture is a term that refers to the tangible, or visual, expressions by a people or group that collectively describes the characteristics of that body as a whole". She proposes that visual culture "is not necessarily limited to the most obvious and direct forms of visual expression…the term is most useful for what specific aspects of the visual culture of a people reveal about the people themselves" (Schleimer, Lauren n.d.,1). The description used above of an "exploration" is deliberately used in that assembling a sufficient range and quantity of visual material to allow sensitive judgements to be made about social and economic conditions in a society existing nearly a hundred years ago provides an almost archaeological challenge[8] to the historian. The visual clues to cultural development in the period may be found in a wide variety of artefacts from fine art produced throughout the country by artists of varying degrees of competence, to commercial art, photography, and cartoonists' commentaries.

In earlier work on visual imagery in the 1930s I concluded that although the period could be included in the wasteland classification (at least until a few, by now, iconic artists appeared), this labelling may have been unfair or short-sighted in that artworks by "lesser" artists (as opposed to the "iconic" artists) may have been stored away in galleries, museums and other institutions and not, therefore, particularly accessible to the critics, writers and art historians studying images from the period.[9] Major New Zealand galleries and museums acquired or were given paintings from local art societies; their holdings and archival materials may show that the visual history of the period was more productive than has hitherto been suggested by some.

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[7] The most provocative use of the term would be that of P. A. Tomory, see Gordon H Brown and Hamish Keith, *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1980* (Auckland: David Bateman, 1988), 97.

[8] Foucault believed in the significance of archaeology in that artifacts were "not only as the products of skilful artists of the past but serve as the container for the artists' souls, interests, thought processes, desires, attitudes and values".(Setiawan Sabana and Harmawan Setiono 2016, 740)

[9] Brett Lineham, *It Makes Visible* (Wellington: Unpublished Research Essay, 2021), 59.

In essence, adopting a visual culture approach to this analysis is most useful when the evidence it amalgamates is drawn from a range of visual material and can be associated with the socio-economic environment in which it could have been seen and, thereby, shaped and was shaped by individuals or groups of people. This extends the research process into a more extensive investigation than might have been required in a traditional art-history analysis.

In exploring the cultural environment of the 1920s, this thesis traverses the expanded field of visual culture of the period beyond fine art, including: 1920s' ephemera; photographs published in newspapers and magazines; commercial art, a significant source of visual material (which was ubiquitous and used to fuel the engine of a modernising economy); and the cartoons produced in the 1920s which were also a potent source of political, economic and cultural commentary and will be included as research materials.

The use of a visual culture framework in this thesis is a critical component of the rationale for carrying out the research. In relation to the art of the 1920s, Peter Tomory's conviction that the years between the First World War and the depression were indeed a wasteland may be justified (which would be a negative, albeit valuable, outcome of the research) and, if so, the importance of other forms of visual culture becomes amplified. Brown and Keith in their *Introduction to New Zealand Painting* suggest that the Tomory comment was a "justifiable, though over-simplified assessment,"[10] and the commentary written by A. H. McLintock for the 1940 Centennial Exhibition made his opinion of interwar art quite clear.[11]

Interpretation of the imagery from the 1920s is somewhat prospective given that this study will not be able to give due weight to much of the visual evidence that probably exists in New Zealand museums, galleries, research institutions and archives. However, discovering, exposing, and using the visual culture toolbox to analyse a sample of the available information enables provisional judgements to be made about the richness, or otherwise, of the images produced in the 1920s.

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[10] Brown and Keith 1988, 97.

[11] A. H. McLintock, *New Zealand Art: A Centennial Exhibition* (Wellington: New Zealand Government), 15.

New Zealand Art Galleries

Art galleries have a significant role to play in making cultural experiences available to their visitors. Attitudes to the viewing public and the representational role of the museum have changed over the last hundred years and there may be a relationship between the museological attitudes in the 1920s and the allegedly uninspired artworks being created. This could be, partly at least, a consequence of museum collection acquisition and accession as well as exhibition policies —the support given to local artists, and could be a useful area to explore further. New Zealand museums and art galleries in the interwar period were designed on Victorian and Edwardian models (see Figure 2: Dominion Museum[12]) and were administered with Victorian assumptions about exclusive culture, i.e. access being effectively restricted to the elite, while ostensibly open to all. The educative benefits of art and the societal advantages that would accrue from the "working class" being exposed to such benefits may not have been in the forefront of art gallery policies (Bennett 1995).

The movement called "The New Museology" (Vergo 1989) has had a significant impact on the role of museums, including art galleries, in recent decades: much more criticality about the museum's role in society; a clearer focus on museum visitors and their interests; opening up access to groups that had been largely excluded under the traditional model; and stress on the significance and importance of the museum's political, societal, and economic contributions. Institutions from the GLAM sector (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums) had and still have a very important role in encouraging both respect and understanding for the achievements of what, at least in retrospect, was a very important period in New Zealand's history.

The 1920s were bookended by the First World War and the Great Depression, saw New Zealand under Prime Minister William Massey stumbling and struggling in its attempts to build a proto-national identity, welcomed modernism (at least in the consumer sector if not in the fine arts) and signalled that social and political changes, which would prove to be of critical importance to New Zealand's future, were coming.

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[12] Although completed in a period dictated by art deco design, the Dominion Museum was classified as a "stripped classical" design which, while including a number of art deco embellishments, was "stripped" of classical excesses.

FIGURE 2: DOMINION MUSEUM, WELLINGTON

For a researcher, the GLAM institutions play a central role in collecting, storing, adding value by way of scholarship, and exhibiting historical artefacts. In the context of a research project in which social and economic conditions existing around a century earlier are investigated and when artefacts from the period may be a valuable contributor to the research process, the availability of those artefacts owes much to the care and attention given to them by museums and galleries throughout New Zealand. Also of importance are the archival collections of documents and ephemera held in regional or national collections and which add verbal emphasis or explanation to the meaning and significance of visual artefacts.

The thesis methods' plan had originally included researching in a number of provincial art galleries as well as the major galleries in Auckland and Wellington. There were four galleries in existence in 1920: the Auckland City Art Gallery; Dunedin Public Art Gallery; Nelson's Suter Art Gallery and the Sarjeant Gallery in Whanganui. By the time the National Art Gallery was opened in Wellington in 1936 (taking over the collection of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts) galleries had also been opened in Christchurch with the Robert McDougall Art Gallery and in Napier with the Hawkes Bay Museum. Unfortunately, Covid-19 lockdown mandates ruled out research visits to these institutions. Information from each of the galleries could have included details about their accession of works created in the

1920s and their exhibition history; the accessibility of gallery records from the 1920s and information about administration and curatorial policies; was the gallery seen as a temple of culture or a place of entertainment; the extent to which it was primarily catering to the elite or trying to democratise access to its artworks?

The collection of visitor statistics in British galleries was not unknown in the early 19th century "but only in a form that allowed gross visitor numbers to be correlated with days of the week or times of the year. The earliest political use of these figures was to demonstrate the increased numbers visiting in the evenings, bank holidays… and Sundays" (Bennett 1995, 8; Davidson and McCarthy 2019). From contemporary newspaper reports covering the New Zealand galleries in the 1920s, there are indications that some statistics about visitor numbers were kept but collection frequency and storage outcomes are unclear.

Bennett, in touching on early 19th century justifications for museums, pointed to the subject of working class improvement, as promoted by Victorian reformers like Francis Place and Thomas Greenwood, that bringing culture to the working classes would have a civilising impact on them. The evolution of the museum over the 19th century is well documented in the literature. Bennett's account of the development of the museum and his reflections on the importance of cultural institutions participating in governmental initiatives to reshape and strengthen behavioural norms (1995, 6) provides a useful comparison when the 1920s New Zealand art museums and their management, curatorial and viewer policies are being considered. Gallery records about gallery management's attitudes to exhibiting various types, quality and provenance of artwork, could have added substance to efforts to assemble the profile of the viewer, the encouragement given to particular artists, and the gallery's enthusiasm for innovative art. As, however, the "gold standard" is likely to have been the desire for accessioning and display of late-Victorian British art, the local product was probably the subject of invidious comparison.

Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the art museum display and its "social usage" led to his conclusion that art museums hold an unfortunate distinction of being the least accessible to the public of the institutions involved with collecting and exhibiting artworks (Bennett 1995, 10). Bennett draws on a wide range of philosophical and social theorists in his unravelling of the epistemology of the art museum. He also credits Bourdieu in throwing light on the "contradictory dynamics" of the museum (particularly the art gallery):

> While the gallery is theoretically a public institution open to all, it has typically been appropriated by the ruling elites as a key symbolic site for those performances of "distinction" through which the cognoscenti differentiate themselves from "the masses" (1995, 11).

In a report by Markham and Oliver, commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation and published in 1933 (i.e. researched and written at the beginning of the 1930s and in the midst of the Great Depression), the authors considered that New Zealand's museums and art galleries ranked highly when compared with other institutions they had assessed.[13] The Markham and Oliver report pulled no punches in making it clear that the movement associated with museums and art galleries, one they had praised, owed little to government but much to "enlightened and public-spirited citizens" imbued with the competitive spirit of trying to achieve the best for their town or city. The researchers used the example of Auckland which developed a museum using its own resources—The Auckland War Memorial Museum—vying with a small number of competitors as the Empire's most beautiful museum. The report ranged widely, for example heaping praise on the Otago Early Settler's Association museum but commenting, in the same breath that "a severe weeding out and rearrangement of the exhibits is required" (1933, 79).

Considering Bourdieu's comments about the public enthusiasm for the art gallery and Tomory's lack of enthusiasm for the art of the period, it comes as no surprise that Markham and Oliver thought that the buildings being used as art galleries were not successful in meeting their intended purpose, staff were not housed well, and labelling was poor (writing about cheap prints as if they were original masterpieces). They commented that the six art galleries:

> Each contain works of modern British and New Zealand artists and sketches of early New Zealand scenes which are generally more interesting from the historical than from the artistic point of view. Possibly Wanganui has the finest pictures, Christchurch, the loveliest interior and Dunedin, the best arrangement and most

[13] "Very surprisingly, from the information then available, New Zealand, in proportion to population, ranked slightly higher than any other British Dominion or Colony". (Markham S.F. and W.R.B. Oliver 1933, 69).

> careful selection. Broadly speaking there are very few "old masters" in the whole of New Zealand, and all the art collections put together probably would not equal those of one of the great cities of Europe, and such pictures as there are, lack much in the way of sequence or classification. (Markham 1933, 90)

The social role of the gallery was also of concern to Markham and Oliver and their disappointment was transparent—they thought they would find, in socially progressive New Zealand, new social experiments, particularly in relation to education. They thought it unfortunate that New Zealand galleries were content to follow the conservative and traditional lead set by institutions in Europe and America. They also had some hard, but probably justifiable, comments about professional staff:

> The general attitude of one or two New Zealand curators seems to be that they must never look outside the doors of the museum unless it is to secure new specimens. Few curators play that bold vigorous part in the educational and cultural life of the town such as they play in many American or British cities, while two of them in fact are almost museum recluses…oblivious to the fact that there is a world outside their doors that has never been taught to appreciate museums. (1933, 102)

One of the research objectives of this thesis is to investigate a gap that appears to exist in the collection of information (management, curatorial policies, and relevant holdings etc) about the art galleries that were operating in the 1920s. There is some information (at least implied) in the Markham and Oliver report and individual galleries have published biographies which include some 1920s details, but a preliminary hypothesis suggests, not unexpectedly, that there could be more information available than has been published so far (see Catchpole, Warren, and Suter Te Aratoi o Whakatu (Gallery) 2016; Kay and Eden 1983; Strachan and Tyler 2007). Ultimately it would be desirable to be able to compile a composite picture of the early art galleries and their role in discourses of the day. Such questions as the impact on local artists and their work if their local art museum had an active programme of public outreach on museographical issues, or favoured local artists when collecting artworks, or followed curatorial policies that supported exhibition of local works, might be addressed. To explore issues such as these we would need to reimagine the operations of the local art galleries overlaid with a more recent view of museology as their operating guide.

The New Museology

In her reflections on changing values in the art museum, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000) discussed the challenges being faced by older museums in adapting to changing social and cultural values. Although the forerunners of museums have been a part of human activity for millennia, the modern museum is a product of the Enlightenment. They matured alongside the modernist project and, in doing so, picked up a self-image that sets them apart in the catalogue of public institutions. Hooper-Greenhill suggests:

> The British Museum has become a museum archetype. With its classical columns, triangular pediment, the stairs that need to be climbed before entry, this type of large stone building is the image of "The Museum" held by many at both a popular and a theoretical level. It is an image that can sustain a range of interpretations: of culture and civilisation; of dust, decay, and neglect; of power and control. (2000, 10)

This image of the traditional modernist museum is germane to this thesis because of the modernist approach taken to museum architecture in the interwar period. The 1929 Auckland War Memorial Museum and the 1936 Dominion Museum and National Art Gallery in Wellington (see Figure 2) are cases in point. Therefore, in thinking about the values and policies of 1920s art galleries in New Zealand, the literature about the evolution of galleries is particularly relevant. Hooper-Greenhill suggests that the modernist approach to communication based on "the transmission of authoritative subject-based facts to a mass of passive receivers" (2000, 9) is poor communication and inadequate education. She asserts that it was time for museums to be recontextualised in the light of changing audiences, information transmission and social and economic realities.

Nick Merriman, in an article about museum studies (Merriman 2020) points to 1989 as being a critical date for museum studies and a needed paradigm shift. For him, the publication in that year of Susan Pearce's book *Museum Studies in Material Culture* (from a 1987 Conference) and the collection edited by Peter Vergo published the same year (1989), were key events. Merriman, coming from a museum studies background, thought that the Pearce book was a more significant work for signalling new roles for museum studies, than the more art history influenced Vergo book. His reservations notwithstanding, Merriman outlined the successes in recent decades in terms of professional development in museum studies and the changed attitude in museology and museography. Some of the changes

include: critiquing of singular views of history; better understanding the political nature of museums and the role of museums in society; giving voice to the previously excluded; a focus on audiences (2020, 175).

In a short article, *Museology and Museography*, Donald Preziosi gives a more nuanced view of the challenges facing museums and although written 20 years ago, it is still relevant. His list of subjects requiring attention includes:

- Art came to be fielded as central to the very machinery of historicism and essentialism: the very Esperanto of European hegemony…museology and museography have been indispensable to the Europeanization of the whole world.
- They (museums and mystery novels) show us that life, experience, and the world itself need to be pieced together (literally re-membered) so as to become coherent.
- Museums cause us to forget that we have forgotten how particular things worked in their own or other (extramuseological) worlds. (2020, 14–15)

The Virtual Gallery

It goes without saying that art museums have a significant role to play in making cultural experiences available to their visitors and attitudes to the viewing public and the representational role of the museum have changed over the last hundred years. There may, therefore, be a relationship between the museological attitudes in the 1920s with the allegedly uninspired artworks being created in that period. “The New Museology” has already had a significant impact on the role of museums, including art galleries: much more criticality about the museum’s role in society; a clearer focus on museum visitors and their interests; opening up access to groups that had been largely excluded under the traditional model; and stress on the significance and importance of the museum’s political, societal, and economic contributions. It seems almost a given that if access to a gallery is impacted by tradition or a potential viewer’s social position, then the public appreciation of art (or purchasing it) will be restricted, and the idea of an artistic and cultural wasteland may have currency. Research into gallery holdings and exhibition policies offers the possibility of locating relevant artworks which could add to scholarship related to 1920s art.

One possible vehicle for making the 1920s live in the imagination of the public, could be the curation of an exhibition, composed in an electronic format using material collected as part of the research process. It is conceivable that such a document could be converted to a hard-copy exhibition that showed a wider view of 1920s visual imagery than currently

appears to exist. One source of inspiration for this idea was the 2015 article written by Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Album of Images According to Andre Malraux*.[14]

Didi-Huberman considers that Malraux, the very practical composer of the *Museum Without Walls* trilogy, created a new type of art book based on an album of family photographs. In trying to portray art from disparate parts of the world, Malraux drew on the power of photography to capture, with appropriate staging and lighting, similarities in images that might not, otherwise, be captured;

> Compared to the traditional museum, the "museum without walls" thus owes its great fecundity to its practical, technical capacity to have objects that are distant in space or time from each other to come into contact with each other…he makes use of all of photography's resources – both formal and rhetorical – in order to transform its [the created visual montage] nature as document, collection or record into a genuine tool for revelation, persuasion or certainty. (2015, 7)

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Although the possibility of producing an adjunct publication that utilises visual imagery and emulates, in electronic form,[15] an exhibition of art from the wasteland, is, as yet, formative, the Malrauvian production of "museum without walls" is a powerful example of the synergy and additional meaning to be gained from carefully produced and mounted photographs of thematically contiguous objects.

As part of the research project's planned fieldwork (pre-Covid-19), I had intended to visit local art museums with the aim of researching their holdings of 1920s art as well as any archival material that could give an insight into the art of the period. Such information would have addressed the range and content of the visual imagery available to New Zealand viewers and, therefore, capable of influencing them. Researching the art holdings and accession and exhibition policies of the art museums, offers the possibility that there will be paintings and drawings in private hands and back stacks in museums and galleries that explore political and socially critical events. Beth Fowkes Tobin explains, in her book *Picturing Imperial Power*,

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[14] (Didi-Huberman 2015)

[15] Although an exhibition of images mounted in electronic form may not be a preferred format, there is no doubting the viewer popularity of such a presentation (as opposed to an exhibition that has to be viewed in an art gallery). See Navarrete and Borowiecki (2016) for some relevant statistics.

that "most of the paintings…[she] discussed …have received scant attention from art historians. They have gone unnoticed…Because they fall below the threshold of "great art" …rarely exhibited…they lie crated in the basements of great art museums" (1999, 2). And as Linda Nochlin intimates, using art historical categories that preference aesthetic categories applicable to "great art", may result in the political significance of the artwork escaping us completely (1991, 56–57).

A Visual Culture Framework for Analysing the Arts of the 1920s

Even though the 1920s were an important period in New Zealand's history there does not appear to have been an assessment of the art of the period using tools of analysis which go further than relying on "the good eye" and patrician comments about aesthetic quality (low) of New Zealand art. The lack of recognition, in the art product in the 1920s, of New Zealand's incipient modernism was also a feature of the discourse on art. It is, therefore, one of the objectives of this research to use visual culture as a lens through which to view the broader field of visual imagery from a significant period in New Zealand history.

From the absence of contradictory comment,[16] it is a reasonable inference that Peter Tomory's comment about 1920s art was, and has been, received as a valid and accurate critique of the quality of the art produced in 1920s New Zealand. In Tomory's essay *The Visual Arts* written for the publication *Distance Looks Our Way* (Sinclair, Keith 1961, 72), he made a number of perceptive comments about New Zealand's art history but not about the period being researched. This is a major point in this research—his dismissing 1920s art as not meriting serious and detailed comment. Why was this the case? Christopher Perkins, recently arrived from England, in reviewing a New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts Annual Exhibition, said, in 1930, "quite a number of artists exhibiting in the Main Gallery are Academic and Victorian. Victorianism is a state of unawareness of contemporary thought or taste."[17] This conclusion, or the attitudes it represents, probably influenced later critics. Notwithstanding this critique, it has to be recognised that in the 1920s there were committed and well-intentioned painters active throughout New Zealand. Frances Shurrock, in

[16] Although Brown and Keith did qualify the Tomory position but they did not resile from the main point about the wasteland. (1992, 97)

[17] *Art in New Zealand*, no 10, December 1930: 105.

commenting about the Canterbury Art Society's 1933 Exhibition,[18] drew attention to the number of paintings on view at this one art society exhibition. In his commentary he avoided criticising the quality of art created, but focused, instead, on the genres being exhibited and the absence of works which addressed matters related to New Zealand's culture.

Tomory, in looking back at the art produced up to 40 years previously, was involved in a historiographical exercise of similar provenance to this research (although slightly closer to the action). What then was he trying to convey with his "wasteland" comment? Was it a matter of his personality or his particular attitude to the quality of an artwork? In his role as an influential gallery director he emphasised sound professional practice, both in the Auckland City Gallery and in relation to New Zealand's visual arts generally. He was strongly opposed to exhibiting amateur artworks in the gallery and was credited with raising its standard and the quality of its accessions. He improved the New Zealand collection and, with his conviction that the role of the institution was to educate the viewing public, had a strategic approach to balancing the overall collection. He was also well-educated and a trained and competent art-historian.

Revisiting artworks created in the 1920s, using visual culture as a methodology, provides us with a tool that gives us a wider view of the cultural production of the period and the social and economic environment in which it sits. The subjects that appear in the images produced in the decade all have a story that may be able to be at least partly uncovered with observation, research, or just romantic creativity. In her book *The Look of the Past*, Ludmilla Jordanova, one of the stronger international theorists on this subject, makes the following comments (which confirm for the historian of visual culture the exciting opportunities the use of the methodology provides):

> All historical works rest on assumptions, some of which their authors recognise and avow, while others are so deeply embedded that they are difficult to bring up for critical inspection…the use of images and objects as historical evidence turns out to be a topic that elicits strong feelings. Perhaps this is connected with anxieties about their reliability, especially given the allure some images and objects are known to exercise…such forms of seduction can be turned to good effect and need not deter

[18] See page 3 for further details.

> historians from engagement with sources that are numerous, diverse and eloquent, and neither more nor less "reliable" than other forms of evidence (2012, 3).

Jordanova's book joins a fairly long list of collections of readings and articles, examples of case studies, and valuable insights about the need to integrate diverse evidence into a meaningful commentary (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001; Sturken and Cartwright 2001; Schwartz and Przyblyski 2004; Nochlin 1991; Duncum 2003a; Mirzoeff 2010; Rose 2007). She recognises the utility of many of the often theoretically driven guidebooks on visual culture but prefers her own method which is to focus on a specific object, image, theme, or concept to track, to imagine, past processes. She is also a strong proponent of comparative analysis and, using Russian and North American literature[19] in a comparative framework, introduces a number of issues, for example, the necessity to be sensitive to the precise historical conditions in which texts are made and received. She also contends that comparative literature gives itself permission to range widely between cultures and approaches; "translations" also occur between periods, giving rise to rich materials for comparison when those in a later period engage with the visual idioms of an earlier one. The importance of the role of historical consciousness in the making of cultural products is emphasised and those who travel, forge collaborations, read books and collect are, in every moment, bringing the past into the present (2012, 214–16). This, admittedly, small selection of Jordanova's thoughts about historical visual research is a sample of her compelling approach to her subject and highlights the value she (and other theorists and commentators) brings to the subject of visual culture and the use of appropriate research methods.

Lauren Schleimer has proposed a relatively simple definition of visual culture:

> Visual culture is a term that refers to the tangible, or visual, expressions by a people or group that collectively describes the characteristics of that body as a whole. Visual culture is the term is most useful for what specific aspects of the visual culture of a people reveal about the people themselves (Schleimer, Lauren. N.d. 1).

As a discipline, visual culture has been around for at least the last half-century, but the subjects from which visual culture has been formed (for example, history, art history,

[19] Jordanova's analysis can be readily translated from literature to art (with equal validity).

literature, cultural studies, film and gender studies) have not been subsumed. For this researcher, and for many, visual culture offers more than the sum of its parts. For this thesis it suggests a way to test the Tomory position: it emphasises visuality and a much wider cache of visual material than fine art alone; it stresses the importance of social and cultural interpretations of visual imagery; it de-emphasises the "good eye" and the arguably elitist judgements about the aesthetic qualities of an artwork; it emphasises exploring the potential political significance of visual images; it recognises the rapidly growing range and quantity of image providers which would include photographers, commercial artists, and cartoonists.

In this thesis, interpretation of the imagery from the 1920s is somewhat prospective given this research is not able to give due weight to all the visual evidence that exists in the collections of local museums, galleries, research institutions and archives. However, discovering, exposing, and using the visual culture toolbox to analyse a sample of the available information should enable tentative judgements to be made about the richness, or otherwise, of the images produced in the 1920s. It is possible to be deceived by Schleimer's simple definition of visual culture. But a study of the large body of literature on it, even though it is a relatively new field of study, demonstrates the complexity of the subject. The excellent compilations of articles on visual culture and its component parts[20], point to the breadth of an academic area that draws inspiration from a very wide range of subjects. Being involved with the visual image and its place in communication it is rapidly growing and becoming popular with the generation of students who have lived through the period of exponential growth of visual media.

While setting the scene for their book on visual culture and the use of it for historical analysis, Schwartz and Przyblyski (2004) briefly discuss some of the historical developments that have contributed to visual culture and, significantly, its connection to modernity and its relationship with the 19th century technological developments related to image production (photography and lithography, as examples). The use of images in news media and entertainment grew rapidly in the latter part of the 19th century and into the period that relates to this thesis. The ubiquity of the image plays into our intention of using visual culture in the analysis of 1920s art and social and economic development. As Schwartz and Przyblyski state

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[20] Two volumes in the Routledge series are particularly useful: *The Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff, and *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader,* edited by Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski.

in a reference to the explanatory potential of visual culture (which readily adapts to study of the 1920s):

> As an historical narrative, the history of visual culture asks us to interrogate the period boundaries, limits, and moments of paradigm shift accounting for our current sense of the centrality of images to belief-systems (capitalism, democracy, fascism, globalisation, and its discontents) in contemporary society (2004, 3).

Irit Rogoff, in a perceptive article "*Studying Visual Culture*", asks how we can best characterise this emergent field. She insists that an appropriate characterisation would go much further than the most open-ended and cross-disciplinary "study of images" (Rogoff in Mirzoeff 2010, 24). Visual culture, she considers, opens up the wide spaces of intertextuality and uncovers "the free play of the signifier, a freedom to understand meaning in relation to images, sounds or spaces not necessarily perceived to operate in a direct, causal or epistemic relation to either their context or to one another" (2010, 25). It is not difficult to see the traditional art-history academic being threatened by the Rogoff analysis: it is also clear that acceptance of her point of view allows the researcher benefits in terms of the visual and other media they draw upon. But she also cautions the analyst about a continuous displacement of meaning which would, as a consequence, require some skill in interpreting and matching images to the cultural action. This becomes more difficult when dealing with historical images, but using visual culture opens up the possibility of establishing new narratives and new understandings about the period and the actions that occurred in it.[21]

In drawing attention to the alarm expressed by conservative professionals and academics about potential and actual institutional formations which annex their traditional fiefdoms, Rogoff politely criticises a number of commentators who, by their comments, clearly fear encroachment by this arriviste, visual culture. Michael Wilson, a Professor of History writing in Schwartz and Przyblyski, ponders whether visual culture is a useful

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[21] Rogoff summarised her views on these points: "The emergence of a relatively new arena such as visual culture provides the possibility of unframing some of the discussions we have been engaged in regarding presences and absences, invisibility and stereotypes, desires, reifications and objectifications from the disciplinary fields – art history, film studies, mass media and communications, theoretical articulations of vision, spectatorship and the power relations that animate the arena we call the field of vision.' (2010, 27)

category of historical analysis. He suggests a convenient answer would be "no" because visual materials are well-entrenched in historical publications. He also questions the dubiety to historians of a field of study that is so "vaguely and poorly demarcated." To amplify this latter point, Wilson outlines a selection of visual culture proponent's views on what their subject might be. He suggests that visual culture is "used by its advocates to refer to any number of phenomena: a particular range of images, or the image as such, or relations between icons and ideas, or the social process of visual perception, or a mode of criticism and analysis." He questions the provenance of visual culture and suggests the subject did not "simply" emerge to assist comprehension of the contemporary domination by the image—it stemmed, he thought, at least partly from the success in making practitioners in such fields as art, design, and architecture, historicise their own work. Wilson gave some useful examples of symbiosis of historical analysis and visual imagery and finished his article with the warning: "historians need not adopt 'visual culture' as a category of analysis, but if they fail to engage this new field, they risk intellectual and methodological impoverishment." (Wilson in Schwartz and Przyblyski 2004, 26–33).

The theme of not engaging with popular culture, when "an expert" addresses questions to do with the art canon, is referred to by Kevin Tavin in an article about visual culture and the creation of visual experiences in everyday life. Tavin draws attention to traditional educational practices creating a dialectical situation which is hard to resolve:

> While art educators place art from the museum realm at the centre of their curriculum, their students are piecing together their expectations and dreams in and through popular culture. By focusing…[on what] counts as legitimate culture, art educators help subjugate students' experiences with everyday life…the canon of high art is maintained as unproblematic. (2003, 197).

Tavin's comments have relevance to this thesis in that the judgements made by critics about the nature and quality of 1920s art appear to be biased towards the views of the privileged elite who are reluctant to question the canon of high art, or allow popular culture to be seen as part of art history or the established institutions of art representation. I understand that the use of visual culture to revisit judgements made about 1920s art, and the utilization of imagery from popular culture of the time, may make it difficult for some to agree with the methodological approach let alone the conclusions that may be reached. Tavin suggests that

visual culture (the term) is frequently used to "describe a shift or turn in society where the increase in production, proliferation, and consumption of imagery, in concert with technological, political and economic developments, has profoundly changed our world and the context in which our knowledge and awareness of that world is rooted" (2003, 204).

Tavin's definition of the "shift or turn" describes, with a clarity I find defensible, the changes that were accelerating in the 1920s and which can be better explained with the lens of visual culture being focussed on the period. That the subject of art history often figures in an uncomplimentary way in analyses of visual culture, is not something to be concerned about in relation to the present research project.

A writer engaging with a critique of visual culture, W.J.T. Mitchell, has written a mischievous article "Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture" (Mitchell in Mirzoeff 2010, 86–101), in which he sets out his interpretation of the major criticisms of visual culture and provides a number of counter-arguments. He wonders, for example, why we need a new field of enquiry (referring to "visual studies" as the study of "visual culture") when we are well served by the traditional subjects of aesthetics and art history; we should also fear the erosion of the skills of scholars of the aesthetic tradition who have switched allegiance to "a generalised 'iconological' interpretive expertise" (2010, 89). Although there is little point in repeating all of Mitchell's "myths and counter-theses on visual culture," I have set out an abbreviated version picking out the most pertinent points:

Myths:

- It entails the liquidation of art (as we know it); art is defined as working exclusively through optical faculties
- It transforms the history of art into a history of images; a predilection for the disembodied, dematerialised image
- Modernity entails the hegemony of vision and the visual media
- It's about the social construction of the visual field, not seeing "naturally"; anthropological, therefore an unhistorical approach to vision.

As counter-theses:

- Visual culture encourages reflection on the differences between art and non-art and meditation on the position of the sensorily deprived
- Not limited to the study of images or media but extends to everyday practices of seeing and showing

- All media are mixed media; the disembodied image and embodied artifact are permanent elements in the dialectic of visual culture
- We don't live in a uniquely visual era
- It's the visual construction of the social
- Political task of visual culture is to perform critique without the comforts of iconoclasm.

Using Visual Culture

This section includes examples of a limited number of analyses of imagery and/or publications which offer suggestions about the use of visual culture in research projects. For example, one of the pathbreaking studies was a beautiful piece of work carried out by Svetlana Alpers (2019) which related unique features of Northern and Southern European art to social and economic differences as reflected in 17th century art. The Dutch enthusiasm for maps for instance, as shown in many of Vermeer's interiors, was read as signalling the Dutch eminence in international economic and trade activities. Alpers also explored the use of the camera obscura and the Dutch preoccupation with optics, again features of Dutch art which set it aside from the Italian approach to art.

Ludmilla Jordanova, with her book *The Look of the Past* (2012) provided a very helpful compendium of insights, practice-based advice and case studies for practitioners or students of visual culture. She admits that the use of historical imagery provokes strong feelings, particularly, from concerns about reliability, but she feels that this should not deter historians "from engagement with sources that are numerous, diverse and eloquent, and neither more or less 'reliable' than other forms of evidence." (2012, 3). Her book contains reproductions of many artworks and visual images each with physical details and provenance of the item and a short account of historically significant details that are derived from analysis of the image and research into its creation, display, and representation. The book contains four short essays on a variety of subjects (e.g., architecture with the Wren Library; sculpture, reflecting on Bernini's Ecstasy of St Teresa; photographing the Family of Man; and Renoir's portrait of Ambroise Vollard). The essays provide a cogent account, with their breadth of subject-matter and Jordanova's historiography, of how to utilise research and scholarship, as well as the lens of visual culture, to carry out significant and convincing visual projects.

One of the challenges for the researcher, when surveying the literature, is making sense of the diverse range of resources associated with visual culture and the theories and research practices they include. For example, Jordanova points to, with detailed notation, the critical need for the historical researcher to become familiar with the period and artworks associated with it. Part of interpreting culture in a particular period requires the analyst to understand the ramifications of the term "culture" itself. Sturken and Cartwright in *Practices of Looking*[22] introduce the concepts of high and low culture as part of their explication of the scope of visual culture.[23] Throughout their book the authors include references to the philosophical underpinnings of the subject (see also Rose 2007; Mirzoeff 2010; Schwartz and Przyblyski 2004; Schleimer N.d.; Duncum 2003b; Tavin 2003; Tobin 1999; 1999). "High culture" is aligned with the traditional view of connoisseurship and has been a staple definition in art history. However, another definition of culture—the anthropological definition—is particularly relevant to visual culture. Sturken and Cartwright said that culture referred:

> To a "whole way of life," meaning a broad range of activities with a society. Popular music, print media, art, and literature contribute to the daily lives of "ordinary people." So too do sports, cooking, diving, relationships, and kinship…links the term "culture" to the idea of popular or mass culture. (2001, 3)

Studying an image raises the question about the method used to analyse the visual document. Approaches to this could include:

- The use of theories to study images themselves and their textual meanings; looking for what the images tell us about the culture in which they were produced.
- Considering the modes of visuality —assessing the viewers' practices of looking.

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[22] (Jordanova 2012)

[23] Sturken and Cartwright, in discussing "culture" referred to Matthew Arnold's definition as "the best that has been thought or said" in a society, and was "reserved for an elite, educated audience…thus the idea of 'high' culture has often been implicit within definitions of culture… (fine art, classical painting, literature) and 'low' (television, popular novels, comic books)."

- Look at the institutional frameworks that regulate and sometimes limit the circulation of images, as well as the way images change meaning in different cultural contexts. (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 6).

Perhaps to be provocative (but his concerns do contain an element of truth), James Elkins contends that "visual studies are too easy…a more rigorous and complex visual studies would be denser with theories and strategies, more reflective about its own history, warier of existing visual theories, more attentive to neighbouring and distant disciplines, more vigilant about its own sense of visuality, less predictable in its politics, and less routine in its choice of subjects." (Elkins in Daiello et al. 2006, 308–9). The nominated genesis of visual studies in 1970/80 coincided with the adoption of theoretical approaches to wide-ranging but relevant subjects from an influential group of French philosophers (e.g., Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Guy Debord, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan). A sampling of their theories and commentaries is taken from Sturken and Cartwright (although both Mirzoeff and Schwartz and Przybylski, in their compilations of articles, are excellent references).

To give even a sketchy account of all Foucault's contributions to modern society (and those of Foucault's many acolytes) would be well beyond this thesis. Sturken and Cartwright recount Foucault's comments about Magritte's "pipe" (*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*) and the representation of the material object "pipe". We are asked to reflect on how words and images, in a complex relationship, give meaning to the object (2001, 16–17). Roland Barthes theorised that an image had two levels of meaning—the denotative and the connotative. The denotative meaning of the image refers to its "literal, descriptive meaning" whereas connotative meanings rely on the cultural and historical context of the image and its viewers' lived, felt knowledge of those circumstances. These differences are important to the evidential value of images (in visual culture analysis, for example). Barthe's sign (combination of signifier, the image, and signified, the meaning) adds to our understanding of image interpretation and the semiotics of images. (2001, 21–29).

In a process of elegant theorising, Louis Althusser takes the Marxist concept of ideology—where ideology, is determined by the owners of capital—and states that "ideology is a set of ideas and beliefs, shaped through the unconscious, in relation to other social forces, such as the economy and institutions" (Althusser in Mirzoeff 2010, 139–41). The concept of interpellation has relevance here given that it refers to a "process by which we are constructed by the ideologies that speak to us every day through language and images." This

fairly bleak critique of the possibility of ideological self-determination, has relevance to this project with its emphasis on the ideologies brought into analysis of art and the lack of awareness (or refusal to admit) that they influence the judgements being made (2001, 52–53: (McCarthy 2006)

Methodology

In the exploration of images produced in the 1920s in New Zealand, I employ a qualitative, mixed method, approach to the research: the significant components of the methodology will be Discourse Analysis, Visual Culture and Case Study analysis. A research objective is the collection of data of a sufficient relevance and quality to enable an assessment to be made on whether, or not, the period deserved the title of a cultural wasteland that commentators have retrospectively thrown at it. The provisional research questions are:

- Was New Zealand in the 1920s a cultural wasteland and, if so, why?
- What impact did contemporary museum practices have on the development of New Zealand art in the 1920s?
- Were the changes taking place in New Zealand's economy, society, and polity, reflected in the visual material available to the general public in the period between the First World War and the Great Depression?
- What added value is provided by the use of a Visual Culture methodology to assess developments in the 1920s, an important and probably under-researched period in New Zealand history?
- What contribution could museums and galleries make to a better understanding of the visual culture of the 1920s and the interwar period as a whole, and how could this be achieved?

In developing my thesis, the employment of a mix of methods facilitate a more balanced and nuanced assessment of visual sources available in the 1920s and the impact that they may have had on societal and developmental issues of the time, than is currently available. My approach included:

- Research from and on published sources
- The use of discourse analysis to explain aspects of 1920's reality
- An application of visual culture methods to the analysis of contemporary imagery

- The use of art-historical methods to analyse paintings, other artworks and relevant archival resources
- Information sourced from Gallery websites and publications, the Covid-19 pandemic having made impossible research travel to visit most of the galleries that were open in the 1920s (they would have been The Dunedin Public Art Gallery, The Hocken Collection, The Robert McDougall Art Gallery, The Suter Gallery and the Sarjeant Gallery)
- Where possible, material about local art societies, in the environs of the galleries (above) collected from contemporary newspaper reports.

Conclusion: Analytical framework

A survey of selected literature on visual culture, both positive and negative, shows that it will be a valid, meaningful, and useful tool to use when analysing visual imagery from the 1920s. Included in the above review also was information about theoreticians who became major influences on visual culture's principles and practice. Although the subject can be approached from different perspectives, the need for the practitioner to have a sound understanding of the historical conditions existing at the time the imagery was created (made and received) was stressed. It is clearly not necessary—it would, in fact, be counterproductive—to limit the research data to the most obvious and direct forms of visual expression. A visual culture analysis could utilise a much wider cache of visual material than fine art alone and analysis of the material demands a well-informed background and solid historical and research skills on the part of the researcher (not just the good eye, or elitist judgement).

In the following chapters I analyse major discourses of the interwar period using visual culture to present visual evidence to guide and support the analysis. In chapters on Society, the Economy, Politics, and Art and Culture, a number of narratives emerge from the analysis and form the basis of the content of each chapter. These include: immigration and a continuing attachment to Britain; economic change, including land ownership, recession, and meeting infrastructural needs; the political discourses I explored included politicians grappling with recession and working class demands, the rise of the Labour Party and debate over its "Bolshevist" policies, and uncertainties in New Zealand's relations with Great Britain. The thesis concludes with a summary of the conclusions reached in the research.

Chapter One: New Zealand Society in the 1920s

> …facing them, on a pedestal…stood a cast of "The Winged Victory" of Samothrace…A grand piano filled in one corner…rare engravings and quaint water-colours, in tarnished gilt frames, hung on the faded pink walls…Valuable Chinese and Japanese porcelain vases…four great silver candelabra. (Mander 1994)

This description was not that of a drawing-room in an upper-class London house but one in Mrs Brayton's house on the Otamatea River in the Kaipara which was situated amidst kauri milling, gum digging, Māori villages and a complex mix of immigrants from Great Britain, Europe, and Australia. Jane Mander's evocative 1920 publication *The Story of a New Zealand River* (1994) establishes, in her account of Mrs Brayton's room, a key to many aspects of New Zealand life in the early 20th century. The painting in Figure 3 by Charles Heaphy, *Cowdie (Kauri) Forest on the Wairoa River, Kaipara (Colonel Wakefield proceeding to the Bay of Islands) (1830)* (Figure 3), provides an evocative description of the beauty of the river before exploitation of the natural resources began in earnest. The painting, while emphasising the magnificence of the forest, also focuses on the travels of the New Zealand Company agent Colonel William Wakefield who played a central role in the administration of the Company's land acquisition policies. Wakefield's actions were often questionable and reflect the colonial mentality that land without European owners was there for the taking. A London lawyer, sent to assess the validity of the New Zealand Company's (i.e. Wakefield's) land purchases, "found the only a small proportion of the 20,000,000 acres to which the company laid claim, had been fairly purchased by its agent…Wakefield." (K. Sinclair 1969, 76).

This chapter places the role of immigration as an important factor in the development of New Zealand's cultural identity. By focusing on the Lineham family, it covers the exploitation of new immigrants, but also the drive they had to make a better life for themselves than the one they left in England. Questions of class, racism, working conditions, reverence for Royalty, and modernisation, are also discussed.

The above account of the Brayton furnishings points to the continuing attachment on the part of many settlers to British values and concepts of quality, even if living in conditions of hardship and trying to make the best of an environment that had few of the familiar conditions of "home". This not to say that the experiences they left behind when they emigrated were particularly enviable and many migrants left behind material and class

conflicts that had made living in Great Britain (particularly) virtually unsustainable.

FIGURE 3: *COWDIE FOREST ON THE WAIROA RIVER 1840*, CHARLES HEAPHY

For many, if not most migrants from the British Isles, New Zealand must have seemed an answer to the difficulties they experienced in England. In the second half of the 19th century, a formative period for the new colony of New Zealand, the impacts of the Industrial Revolution were being visited upon the working classes in Britain. The experiences of one group of migrants, Thomas Lineham[24] and family, are not untypical. Thomas, an agricultural labourer, and his wife Mary, a lacemaker, were living in Lidlington a town in Bedfordshire where lacemaking was a speciality. Thomas and his brother became involved in union activities which were an outcome of labourers being forced to accept worsening labour conditions. From a report in the Bedfordshire Times, Bedfordshire farm workers asked for two shillings a week pay rise and were "locked out by the Duke of Bedford as a

[24] Thomas Lineham is the great grandfather of the writer. Having spent quite a lot of my early life with Thomas's son's (also Thomas) family and third generation members of the immigrant family, I thought that Thomas and his descendants, would make a valuable, albeit abbreviated, case study. My maternal grandfather was a Swedish sailor and an immigrant who ended up owning his own "small island trader" (see figure 64).

consequence." [25] As Bedford was by far the largest landowner in the area, the future for committed unionists was bleak.

FIGURE 4: MARY LINEHAM

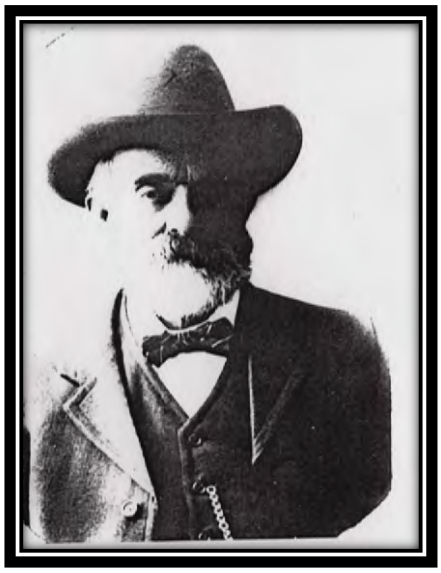

FIGURE 5: THOMAS LINEHAM

In New Zealand, Julius Vogel had been pushing immigration agents to provide "white" citizens that could be settled on lands around New Zealand that had been sequestered from Māori owners. These agents were active in England seeking out potential migrants who could be assisted to leave England for New Zealand. According to Rollo Arnold, Nelson Province was "slow to take advantage of the Vogel immigration drive. Nelson had not suffered through land wars, but the hills and mountains…were a more formidable barrier…Until January 1874 the province took no more than a token part in the colony's new development programme but in that month the provincial council adopted a more progressive plan for public works." The subsequent actions of the union organisers, government agents and workers in Bedfordshire, as well as the moves taken in Nelson to get a "special settlement" established in Karamea and the opening of that settlement, provide evidence of discourses that impacted the "New Zealand culture" in the early decades of the 20th century (Arnold 1981).

[25] There was a considerable amount of industrial unrest in English agriculture in the mid-nineteenth century. Thomas Lineham wrote to his parents in 1876 extolling the virtues of his life in Karamea and comparing some aspects of it with English conditions. A copy of his letter was published in *The English Labourer* on 13 November 1876 (it is in my private papers) and reprinted in the Bedfordshire Times (which was the source of the comment about the Duke of Bedford).

For Thomas Lineham and other members of the wider Lineham family, the oppressive nature of the worker/landowner discourse demonstrated that expecting justice and better working conditions was a hopeless dream. An immigration agent held a meeting in Lidlington at which he excited his audience with tales of a better life in the New Zealand colony. Settlers were promised free transport to this better life and the chance to be treated with respect (a stark comparison with the attitudes of the ruling class in England). Thomas's application for assisted passage was approved and on May 7, 1874, the barque The Adamant sailed for Nelson with 340 immigrants on board (in reality far too many passengers for the steel-hulled Adamant to carry). After transhipping to a smaller coastal vessel in Nelson, a "pioneer" party of 30 heads of families and their oldest sons arrived in Karamea on 27 November.

FIGURE 6: THE ADAMANT

In a letter to his parents in England, Thomas touches on subjects that had much to do to shape his life (and certainly that of other immigrants) in New Zealand. He and son George first built a house —"a better house than our old one in Lidlington"; on his 50 acres of grant land he did some piece-work for the settlement and some work for himself; food (sheep-meat) was plentiful compared to that available for "the poor empty bellies in the old country"; on arrival they had to pitch their tent which required them first to cut down trees (some "thirty yards long"); they also started building roads and digging ditches.

:

FIGURE 7: *KAURI FOREST, WAIROA RIVER, KAIPARA* 1839, CHARLES HEAPHY

Initially the immigrants would have been ignorant about a number of issues in relation to the administration of the settlement. The development of the Karamea site had not been well-planned and the Nelson Provincial authorities had been unprepared for the arrival of the Adamant group and at least three other ship-loads of settlers. Prior to the laying out of the settlement, superior blocks of land had been bought up by Nelson speculators with the Provincial Secretary, the person responsible for the planning and administration of the settlement, being one of the speculators. The immigrants were also rorted by the system which required them to shop at the government store where they bought "significantly overpriced" tools and supplies on credit which was then paid for by the migrant working on government projects (most often on roadworks). The egregious prices being charged by the authorities and the likely destination of a good proportion of the excess profits, fuelled the distrust of the settlers in government authorities.

Religion played an important part in the life of Thomas and his family. In his letter to his parents he talked of God's kindness in providing food and in other documents, according to Arnold, "we must note its expression of simple faith and piety, in keeping with the Bunyan tradition of Baptist connection". Thomas was also grateful for the start given to him in New Zealand, a start that he would not have received in England. He may have had the words of encouragement given to the early Karamea settlers by Charles Elliot the Nelson Immigration Officer, still ringing in his ears:

> The day before they left [for Karamea], Elliot made a rousing farewell speech to the pioneers telling them he was sure they would succeed since "colonising is the especial mission of the Anglo-Saxon race, and the same blood flowed in their veins as in the men who gave language and laws to the whole continent of North America, to vast territories in Africa, to the huge continent of Australia, and numerous lesser countries" (Arnold 1981).

It seems that a number of the settlers were enthusiastic about their colonising mission as they set to work with excitement, clearing land and building houses. But there is little evidence that they gave much thought to the owners of the land the Crown (or the New Zealand Company) so readily provided. There was also the issue of land quality and for Thomas and others the land allocated to them was unable to be farmed. Thomas and his family eventually moved away from Karamea for the life of a storekeeper in Dargaville.

Two of his children (George and my grandfather Thomas) opened a general store in the gumfields in Kaipara at Kaihu (Figure 8) and proceeded to build a fortune which was invested in property in Auckland. The 1920s were kind to them (although Thomas senior was killed in a train accident) but hardship returned with the Great Depression at the end of the decade, and Thomas was forced to sell off most of his investments in order to live.

Jane Mander's books *Alan Adair* and *The Story of a New Zealand River* provide a compelling picture of life in the gum-fields of Kaipara. The natural wealth of the area (both Kauri gum and Kauri timber) attracted workers from a variety of countries, looking to exploit those resources and accumulate wealth.

FIGURE 8: GEORGE LINEHAM'S GENERAL STORE, KAIHU

FIGURE 9: DALMATIAN GUM-WASHING TEAM, AWANUI

Not all of them succeeded in achieving this. Still, for many, work in the gumfields provided a foothold in New Zealand and some income. Succeeding generations of these 1920s' workers have contributed considerably to New Zealand's economic and social development. The example of immigrants from Dalmatia provides a case in point (Figure 9). The gum-washing machine pictured above was owned and run by a Dalmation team who worked a gum field at

Awanui in 1935. James Belich, in *Paradise Reforged,* gave a qualitative ranking of immigrant groups:

> From the 1880s, there was an increasing tendency to racially rank past and prospective migrant groups. It was not a matter of simply preferring British to others, but of consistently ranking the others. At the top of this racial ranking were Northern Europeans, notably Germans and Scandinavians; in the middle were Southern Europeans, notably Dalmatians and Italians; at the bottom were Asians, notably Chinese and Indians (2001, 224).

Scandinavians[26] were the favoured continental migrants: they assimilated rapidly; carried less baggage than the Germans; a good English language facility; had a reputation for physical capacity and strong work ethic. In the internationally competitive environment for migrants, Scandinavians were preferred which meant that New Zealand could not always procure this quality or type of migrant. A feature of migrant settlement was the tendency of the groups to gravitate to locations where they found security and social fellowship. Industry in these enclaves often featured their previous occupations, Examples of this include the development of wine-making in the areas settled by Dalmatians; Italian immigrants from Stromboli who settled in Wellington's Island Bay, were active in fishing the waters around Wellington (Figure 10); Scandinavian settlements were established in southern Hawkes Bay at Dannevirke and Norsewood (Figure 11).

[26] New Zealanders, suggested Belich, lumped Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians together as "Scandinavians" - a name, it seems, adopted by the ethnic groups themselves (2001, 225).

FIGURE 10: ITALIAN FISHERMEN, ISLAND BAY, WELLINGTON, 1920s

FIGURE 11: NORSEWOOD, 1920S

By 1920 it seemed that the pieces were in place. New Zealand had made a significant contribution to the allied war effort, profited from the British need for food and raw materials over the period of the the first world war, and polished its credentials as a loyal servant of, and supplier to, Great Britain. As will be discussed later, New Zealand politicians, particularly those (the majority) from the conservative and traditionally powerful elements in New Zealand politics, made assiduous attempts in the period after World War One to cement New Zealand's special status in British hearts. The lives sacrificed in the mud of Passchendale and the strategic catastrophe known as Gallipoli, while not securing this special status, at least had an impact in Britain and added to New Zealand's reputation for being a reliable member of Great Britain's clutch of international supporters.

Many of the early settlers had emigrated to New Zealand to escape the oppressive outcomes of the class struggle. The Industrial Revolution had done very little to break down the class structure, adding wealthy industrialists to the hierarchy of authority and control. Coming from a class-ridden society, many of New Zealand's early citizens had a firm view of class —both positive and negative —embellished with a knowledge of their position in the New Zealand class structure, and a desire for upward mobility. There is ample visual evidence of New Zealanders emulating the types of activities that they would associate with their, and their parents', understanding of the way people acted at "home" (i.e., Great Britain). Even early on in New Zealand, a stratification – elite, middle class, worker – was evident in the visual material which was being created and disseminated at the time. Royalty, or representatives of the Crown, were at the peak of the class structure and photographs of the patricians who occupied the Governor General's position appeared regularly in newspapers and magazines.

The First Earl Jellicoe was appointed Governor General in 1920 (Figure 12). He was a career officer in the Royal Navy who had risen to the position of Admiral of the Fleet. He did not, it seems, have a stellar war, and had a reputation for caution (which would not have appealed to Churchill). Photos have been taken of Jellicoe in less formal surroundings and although he was not "a man of the people" the photo taken in 1924 of Jellicoe and his wife (Figure 13) suggests that the couple could successfully dress down to their host's level.

FIGURE 12: FIRST EARL JELLICOE

FIGURE 13: GOVERNOR GENERAL AND LADY JELLICOE

The *Weekly News* photograph[27] below (Figure 14) of a wet Auckland welcoming the Duke and Duchess of York in 1927[28], gives an indication of the enthusiasm generated by Royalty. This reverence for royalty reflects the origins of New Zealand's population, with only a very small proportion of immigrants coming from sources outside the British Isles. Furthermore, the British brought with them a heritage based on decades of Victorian rule; a colonialist's attitude to "place;" and an ambition to improve their position in society.

Initially, in the rush to colonise and with the New Zealand Company enthusiastically seeking out the "right" people, a range of early occupiers moved into plum locations around the country. They were headed by upper and upper-middle class men on the make who were accustomed to control and had a speculator's eye for a bargain with land as their desired form of investment. Their artistic and cultural tastes were decidedly conservative and representative of the Victorian era. Daughters were "introduced" into society and sent off for "finishing" in Europe. Their sons may have been educated abroad and participated in "the grand tour" but were also expected to pursue the business opportunities that their fathers had opened up in New Zealand. New Zealand's early gentry did not follow Edward Wakefield's

[27] *The Weekly News* compendia volumes are an invaluable source of period photographs (see Barnett and Ridge, 1988).

[28] This visit by the future King George VI and Queen Elizabeth was aimed at strengthening ties within the British Empire

FIGURE 14: AUCKLAND WELCOMING THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF YORK

development proscription for small farms and many farm employees. Historian Keith Sinclair points out that:

> Wakefield's "system" …would not work…Most of the population made a living by combining labouring of various sorts with subsistence farming tiny "farms" … For another, the "gentry" he wanted to see in colonies were created by the very thing he detested—large scattered, leased land holdings. And because Britain was the leading industrial power…importer of wool and foodstuffs. (1961, 31)

FIGURE 15: A DEBUTANT IN 1929

In the immediate post-War period New Zealand was, at least for the upper-class elite and the members of the professional, administrative, and commercial middle class, a prosperous society. The depressions that occasionally struck in the 1920s did not impact universally and affected the "have nots" (particularly small farmers and members of the urban working class) much more than the elite. Photo journals like *The Weekly News* provided ample evidence of the enthusiasms of the wealthier members of New Zealand's 1920s elite. The picture above of Miss Jacqueline Nathan, a debutante at the Vice-Regal Ball in 1929 (Figure 15), is one of a number of images of young women presented at the Ball and whose photographs were published in *The Weekly News*. She was a member of the wealthy, Jewish, Nathan family who were prominent in Auckland commerce. Her clothing and accessories look expensive and as

the depression of 1929 was starting to bite, suggests that for the Nathan family, at least, economic conditions were holding up reasonably well.[29]

The growth of the middle-class was a key component of the relatively rapid development of the New Zealand economy and the social maturity that breaking the shackles of dependency on Great Britain, would require. Literate employees with arithmetical and writing skills (who would probably consider themselves to be middle-class citizens) were an essential component of the rapidly growing commerce and administration sectors and, equally, were important contributors to the growing industrial sector. Many of them were children of migrants who, as second-generation New Zealanders, were the products of the newly constructed education system and who often profited from the migrant work ethic. This was certainly the case with Thomas Lineham and his descendants.

FIGURE 16: STAFF MORNING TEA, WELLINGTON RAILWAY STATION C. 1930

[29] David Nathan established L D Nathan in 1868 in Auckland. The company exported flax and kauri gum. Thomas Lineham was one of the suppliers of kauri gum. L D Nathan became a very powerful commercial entity and was prominent in brewing and retailing.

The photograph (Figure 16) reproduced above (an edited version of a larger image) highlights the contribution that women were making to the economy. It also demonstrates attitudes to dress and shows people partaking in the genteel ceremony of the tea-break. It probably could have been taken in London earlier in the decade or, more recently, in Melbourne. The growth of the middle-class and its share of gross domestic product was reflected in the consumption possibilities that would be found in a modernizing economy. For example, New Zealand had one of the highest rates of car ownership in the world and the automobile was featured in the news media of the day. The lineup of cars at the Stratford Races (Figure 17) reinforces the comment above about car ownership.

Economic conditions in 1927 were relatively buoyant and farming incomes at the time were high following a few years of strong demand for primary products. Another feature of the photograph is that the cars seem to be relatively new, which reflects the situation post World War I, the Influenza crisis, and the depression early in the decade.

FIGURE 17: AT THE STRATFORD RACES, 1927

FIGURE 18: LIVING THE MIDDLE-CLASS DREAM, 1929

Meryl Tripe had an alternative view of the 1920s' woman with her oil-painting *The Successful Immigrant*. It shows a young woman dressed in the style of the decade, wearing a cloche hat and with her hair cut short (Figure 19). Her appearance is emblematic of the period and Tripe's painting of the "*Immigrant*" makes for a lively and compelling portrayal. The painting also carries some weight in that it is a painting from the 1920s that comments, albeit obliquely, on a social issue – the upward mobility of migrants. The appearance of such a commentary is very rare in the art of the period. The other significant factor is that it is the first painting shown in the new publication *Art in New Zealand*.[30]

[30] The magazine *Art in New Zealand* was first published in September 1928 (the inaugural issue in which the Tripe painting appeared). It was "a quarterly magazine devoted to art in its various phases in our own country" (Masthead). A project initiated by Harry Tombs (Whitcombe and Tombs), it lasted until 1946 and provided "artists and writers a journal they can justly call their own…By means of illustrations in colour and black-and-white we shall bring artist before artist, and both before art-lovers." (Art in New Zealand Vol. 1 No. 1. 1928.)

FIGURE 19: *THE SUCCESSFUL IMMIGRANT*, M.E.R.TRIPE

Life was not quite so genteel for the people who could be described, uncharitably but familiarly, as working-class. The composition of this group included small farmers and their families eking out a living on uneconomic holdings, labourers in both urban and country environments, the unemployed, swaggers and miscreants. The visual imagery of the activities of the working class was compelling both in terms of the volume of imagery and the detail with which they were portrayed. Any discourse that showed workers would, it is a reasonable assumption, soon be interpreted by the elite or even workers from the middle class, in a "them and us" framework. If raised in a middle-class household one would be regaled, not infrequently, with stories about worker laziness or other perceived inadequacies. This attitude was not unique to New Zealand dinner tables and has long been part of the discourse. What may have been unique (although would have been familiar in Australia or America) was the period of time—two or three generations at the most—from when the forebears of the New Zealand middle-class were, themselves, labouring workers in Great Britain prior to their emigration.

FIGURE 20: WOMEN'S WORK

FIGURE 21: *HOMEWARD* MINA ARNDT

FIGURE 22 FELLING KAURI

FIGURE 23: FORESTRY NURSERY, WHAKAREWAREWA. MĀORI EMPLOYMENT

The photos reproduced above are only a small proportion of the visual documentation related to work. They do, however, show a range of people engaged in meaningful work and, along with large numbers of other photographs taken and reproduced in the 1920s, serve to both inform others about the nature of work being carried out and perhaps encourage them to look for suitable opportunities for themselves. As will be seen in a subsequent chapter, workers were becoming unionised and much more assertive about their rights and rewards. Many workers were of the generation that emigrated from Britain and, by doing so, escaped the repressive impacts of the control asserted by the titled owners of capital. They did not want to see the British situation repeated in their new land.

It was still the case, however, that there was a well-defined class structure which was at odds with the myths about New Zealand egalitarianism and the opportunities available in the "young" country. The early migrants had been excited by the vision of a "New Britain" and, as Thomas Lineham's letter to his parents indicated, were able to improve their lot relatively quickly. However, many members of the moneyed or titled elite, who got into New Zealand ahead of the lower-class workers, were not prepared to surrender any of the privileges they had secured by a variety of means. It is not difficult to see where Samuel

Parnell's vision and obstinate pursuit of it, came from.[31]

Rightly or wrongly, New Zealand had an international reputation for equality of opportunity and the treatment of its citizens. In trying to explain his position on writers' efforts to portray New Zealand's place in the world, C.K. Stead, in *Distance Looks Our Way* touches on some of the issues traversed above:

> It is the combination of remoteness and insignificance which New Zealand writers feel. And to the insignificance of New Zealand, I should add the thinness and uniformity of its society, its dependence on Europe and America, and a certain sourness that underlies its achievements. Our forebears had, I imagine, two principal aims incoming here: to escape from the sordidness of English industrialism, and to advance themselves materially. These aims, expressed in terms of the present, have become the ideals of New Zealanders…(1961, 81)

Although Stead neatly sums up the situation, he ignores the push factor where the Industrial Revolution's owners of capital conspired to rid themselves of as many labouring troublemakers like Parnell and Lineham, as they could.

What is evident about New Zealand's colonial history is that many migrants arrived in New Zealand with large hopes for the future; they had an ability and drive to work and better themselves and their family members; they were not, necessarily, rooted to one spot or occupation and had a willingness to go after better opportunities (geographical and occupational); their respect for authority was conditional on their rights being recognized and protected; and they were not, necessarily, protective of others' rights (e.g. Māori) if they had an impact on what they perceived to be their own rights.

By the beginning of the 1920s, when many second generation New Zealanders were well on the way to securing, or so they thought, a secure and well-rewarded place in this "exceptional" country, the omens seemed very good: economically, the national accounts were strong; culturally it was turning into an exciting time; and, politically, the signals suggested that new allegiances were possible and the old politicians were no longer

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[31] A carpenter from Wellington, S.D. Parnell, has been credited (along with others) as the leader of the pursuit of an eight-hour working day. He had apprenticed as a carpenter and joiner in London and arrived in New Zealand in 1840 and settled in the Hutt Valley.

guaranteed electoral success. In terms of the major historical discourse considered in this thesis—that New Zealand in the 1920s was an artistic wasteland—there is evidence (and some has been referred to in the current chapter) that this was not the case. Moreover, I have tried in this chapter to read the history of the 1920s through a range of visual images produced at the time. I also thought that it was important to pay attention to the antecedents of the 1920s population, to the generation that would have influenced many of the migrants still alive in the 1920s. This is why I compiled a small case study using documents from my great grandfather's family. In the following chapters some of the cultural, economic, and political issues mentioned above will be discussed, and links explored to the visual culture of the period.

Chapter Two: The New Zealand Economy in the 1920s

FIGURE 24: *THE DUNEDIN*, 1882

The New Zealand economy in the 1920s showed mild resilience, but with the end of Britain's wartime purchase arrangements it was exposed to several moderately serious economic shocks. In this chapter I discuss some of the changes in the economy and the implications of what I describe as an economy in transition. The movement from colonial dependence on the British market to some diversification in production, while still holding on to the British lifeline, is a major economic discourse in the 1920s. I also cover borrowing policies and infrastructural investment, as well as the growth of innovation and the signs of modernism.

It could be argued that the single event that impacted most significantly on 1920's New Zealand occurred in 1882, when the three-master sailing ship the Dunedin[32] carried the first ship-load of frozen meat from New Zealand to England. The opening up of the British

[32] The painting of *The Dunedin* (Figure 24) was downloaded from Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunedin_(ship) on 17 October 2022. Painting by Frederick Tudgay (1841–1921), 47 cm by 77 cm oil on canvas.

market for protein products from New Zealand, offered a new opportunity for the colony's farmers, which was a development which changed the face of rural New Zealand. In turn, this had an impact on political traditions and had a major influence on New Zealand's culture. Keith Sinclair explains the situation in the 1880s as:

> When the big estates had been built up the population had been small, so that few were excluded from the land; there had been, in any case, only a limited scope for small farming…there had been no large market for perishable produce…consequently, since the economy had rested on wool, the squatter had been king…Now, however, there was a much larger population, considerable unemployment, thousands of families waiting to leave the towns and begin farming. (1969, 166)

By the end of the First World War, New Zealand had overcome the impact of the "long depression" by, initially, the positive contribution of Julius Vogel's anti-retrenchment economic policies, public infrastructural development, agricultural reform, and then, as war deepened, strong demand for New Zealand's food exports. The New Zealand economy was reasonably strong and showing evidence of economic and cultural modernization; at the same time, it was being buffeted by a series of trade and income reversals. New Zealand's post-war dependence on the British market—a relationship that had been of great value to Great Britain during the conflict—was both a strength and a weakness for New Zealand. Class conflict and unemployment (exacerbated by bankruptcies of many ex-soldiers who were unable to succeed in farming) sowed the seeds of labour unrest and, for the socialist Labour Party, growth, and ultimate electoral victory.

Settlement

From the earlier discussion on immigration, it was clear that a major preoccupation of many new migrants was to secure good land. "Good" is emphasised because, not infrequently, the settler found on arrival in New Zealand that the land allocated to them was often unsuitable for cultivation. To make matters worse, settlers found that good land had been bought or acquired by a relatively small body of politically powerful landowners which was, for many settlers, the situation they had hoped to leave behind in England. In the early days of New Zealand's European settlement, the accretion of large holdings by rapacious settlers produced

a culture in which landownership was seen to be the key to success in the new colony. With, for many, only a generation or two separating them from the settlers who had, earlier, stepped off the boat in New Zealand and begun to fashion a new life, and then having to face exploitation, adversity and, for many, war, it is little wonder that land settlement in the immediate post-war period was a complex and politically charged process.[33] The tensions between town and country, between larger landowners, small farmers and workers which were intensifying in the 1920s, owed more than a little to the attitudes formed in the 19th century. The land policies followed by the government in the immediate post-war period made an already complex situation even more difficult. Returning soldiers were offered land as a reward.[34]

FIGURE 25: *SETTLING THE RETURNED SOLDIER*

[33] See Te Ara "Land Settlement" on https://teara.govt.nz/en/land-ownership/page-2 for a good overview.

[34] The cartoon (Figure 25) relating to the government's (intended) policy, was drawn in 1917 for the *Observer,* by an outstanding artist of the period, William Blomfield. It points to the very difficult situation facing the newly "settled" soldier/farmer, the isolation many would feel and, on the other hand, the self-satisfied smirk on the face of the banker/speculator with his catalogue of farms "for sale".

In a repeat of early-settler experiences, the land offered was often of poor quality and would have been difficult for even experienced and skilled farmers to farm. Quality issues notwithstanding, the initial high prices for export products and the emphasis being placed on land ownership fueled a speculative boom which led to many hopeful neophyte landowners being vastly overextended financially. Great Britain had no intention of continuing what had been wartime food import policies—the correction, when it came in the early 1920s, was brutal and changing circumstances drove many New Zealanders to the wall. The banks and larger land speculators profited; the same could not be said of the many who had to move into towns and give up dreams of farming their own holding.

Production

New Zealand in the 1920s gained much of its financial strength from its primary product exports, but actual farming production was only one of the major components of gross domestic product (GDP) (Figure 26). Taking a year's GDP statistics[35] from mid-decade (1925), the figures showed that the major contributors to income were: Farm Income (29%), Mining (1%), Factory Production (23%), Construction (5%), Transport (4%), Finance and Commerce (21%), Personal and Domestic Service (4%), Government (9%). This GDP breakdown points to the root causes of confrontation and dissension in the decade. New Zealand had been developed as a farming society with Government looking after the perceived or actual interests of large landholders and the finance sector (often foreign controlled). But the evidence of income generation in areas such as industry and infrastructural activity, i.e., not farming, points to a range of interests that, because of their growing influence in the 1920s, demanded to be heard. The political dynamics will be considered in the next chapter but, for the moment, it is constructive to survey some of the developments that had an impact on employment and income.

The table below provides a broad perspective on the drivers of development as well as an indication of the significant fluctuations in income growth. The long depression of the late 19th century had exposed the wealthy, but indebted, propertied class and raised, for them,

[35] B. T. Lineham, *New Zealand's Gross Domestic Product, 1918/38* (Wellington, New Zealand Economic Papers) 1968, 2:2, 15-26

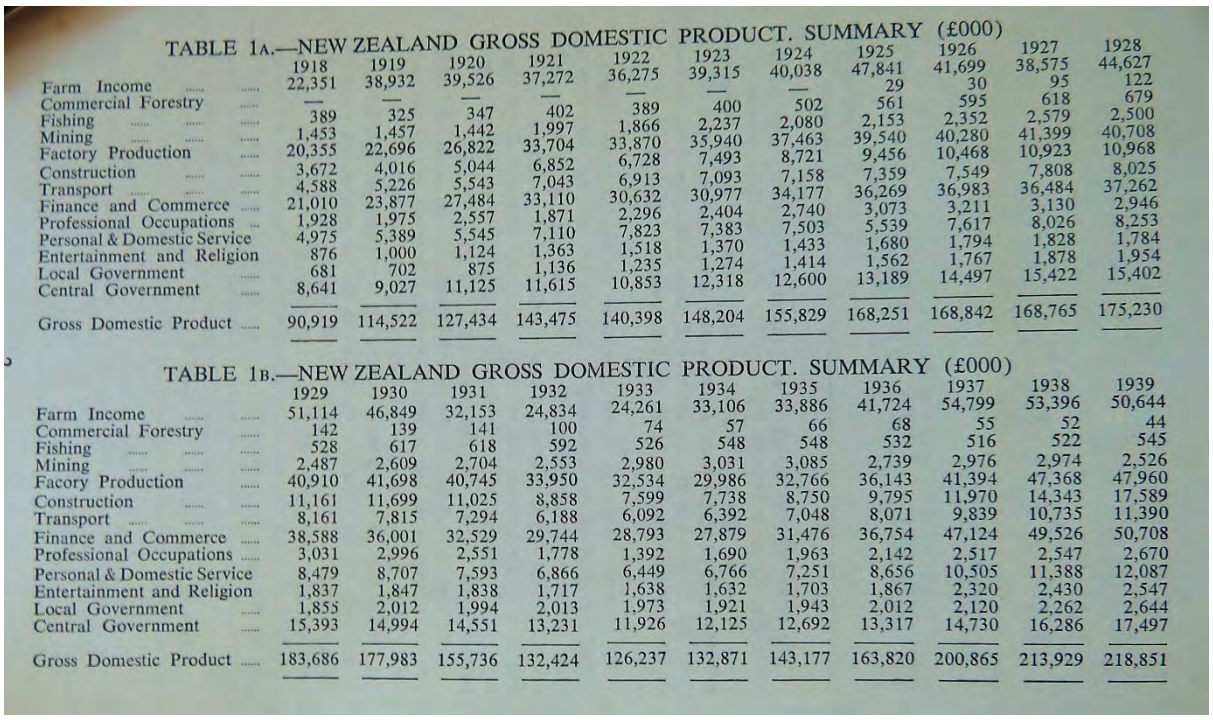

TABLE 1A.—NEW ZEALAND GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT. SUMMARY (£000)

	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928
Farm Income	22,351	38,932	39,526	37,272	36,275	39,315	40,038	47,841	41,699	38,575	44,627
Commercial Forestry	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	29	30	95	122
Fishing	389	325	347	402	389	400	502	561	595	618	679
Mining	1,453	1,457	1,442	1,997	1,866	2,237	2,080	2,153	2,352	2,579	2,500
Factory Production	20,355	22,696	26,822	33,704	33,870	35,940	37,463	39,540	40,280	41,399	40,708
Construction	3,672	4,016	5,044	6,852	6,728	7,493	8,721	9,456	10,468	10,923	10,968
Transport	4,588	5,226	5,543	7,043	6,913	7,093	7,158	7,359	7,549	7,808	8,025
Finance and Commerce	21,010	23,877	27,484	33,110	30,632	30,977	34,177	36,269	36,983	36,484	37,262
Professional Occupations	1,928	1,975	2,557	1,871	2,296	2,404	2,740	3,073	3,211	3,130	2,946
Personal & Domestic Service	4,975	5,389	5,545	7,110	7,823	7,383	7,503	5,539	7,617	8,026	8,253
Entertainment and Religion	876	1,000	1,124	1,363	1,518	1,370	1,433	1,680	1,794	1,828	1,784
Local Government	681	702	875	1,136	1,235	1,274	1,414	1,562	1,767	1,878	1,954
Central Government	8,641	9,027	11,125	11,615	10,853	12,318	12,600	13,189	14,497	15,422	15,402
Gross Domestic Product	90,919	114,522	127,434	143,475	140,398	148,204	155,829	168,251	168,842	168,765	175,230

TABLE 1B.—NEW ZEALAND GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT. SUMMARY (£000)

	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
Farm Income	51,114	46,849	32,153	24,834	24,261	33,106	33,886	41,724	54,799	53,396	50,644
Commercial Forestry	142	139	141	100	74	57	66	68	55	52	44
Fishing	528	617	618	592	526	548	548	532	516	522	545
Mining	2,487	2,609	2,704	2,553	2,980	3,031	3,085	2,739	2,976	2,974	2,526
Facory Production	40,910	41,698	40,745	33,950	32,534	29,986	32,766	36,143	41,394	47,368	47,960
Construction	11,161	11,699	11,025	8,858	7,599	7,738	8,750	9,795	11,970	14,343	17,589
Transport	8,161	7,815	7,294	6,188	6,092	6,392	7,048	8,071	9,839	10,735	11,390
Finance and Commerce	38,588	36,001	32,529	29,744	28,793	27,879	31,476	36,754	47,124	49,526	50,708
Professional Occupations	3,031	2,996	2,551	1,778	1,392	1,690	1,963	2,142	2,517	2,547	2,670
Personal & Domestic Service	8,479	8,707	7,593	6,866	6,449	6,766	7,251	8,656	10,505	11,388	12,087
Entertainment and Religion	1,837	1,847	1,838	1,717	1,638	1,632	1,703	1,867	2,320	2,430	2,547
Local Government	1,855	2,012	1,994	2,013	1,973	1,921	1,943	2,012	2,120	2,262	2,644
Central Government	15,393	14,994	14,551	13,231	11,926	12,125	12,692	13,317	14,730	16,286	17,497
Gross Domestic Product	183,686	177,983	155,736	132,424	126,237	132,871	143,177	163,820	200,865	213,929	218,851

FIGURE 26: INTERWAR GDP FIGURES FOR NZ

the spectre of a political takeover by small farmers and urban business interests. Sinclair thought that:

> Their chief fear was that the Colony's problem of paying the interest on overseas public debts would necessitate higher taxes…one government after another tried to find a way of paying for the past without raising an income tax, which was thought politically impossible. And one after another fell by threatening the security of a small politically powerful indebted class. Thus a class of conservatives, desperately trying to preserve its status, was created.(1969, 168).

The Gross Domestic Product figures show a low level of earnings and, not unexpectedly, for the period immediately following the War and the influenza epidemic, depressed economic activity in the period 1918/1920. Led by manufacturing and strong farming receipts, the economy started to strengthen, rising to a high in 1929, with the real impact of the Great Depression being shown in the GDP figures for 1931. Analysis of the income figures for the period signalled the social reality and point to a major cause of political unrest:

> Beginning with the inter-war period, we can see that the share of the top 1 percent is estimated to be in excess of 10 percent from 1921 to 1942. In other words, the members of the top 1 percent on average had more than 10 times their proportionate share of total income. The top 0.1 percent had an estimated share of 2.5 percent or more, giving them at least 25 times their proportionate share. These shares were broadly stable over the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s, but fell sharply in 1937–38, leaving the share of the top 1 percent at around 11 percent in 1940.(Atkinson and Leigh 2008, 157)

FIGURE 27: MASSEY TEACHING THE FARMERS TO SWIM

A selection of visual images from the period shows an economy in transition, with major challenges in infrastructural development and in achieving the "paradise" that many settlers came to New Zealand to find. In a long thin country it was an impossible undertaking to develop all parts of it equally, and preference was given to the politically protected large-scale farmers. Prime Minister William Massey, while often portrayed as an avuncular grandfatherly type, had a rather brutal, conservative approach to politics and when, in 1920, New Zealand's guaranteed export market was cut in Britain's post-war restructuring and, as a consequence, New Zealand went into the first post-war depression, Massey's Reform

Government followed policies of retrenchment which favoured the larger farmers and not the small farmer, many of whom were facing ruin after extending themselves too widely in the speculative boom at the end of the previous decade.

The cartoon above (Figure 27: *Heaven Helps Those Who Help Themselves*) was drawn by T. Ellis (in reality Tom Glover, who used his Christian names as a cover) for *Free Lance* in 1921. It shows an unconcerned Massey throwing an elderly farmer, who was finding it impossible to keep his head above water, a book of swimming instructions (that might have been valuable a few years previously when the government should have been planning for New Zealand's preferential situation to change). Massey, by so blatantly favouring the farming lobby, was using up political capital and exposing the Reform government to electoral difficulty.

FIGURE 28: *YES, WE HAVE NO PLUMS*

Jack Gilmour, borrowing a concept from French revolutionary politics and punning insouciantly, summed up the situation facing Massey's government in 1924[36]. The very rotund farmers, representing meat, wool and dairy, were clearly in control of the smaller, but equally rotund Massey, who was holding up the incentive of reduced taxation to the farmers. The group towered over the somewhat scruffy general public who was clearly going to be ignored in this tableau. The public was getting rather tired of special treatment being given to

[36] Figure 28: *Yes, We Have No Plums Today*, Gilmour, *Truth,* 1924.

the farming community when so much development work was needing to be done, And the GDP figures (Figure 26) showed that by 1921/22 economic recovery was underway with the government's finances improving to the point where some income redistribution should have been possible. This was a period when the equity discourse reflected (although not compellingly) a bias favouring conservative interests in the colony.

Visual evidence pointing to a wide range of economic activities and development projects underway or clearly needed, is drawn from contemporary photographs focused on such matters as infrastructural development, farming, land and sea transportation, or aviation.

FIGURE 29: FROM AUCKLAND TO SMITHFIELD[37]

The application of visual culture makes more explicit the realities that might be obscured by a a recitation of statistics alone. I, and other commentators, have criticised the absence of a fine art commentary on social and economic subjects but, by using visual culture, this absence is

[37] Figure 29, a photograph showing a critical economic activity, may also have been a model for one of the rare New Zealand paintings of economic and social activities by Christopher Perkins (see Figure 56 – *On the Wharf*).

compensated for by artists using photography and cartooning to bring evidence of New Zealand's development discourse to the viewer.

Creating viable transportation networks was a major priority for the country and whereas the Government had placed, under Julius Vogel's leadership, an understandable emphasis on well-proven technologies like road, rail and sea transport—air travel was a relatively new and exciting development. This image at Figure 30 captures the arrival, in 1921, of the first flight between Auckland and Wellington. International flights arrived later in the decade.

FIGURE 30: AUCKLAND/WELLINGTON BY SEAPLANE

FIGURE 31: CHARLES KINGSFORD SMITH FIRST TRANS-TASMAN FLIGHT, 1928.

While an important priority was the creation of better roads for the benefit of farming communities and the politically connected runholders, it was hard to find a speck of mud where royalty was involved.

FIGURE 32: COUNTRY ROADS

FIGURE 33: DUKE AND DUCHESS OF YORK ON A ROYAL VISIT

FIGURE 34: SHEEP STATION WELLINGTON PROVINCE

FIGURE 35: SHEARING AT MT WHITE STATION

Sheep farming, being land-extensive, was still the preserve of the runholder who had both considerable political power and the wealth they had accumulated since gaining control of large holdings in the colony's early years. By the early 1920s, farming statistics show that some 24 million sheep were being farmed, with wool export receipts for 1924 totalling over 14 million pounds sterling. By 1930 the figures were 30.8 million and 15 million pounds respectively.[38] Clearly, the earnings from this one source were of critical importance to the Government, and Ministers would be very wary of alienating the sheep-farmer lobby.

Dairy production was becoming an increasingly important contributor to New Zealand's income. It was suited to small scale production; it provided working options for women on the farm (not always a positive outcome); dairy farming was often carried out close to small urban locations; and it offered the possibility of mechanised assistance associated with the farming operation.

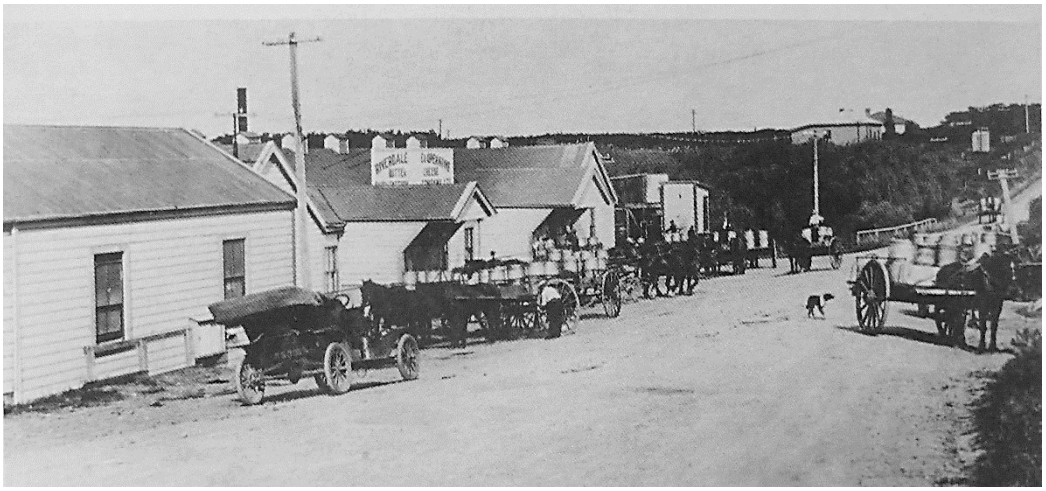

FIGURE 36: RIVERDALE DAIRY FACTORY, TARANAKI

The photograph of the Riverdale Dairy Factory shows an industry in transition. Transportation is a mix of small horse-drawn carts, which would be large enough to carry milk from local dairy farm, with a relatively new (for the 1920s, at least,) American car. Given the New Zealand propensity to purchase cars it is possible that the car parked

[38] Figures for production and trade are taken from the New Zealand Official Yearbooks for 1920, 1925, 1930, and 1931. Accessed on 25/10.22 on: <https://www3.stats.govt.nz/New_Zealand_Official_Yearbooks/1920/NZOYB_1920.html?_ga>

alongside the factory belonged to the factory owner (and would stand as a constant reminder of the rewards available for hard work or good luck).

Images of activity and/or equipment in other areas of production were captured in the 1920s and although it is impossible to reproduce a large number of them in this thesis, a small selection will show that the country was changing rapidly.

FIGURE 37: *AT HARVEST TIME*, G. CHANCE

FIGURE 38: THRESHING WHEAT, AUCKLAND

Given New Zealand's topography, transportation, and the construction of networks around the country, were a major priority. Julius Vogel had been an important figure in the establishment of railways in the 19th century, but with the advent of smaller-scale farming and the opening up of the rural hinterland, road construction accelerated in the period before the Great Depression. This benefited both community connection and transportation of goods and services.

FIGURE 39: FERRY ACROSS THE MOKAU

FIGURE 40: WOOL SHIPPING, EAST COAST

FIGURE 41: TRUCKS, WELLINGTON WHARF

FIGURE 42: TRANSPORTING KAURI BY BULLOCK CART

At the same time as New Zealand was looking for funds to provide for its infrastructural needs, its economy was changing in response to influences from overseas (from Britain, Australia and America in particular) loosely bundled under the rubric of modernism. Radio and telecommunications were becoming important; a growing labour force was being employed in industry; the demand for housing was rising; and expectations about a decent standard of living were being fuelled by advertising and the media. Economic success was not always being shared evenly and fluctuations of Gross Domestic Product and related changes in incomes, made life difficult for heavily mortgaged families, the unemployed and people living in sub-standard accommodation.

FIGURE 43: RADIO TRANSMISSION

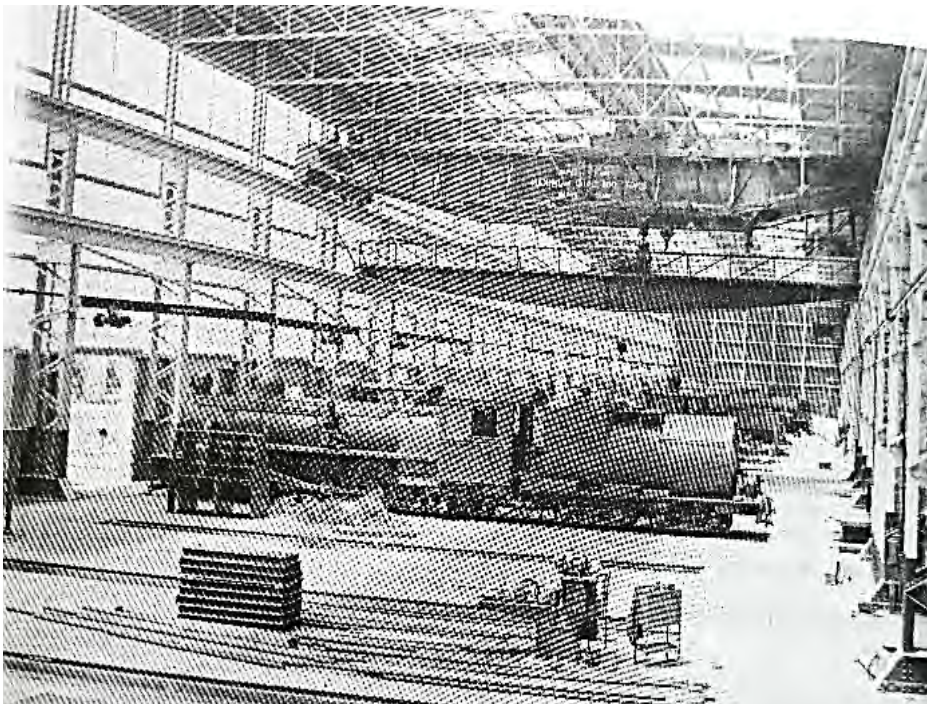

FIGURE 44: HEAVY ENGINEERING

FIGURE 45 (ABOVE): POOR QUALITY HOUSING

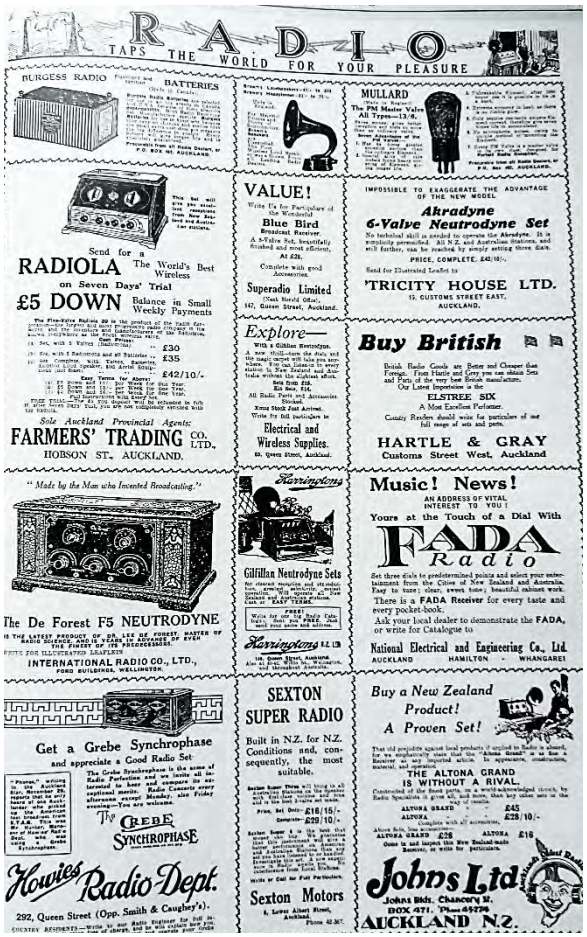

FIGURE 46 (RIGHT): HOME ENTERTAINMENT

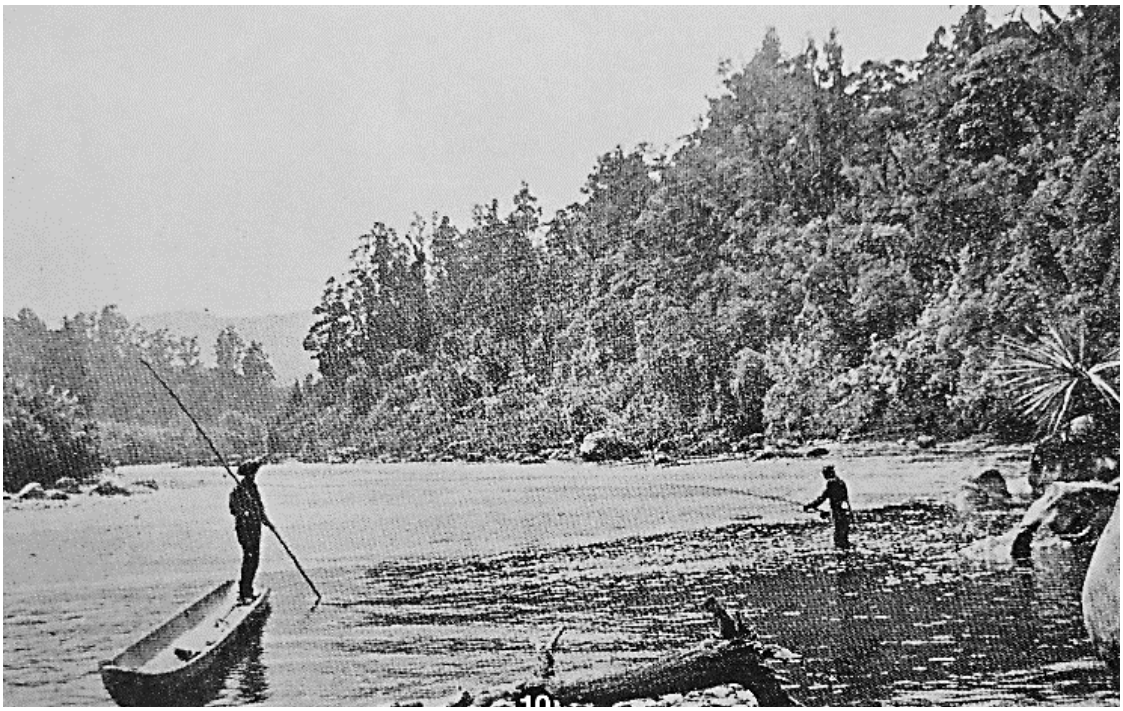

FIGURE 47: TOURISM

The selected visual material reproduced above is not intended to support any particular discourse. It does, however, show that a range of discourses—from class relations to land use policies—were in circulation in the 1920s. The images also suggest subjects that could have stimulated artists to create their own interpretations of significant socio-economic changes taking place in New Zealand in the decade.

Finance

In establishing an image of a politician's view of New Zealand as a "Utopia", historian W. H. Oliver, seemingly conflicted about the outcomes from New Zealand's long-term relations with Britain, made some trenchant comments about New Zealand's relations with its home country:

> The good luck, and the bad, have come from overseas…the British demand for wool…[then] the dwindling demand for wool…then the happy coincidence of farm technology. Refrigeration and the British demand for meat, butter and cheese, and the diminution of that demand in the 1920s; the beneficial effect of at least three world wars; the inadequacy (temporary as we know) of British and European agriculture; the

availability of chiefly British credit for nearly all we wanted to build; and the timely upswings and wars which headed off the spectres of bankruptcy and austerity:(1964, 14)[39]

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FIGURE 48: *EXIT MR GLOOM*

Writing in the early 1960s, he has the benefit of a longer-term perspective than the politicians of the time could bring to bear. He recognises that, for most of the time, the symbiotic relationship must have given the junior partner a feeling of security and comfort.

It was also a major advantage for New Zealand to have a benevolent relationship, albeit at a handsome rate of interest, with London bankers. This existed for as long as extending loans to New Zealand seemed a good and secure investment. J. H. Gee, published in *Free Lance* (Figure 48), captured the situation in 1923 by featuring Prime Minister Massey using borrowed funds to finance New Zealand's way out of a depression which had had a

[39] In developing a case that the relationship forged with Britain has not always produced positive benefits, Oliver, in commenting about the downturns in New Zealand's economic fortunes culminating in the difficulties of the 1890s and the early 20th century, said:

> Then it is the dairy farmer, the man at the end of a mud road, and with him the small town worker, the railwayman, the shopkeeper…again there is depression, turning the small farmer into the hired man of the mortgagee, the town worker into the unemployed drudge. (1964, 14)

severe impact on pastoral incomes. This tactic, if used sparingly, made economic sense. Unfortunately, economic theory and pastoral politics did not, necessarily, go hand in hand. Successive New Zealand governments had financed their policies by borrowing abroad (most commonly in London). This process placed New Zealand in a continuing state of indebtedness to London bankers and compromised the Dominion's independence. In "normal" years this was not seen as a problem because New Zealand's exports usually exceeded its imports leaving the country with a healthy balance of payments. The availability of capital was thus a great advantage for a county with an insatiable demand for it. The public's memory was relatively short and the memory of the "good times" associated with Julius Vogel and the heavy infrastructural investments funded by borrowing, was, if not fresh, at least in the minds of the conservative political elite. To the unemployed ex-farmer or working families hit hard in the first of a number of depressions in the 1920s, the working of the financial system would have been rather mysterious; the need to pay interest on the government's borrowings would not have been seen as the problem it, in reality, occupied for government policymakers.

FIGURE 49: SLAYING THE GOLIATH OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Cartoonist Stewart Peterson was published in 1929 in *Free Lance* (Figure 49) with a critical comment on Joseph Ward's unemployment strategy. As will be discussed in the next section,

the elderly and ailing (in fact, dying) Ward had unwittingly told the electorate that he would, if elected, borrow extremely heavily for public works—hence the tiny Ward's threat to destroy the giant, Unemployment, with a railway engine. The Goliath had already taken the head of the leader of the previous government, that of Gordon Coates, as evidenced by the decapitated trophy hung from the giant's belt. It would also see off Joseph Ward in the battleground that was the Great Depression.

Associated with the significance of the London finance market was Great Britain as a market for New Zealand's exports. W. H. Oliver, in discussing the nature of the New Zealand British relationship comments:

> [in the mid-18th century] a few notable New Zealanders momentarily doubted the value of the British connection…talked a little of independence…But not for long; from 1870 till sometime in the 1930s the British connection seemed like Providence itself, reliable and benevolent most of the time…International trade and finance tied us firmly to London…But we were most firmly tied by our idea of ourselves as the Britain of the South Seas.(1964, 15)

For a country so firmly dependent on a range of pastoral exports and circumscribed markets, this relationship with Britain was critical and the reluctance in policy, economic and social terms to push for true independence, was both rational and sensible.[40] James Belich, in his book *Paradise Reforged*, investigated the reasons why there appeared to be a move in the late 19th and early 20th centuries towards less rather than more independence and termed the process "recolonisation". This, he said, was:

> My term for a renewal and reshaping of links between colony and metropolis after an earlier period of colonisation. In New Zealand's case, it reshuffled and tightened links with Britain between the 1880s and 1900s. It welded selected shards of the old regime together with fresh developments to form a new system in this period. The system had

[40] The policy-makers' dilemma—working assiduously to achieve profitable change while at the same time providing advice to the political establishment which, with some exceptions, prefers a peaceful status quo (albeit with regular increases in national income).

> reached full fruition by the 1920s…Essentially, New Zealand became a town-supply district of London. London became the cultural capital of New Zealand. (2001, 29)

As the financial resources available to the country had to be earned through foreign trade or borrowed, the dependence on a single market, even if the general feeling of benevolence towards "home" engendered antipodean security, the postwar trade arrangements did not provide the certainties that many New Zealanders thought was their due. The first of the post-war depressions (in 1920), which was partly brought about by a downturn in British demand for primary products, brought with it real hardship for many over-geared land holders and exposure to the cold realities of post-war life. Essentially, and this really was a major post-war discourse, most of the population, while negatively impacted by depression, wanted to shelter under New Zealand's "re-colonial" security blanket. Even the Labour Party, opting for security, was reluctantly prepared to go into a coalition with Joseph Ward and other conservative interests for the 1928 election. Another of New Zealand's excellent cartoonists, Stuart Peterson (in the *NZ Herald* in 1930), captured the complexity of the political situation in a way that was both graphically interesting and easy to understand (Figure 50).

FIGURE 50: *ON THE EDGE*

The cartoon captures the final misjudgement of Sir Joseph Ward and elements of the Liberal Party with their borrowing and development policies. From a public perspective it seemed that a donkey could be elected if its promises were captivating enough (or sufficiently outrageous). Ward won, but good government lost in the tragedy of the Great Depression. Instead of initiating a vigorous public works programme to help counter the increasing numbers of bankruptcies, burgeoning indebtedness, high unemployment, and mortgage foreclosures, the government chose to lock away as much of its resources as it could and pursued deflationary policies which only served to increase the hardship being experienced throughout the Dominion.

Innovation and Modernism: New Zealand Visual Culture in the 1920s

Perhaps it has something to do with New Zealand's geography—being situated well away from "home" and civilised discourse—but New Zealanders have a great enthusiasm for exhibitions (McCarthy in Findling and Kimberly Pelle 2008). The New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition held in Dunedin in 1925/26 was a very good example (Figure 51 below). It attracted 3 million visitors over the six months it was open (Wagelie in Kimberly and Pelle 2008: Phillips 2014). The holding of these international exhibitions was part of a deliberate marketing strategy to boost Dunedin's international reputation. Other Dunedin exhibitions of this type were held in 1865 and 1889. Visual images of the specially designed and constructed buildings made a powerful statement about Dunedin, a city that had been New Zealand's most important financial centre in the 19th century. Also represented at the 1925 exhibition were Great Britain, Canada, Australia, Queensland, and Fiji. Countries were displaying their primary products and a wide range of manufactured items and, by doing so, demonstrated to the many visitors who attended the show, the extent to which modernism had entered nearly every aspect of their lives.

Art was also featured at the Exhibition with various rooms in the Art Gallery being devoted to national collections. One critic commented:

> Of all the rooms in the Art Gallery, that devoted to the oil paintings of Australia and New Zealand possesses the least colour, and is, in fact, inclined to strike one as being little sombre, especially after passing through the America Room, with its firm purples, or the French Room with its "jazz"-like riot of colour. This is the more curious because Australia and New Zealand are both countries of sunlight and open

air… [perhaps a] reason is the absence of work of many of the leading artists, with whose pictures the art-loving public is already familiar…

FIGURE 51: NEW ZEALAND AND SOUTH SEAS EXHIBITION

Having implied that the exhibition did not get the best paintings or the iconic works from a particular artist's oeuvre, the *Otago Daily Times* critic went on to suggest that a reason why it was difficult to determine the nationality of a painter from the artist's work was because "in Australia and New Zealand there is, as yet very little indication of the formation of a national art." It was suggested that a factor contributing to this was that the leading artists from Australia and New Zealand "do not remain in their native lands but go to England, France, or America where they, in practically every case, cannot help acquiring the mannerisms and methods of the particular school which they adopt". [41]

[41] *Art at the Exhibition*, *Otago Daily Times*, issue 19752, 31 March 1926, p 4

Introducing a narrative which includes the Dunedin Exhibition, a "national style" of painting and the departure overseas of leading painters, in a section on innovation and modernism, may seem somewhat obtuse, but all these subjects are associated with one of the major discourses being considered in this thesis: the significance of New Zealand's visual culture (in this case, fine art) as a guide to the development in the 1920s of an independent and innovative country. The Exhibition, by displaying the latest manufactured products as the apotheosis of modern life, made the traditional approach to New Zealand art appear, by comparison, to be stuck in a late-Victorian cul-de-sac. The absence overseas in the 1920s of a number of the country's best and most exciting artists, meant, as we were later told by art historians, that we would have to wait for another decade before having artists on our doorstep who could provide the informed and evocative commentary on contemporary events that artists in other places (not only in the developed northern hemisphere countries) were creating and exhibiting. In exploring the accuracy of this narrative we will briefly discuss efforts made by the government to improve art education (the La Trobe scheme); look at the contribution of some expatriate artists; and consider the contribution of "the Art Society" artists to New Zealand's cultural development.

The La Trobe Scheme

William Sanderson La Trobe was appointed as the first Superintendent of Technical Education in 1918 (he retired in 1938).[42] La Trobe, a mathematician and scientist (engineering) educated in New Zealand and at Cambridge, was to make an important contribution to New Zealand art. He returned to New Zealand in 1904 as Director of the Wellington Technical School and set about making major changes to the renamed Technical College. The education model he put in place won widespread approval around New Zealand and, on appointment to his national position, he was given a free hand to devise a better approach to technical education than the traditionally conservative system which was in place in the early 20th century,

La Trobe wanted to improve the teaching of art in New Zealand technical schools. La Trobe was of the post-Industrial Revolution generation and was clearly a reflective and fact-drive individual. In his work at the Wellington Technical College, as evidenced by the reforms he implemented, La Trobe made a connection between art creation and the style and

[42] https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3l1/la-trobe-william-sanderson (accessed on 26//11/2002)

content of art teaching, and initiated a scheme—the "La Trobe scheme"—in the early 1920s, aimed at recruiting qualified art teachers from British schools or other institutions like the Royal Academy of Art. Another approach to the programme was to look for talented artists who would respond positively to teaching in New Zealand. In terms of the impact on New Zealand art this would prove to be much more successful recruitment method than appointing academic teachers. The "star" appointees who stood out from the rest were Robert Nettleton Field and Christopher Perkins. Although they were not members of the avant-garde, through their teaching, lecturing and their own art practice, they had a significant impact on many New Zealand artists (Docking 1982, 124).

In 1925, educated at the Royal College of Art by some good teachers but unable to find work in Britain, Robert Field arrived in Dunedin to take up a teaching appointment at the Dunedin Technical College School of Art. He was not a qualified teacher, but it was soon apparent that he could nurture talent. Michael Dunn commented that:

> Field, as a teacher placed no emphasis on the method of rendering form from the model, preferring instead to see the subject as a motif for a formal arrangement invented by the painter. He encouraged students to see their works as a process in which discovery was a major part…(1991, 70).

This was good teaching technique and facilitated a form of learning that encouraged exploration and innovation. Dunn thought that Field was "mildly modernist" as evidenced by the following work *Landscape: Taieri Mouth*, 1930 (Figure 52) with a traditional landscape by Charles Howorth painted over a decade before, to provide a comparison (Figure 53).

FIGURE 52: *LANDSCAPE: TAIERI MOUTH*

FIGURE 53: *THE BULLER GORGE*, 1910

Discussing the style of the Field painting, Michael Dunn commented:

> …the image is handled like a mosaic of brightly-coloured patches laid sided by side. The colours include mauve and violet accents recollective of Gauguin or the Fauves rather than the subdued palette of most New Zealand landscapists…The jewel-like touches of paint seemed to the young New Zealand artist M.T. Woollaston like a heady revelation of the power of painting and very unlike what was happening at the Canterbury School of Art.

FIGURE 54: *INTERIOR,* R.N. FIELD

If the comparison between the Field and Howorth paintings fails to convince the viewer that Field was bringing something new (but not shockingly so) to local painting, his particularly lovely *Interior* is hard to ignore (Figure 54). It is an evocative modernist painting and is quite unlike work being done elsewhere in New Zealand at the time. With his colours, paint-handling, incorporation of angles and outlining, Field demonstrates an innovative approach that requires some flexibility of mind on the part of the viewer.

If Field is thought of as mildly modernist, his La Trobe colleague, Christopher Perkins must also be anointed with that title. Perkins arrived in New Zealand in 1929 and stayed a brief four years before escaping the environment in which Gauguin's "natural" and seductive beauty was absent. Although his portraiture often seemed, to me, at least, to be a little clumsy he did make a significant impact in that he painted, inter alia, industrial structures and people at work as well as the environment in which they worked. One of the criticisms regularly levelled at New Zealand painters in the post-war period is that they were so enamoured with New Zealand's beautiful and majestic scenery that they made any sign of people in it disappear.

FIGURE 55: *SILVERSTREAM BRICKWORKS* 1930

Examples of Perkins' attitude may be found in his *Silverstream Brickworks* (Figure 55, 1930) in which he portrayed industrial buildings, although smaller than the surrounding hills, dominated the environment in a rather chilling way.[43] His images of workers were both lyrical and informative and showed, if it was not obvious to many New Zealand artists of the time, that there were modern and human subjects to be painted everywhere and there was no need to stick to a limited range of traditional subjects.

One of the most interesting of Perkins' paintings *Activity on the Wharf* (Figure 56), even though it was painted in 1931 and outside our period, "shows a gang of wharfies loading frozen mutton onto slings for dropping into the refrigerated hold of what would have been a British-owned ship bound for the United Kingdom — a representation of classic mercantilism but, nevertheless, representing salvation for the dependent New Zealand economy."[44] This is a particularly interesting painting not only for its subject matter, which is innovative for its period, but also because it is a modernist work in its colouration and its architecture. Not all the viewers were impressed, however.[45] Another feature of this painting is an interesting conjunction between the painting and a photograph *From Auckland to Smithfield* (September 22, 1927), see Figure 29. There is a strong resemblance, in terms of structure and subject matter. It is to his credit if Perkins had seen a copy of the photograph and adapted it for his painting. Again it speaks to the ubiquity of subject matter with virtually all economically and socially significant subjects being ignored by our 1920s painters. Perkins' innovations are an important step in the modernist project and came at a time that artists like Lois White, Rata Lovell Smith and Rita Angus were finding their voice and producing works that were new

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[43] The images in Figures 55 and 56 have both been destroyed. The image of *Silverstream Brickworks* was located in the very informative publication *Looking For a New Country*, edited by Christina Barton and Priscilla Pitts.

[44] (Lineham, Brett 2021, 21)

[45] Lachlan Taylor pointed out that the Evening Post's art critic:

> "dismissed *Activity on the Wharf* for its disorienting 'jazz-cubist' effect…[a] new kind of art that cultivates hard outlines and disregards perspective".(Barton and Pitts 2020, 29)

FIGURE 56: *ON THE WHARF* 1931, CHRISTOPHER PERKINS

Fresh and, if not in the forefront of international expressionism, they showed a willingness to experiment with a different approach to representation than had followed New Zealanders from Victorian England.

Expatriate Artists

Another group of artists who had been captured by modernism were the so-called Expatriates who, in the early part of the 20th century had left New Zealand to study and paint in Europe.

> Whether it was the influence of the European artists or the improved economic climate of the nineties, many second-generation New Zealanders returned at this time to the birthplace of their parents and grandparents, or both. Of the well-known artists who were able to venture overseas in the late nineties and early 1900s, Frances Hodgkins, Sydney Thompson, Mina Arndt, Owen Merton, Raymond McIntyre, and Grace Joel are some of the more prominent…In retrospect it is possible to see that by 1920 constant stimulation from overseas was essential to the visual arts. This occurred

> either through the presence of imported talent or by resident artists venturing to overseas centres to absorb new ideas. (Mackle 1984, 10)

If it is accepted that the 1920s were a cultural wasteland, then it consigns artists from a powerful group of innovative New Zealanders to a form of non-existence, or to a different status than would be the case for artists living and working in the Dominion. The issue was one of nomenclature overlaid with years of debate about the development of a New Zealand style, a "national art". If a painter was not painting in New Zealand how, it was asked, could that painter capture New Zealand's allegedly unique light, or create a landscape that used the Swiss Alps for inspiration, instead of familiar mountains along the Southern Divide. The aridity of this debate is exposed if expatriates from other fields of endeavour are considered. Is it admissible to suggest Ernest Rutherford is not a New Zealander because he spent a lot of his working life in England? The answer is obvious. Accepting that the paintings created by New Zealanders working overseas can be considered part of New Zealand's art history, adds some richness to the art of the 1920s. As Mary Elizabeth Tripe contended:

> If a painter has anything to say—and knows how to say it—he or she should be able to say it in any part of the world, and New Zealanders will do well to think hard before leaving New Zealand whether they are prepared to undergo the necessary hard training, or whether it is worthwhile in their particular case. (Brown 1975, 23)[46]

A small selection of the work of two artists, Frances Hodgkins and Rhona Haszard, fills in a little detail about New Zealand artists leaving their home country and becoming expatriates with the objective of developing further their painting careers. In outlining the importance of the period around the turn of the century to New Zealand's development, Michael Dunn writes:

> Politically New Zealand may have been more mature, but in the visual arts the sense of isolation, fragility and provincialism lingered on. It seems though the taste of European art…was enough to encourage young painters to think in terms of leaving the country rather than staying…

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[46] The Tripe quotation was taken from *Art in New Zealand* no 11, Mar 1931 p 219.

Frances Hodgkins (1869-1947) who was one of the artists who left New Zealand (in 1901, as a more mature painter) was born in Dunedin and spent her formative years in that city. Her father, William Mathew Hodgkins, was a well-regarded artist, active in Art Society politics and a national spokesman for the arts. He had two daughters with the elder of the two, Isabel, being thought, initially, to have the greater artistic talent of the two. Frances trained in Dunedin as an artist and qualified as an art teacher—having a teaching qualification was intended to help her meet one of her objectives of supporting herself from her art. She set out on a journey that included living and working in England and France, painting expeditions to Mediterranean countries, exhibitions in a number of countries (including New Zealand and Australia) and returning to New Zealand on a number of occasions. She maintained a strong attachment to her family (her father had died in 1898) and a number of good friends in New Zealand (although her evolving painting style was not always appreciated, it seems, by them). On an extended stay in Wellington she painted Babette (Figure 57) which gives an idea of her style at the time (1905). It is a softly rendered and sensitive study of a young girl and shows Hodgkin's affinity with the Impressionist portrait paintings she would have seen and studied in France and England. Two other paintings are reproduced here (Figures 58 and 59) to show how Hodgkins' approach to representation changed over the 1920s as she gained a reputation for her work. Her catalogue is compelling and full of beauty, and it is unlikely that she would have gained the same inspiration or shown the same innovativeness, had she not left New Zealand for her peripatetic wandering. She was:

> …resistant to any particular style, forever on the move, her place within modernist art has never been settled…she exemplified the progressive attitude and spirit of the 'colonial woman': a single, talented local artists who left for Europe in her early thirties…she worked, as she wished, as an independent professional artist in a career that spanned six decades…(Hammond, Kisler, and Auckland Art Gallery 2019, 1)

FIGURE 57: *BABETTE* 1905

FIGURE 58: *VENETIAN LAGOON* C. 1921

Frances Hodgkins had a long life and, given the attachments she maintained, the visits she made, the New Zealand exhibitions she held, and the sales she achieved in the Dominion, she would be classified as a New Zealand artist, albeit an expatriate one. She figured in art histories of other countries but that, probably, owed more to her professional achievements than to her nationality. She has achieved an iconic status in New Zealand's art history which would not have been achieved if she was viewed as owing allegiance to another country. Therefore, the paintings she made in the 1920s should be recognised as being made by a New Zealand artist.

FIGURE 59: *THE WHITE HOUSE* C. 1930

A young artist, Rhona Haszard, worked and lived overseas and, like Hodgkins, drew inspiration from the countries she visited and the people she met in them. Born in 1901 and dead from suicide in 1931, she was a very talented artist who journeyed to Europe in 1925. Michael Dunn, in a rather luke-warm commentary, said that:

> Her significance as a painter evolves rapidly after her travel to Europe…and it is to the few years before her death in 1931 that her major achievement as a painter belongs. She evolved a style of Post-Impressionism based on a high-pitched colouring, patch-like paint application and decorative surface treatment.(1991, 67)

FIGURE 60: *THE MARNE VALLEY* 1927, RHONA HASZARD

Dunn thought that her work "is not challenging in subject-matter, composition or distortion of form…rather it is a tame compromise." Dunn further suggested that Haszard's work "became known in New Zealand after her early death by means of a touring exhibition arranged by her husband Leslie Greener." (ibid p 67). Dunn's commentary is contestable: Haszard was referred to in Portrait of a Gallery as "winning a prize of 10 shillings for a painting of a still life in the 1921 Academy" (Kay and Eden 1983, 70); the 1925 Canterbury Society of Arts Exhibition catalogue had works by Rhona McKenzie hung in the exhibition (McKenzie was her married name from an early and relatively short marriage); and she will have been known from her student days in Christchurch. The point is that Haszard would have been known as a student or working artist prior to her leaving New Zealand. But Dunn is correct in his assessment "that her significance as a painter evolves rapidly after her travel to Europe" (p 67). She had become a modernist painter and captured her subjects in a way that set her apart from other New Zealand landscape painters in the 1920s. With her use of colour and calm brushwork she establishes a mood (see Figure 60) that makes her paintings, albeit modernist,

attractive to the viewer who may have been wedded to the late Victorian mode of painting prevalent in New Zealand art in the 1920s.

New Zealand's economy was slowly strengthening in the years leading up to the Great Depression and this relatively pedestrian improvement was mirrored by our fine arts. But we were still hanging on to our traditional British market for security reasons and because it was easier than securing new markets. Our fine artists were also reluctant to venture into new territories, it being safer to hold onto their traditional methods and subjects. But a number of artists were clearly not prepared to wait for the public to accept innovation in art as it was doing in the area of economic development. Their movement overseas and into the ex-patriate category, seems as much motivated by frustration with the slow rate of change in New Zealand as it was their desire to improve themselves professionally. As discussed above, they continued to contribute to our visual culture and added a valuable cutting edge to the imagery created by photographers and cartoonists. They also provided examples of their art to challenge the domestic artists to greater levels of achievement. The expatriate artists, therefore, occupied an important place in New Zealand's economic, social, as well as cultural development.

Chapter Three: Political Change

Over the 1920s, New Zealand politics underwent structural change which signaled the movement from colonialist politics to the political groupings which evolved in the next decade and which, to some extent would be recognisable in politics today. The traditional party of government – the Liberal party – was fading and even though it regained the Treasury benches in 1928 (a poisoned chalice if ever there was one) the power struggle was being moved to the center-left, with the Reform Party, the party of small farmers and urban businessmen, controlling the center and parliamentary politics in much of the decade, and the Labour Party, representing the interests of the working class, moving two steps forward and one back, in its march to 1935 and political power.

FIGURE 61: PRIME MINISTER MASSEY WITH THE GOVERNOR GENERAL, LORD JELLICOE

In this chapter I explore the changes in post-colonial New Zealand that are being worked through in the 1920s and expressed in the political discourse. I discuss the personalities that dominated politics from the turn of the century to the early 1930s and some of the issues with which they are associated: colonial adventuring; labour unrest; Bolshevism; land policies; and the rise and fall of political party associations. Visual culture and the use and interrogation of images from the period, makes considerable contribution to the research.

Between 1900 and 1935 there were eleven elections, with the Liberal Party, more accurately perhaps, Richard Seddon's party, holding power until William Massey and the Reform Party gained victory in 1912. Massey dominated politics until his death in 1925 when Joseph Ward and Gordon Coates took the reins of Government. Leading New Zealand through its colonial period, war and into the challenging 1920s, New Zealand had, in Seddon and Massey, two charismatic and influential leaders, who each ruled for thirteen years. Keith Sinclair writes:

> … historians have emphasized Massey's probity, thus by implication echoing a popular view that the term 'honest politician' is paradoxical. Massey was Seddon's equal as a parliamentary tactician; he was as verbose; he bore quite as excessive a load of portfolios; he was similarly peripatetic in pursuit of voters; he was as hearty and genial in manner; but he cuts rather less of a figure in New Zealand politics. Unlike Seddon he never overcame his education and upbringing. 'King Dick' was as unlettered as 'Farmer Bill' but his boundless ambition carried him to a wider vision." (1969, 239)

FIGURE 62: SEDDON ON THE STUMP

Seddon's background as a publican from the West Coast fitted him well for the rough and tumble for which late 19th century politics—Tammany Hall politics according to many—were renowned. Seddon distrusted patricians, estate agents and bankers but held a coalition of competing interests together with his forceful personality, intelligence, and political acuity. An informal photograph (Figure 62) shows an imperious gaze and suggests strength of character. Like Massey he had strong imperial sentiments and was an active and strong supporter of Britain and the British Empire and New Zealand's position as a favoured member of it. Seddon repeatedly proposed increasing New Zealand's role in the Pacific[47] with his pleading being responded to after the War with the apportioning of German interests in the Pacific.

[47] Annexure of the Cook Islands in 1901 was not enough to quieten Seddon's ambitions. The League of Nations mandate for New Zealand to govern Western Samoa came too late for Seddon; at least he was spared being confronted with New Zealand's poor record of governance in Western Samoa.

FIGURE 63: *SEDDON - PACIFIC EMPEROR*

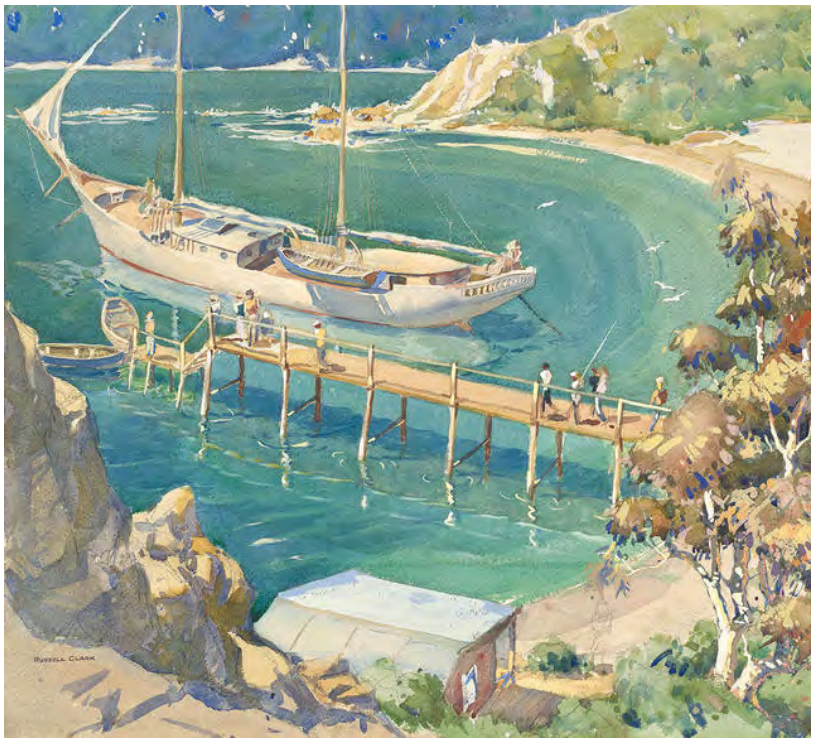

FIGURE 64: *ISLAND TRADER* 1929, RUSSELL CLARK

I have included Russell Clark's painting, *Island Trader,* above for several reasons. Clark was one of a small number of painters producing images of significant events. Although the painting seems to conjure up the image of a benign and delightful location, the reality needs to be seen in light of Figure 63 which gives a clear signal about Seddon's ambitions. The *Scatz* cartoon, drawn for the *Graphic* in 1900, shows Seddon as a traditional chief who looks as if he has the intention to rule his subjects and make money off them. The British paraphernalia suggests Seddon has sympathy for the British colonial style—not a good model to emulate. A subtext in Clark's painting could be that behind the peaceful image there was discord in the Pacific stimulated by suspicions about New Zealand's imperial plans.[48]

Elections in the early part of the 20th century showed that the "natural" leadership of the country (which was how the Liberal politicians thought of themselves) was having to face an electorate that was becoming less tractable and composed of a range of interests that settler society, while still powerful, had to take into account in decisions about the division of resources. Richard Seddon died in 1906 and the party leadership was taken by Joseph Ward, a conservative dandy, and a very different character from Seddon (although he too was a huge admirer of the pomp surrounding Court and Imperial Conference proceedings).

With growing incomes, increasing urbanisation, a modernizing economy and society and with Massey's Reform Party growing in strength, the traditional discourse in New Zealand politics was changing. In the 1908 election the Liberal Party was elected with 58.7 percent of the vote to the Reform Party's 27.8 percent. In 1911 the percentages were 40.7 and 34.6 respectively. Leaving aside the National (unity coalition arrangement) election in 1914, by 1919 the vote percentages had moved to Liberal at 28.2 percent with Reform and Massey on 36 percent (Labor and independent members had increased dramatically over the war period to 23.7 and 10.7 percent).

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[48] I have a personal interest in the Clark painting. My maternal grandfather, an immigrant from Sweden, owned and captained an island trading ketch. He made regular Pacific trading voyages in the "Yvonne" until he was swept overboard in a cyclone off Coromandel in 1937. He, and his large family, have contributed much to New Zealand.

FIGURE 65: SIR JOSEPH WARD

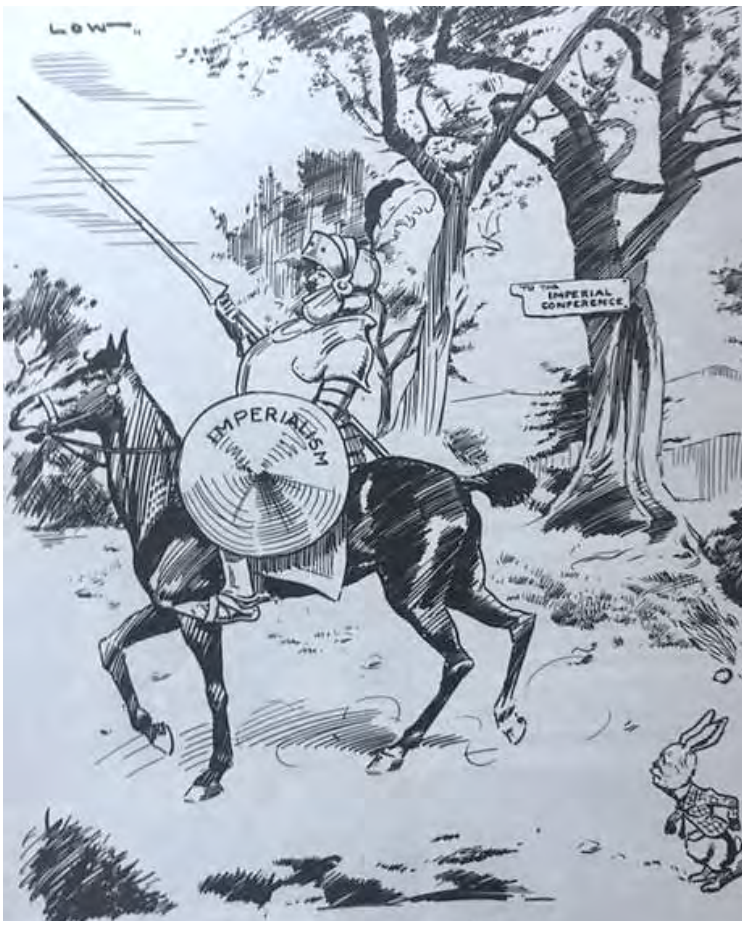

FIGURE 66: SIR JOSEPH, THE IMPERIAL KNIGHT

The Labour Party was becoming a force on the left and demanding that the interests of the working class be taken seriously. This also brought international labour interests into New Zealand politics with the conservative traditionalists painting Labour with communist and Bolshevik labels. In the period before the First World War there was a considerable amount of industrial unrest, with a somewhat confusing succession of labour interests fighting for better conditions for workers. Seddon and the Liberals had maintained a commitment to the worker, but the change of leadership from Seddon to the smoothly attired Joseph Ward, had seen the end of that commitment. Ward also signaled his support for the Arbitration Court which was increasingly adopting a pro-employer position. The Liberal policies were multifaceted and represented a wider discourse than a simple worker versus the government dialectic. Farmers, for example, were becoming increasingly concerned about the government's actions being taken to handle worker disruption—the formation of the Farmers' Union was a clear signal that farmers, and particularly dairy farmers, needed an organization to safeguard their

interests. Worker collective activity revolved around the highly political "Red Feds" and the opposition of more moderate unionists who were convinced that Parliament was the more practical and effective way to achieve their aims.[49] With worker action on the waterfront, at the Waihi Gold Mine, and finally the threat of a general strike, (the I.W.W. agitators[50] were in the thick of the action) the scene was set for a Government crack-down, which a new Government under Massey and employers were happy to provide.

Keith Sinclair suggests that Massey and his conservative supporters were quite willing to raise, at every opportunity, the "dangers of a new 'Red Fed' visitation." He further points out that:

> …the real issues were elsewhere [other than between the red flag and the Union Jack]. New Zealand parties … were 'sectional alliances '. Politics were in part the rivalry of the regional and other economic interests, town versus country, importer against manufacturer, employer against employee, north opposed to south. There were also considerable differences of principle. The Liberal Party had set the pace: Labour was to take the baton … and continue in the same direction; the Reform Party, like the late nineteenth-century conservatives, was a 'party of resistance' against progress towards the welfare state."(1969, 251)

The actions taken by Massey and his supporters to forcefully break striker resolve have gone down in New Zealand folklore. The government recruited students, farmers and mounted law enforcement privateers (special constables) armed with clubs and sent them out on a mission to clear away the agitators. "Massey's Cossacks" as they became known, had the objective to keep wharves open and operating (the initial action was in Wellington, but it spread to sites around the country). Massey's objectives were met, and the wharves were kept open and trade flowing, but his strategy was only successful at reputational cost and further bitterness between the Government and sectional interests, and workers.

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[50] "The Red Feds" was the slang term for agitators representing the American-based Industrial Workers of the World (also known as the 'Wobblies').

FIGURE 67: *ANOTHER HOPELESS DAWN*

Land ownership, distribution and occupation had been a (probably the) significant discourse in New Zealand throughout its colonial history. It was intensely political with powerful groups securing their interests in a variety of ways, some creative, some supported by political action and some illegal. The Liberal Party, with West Coaster Seddon in charge, had an uneasy relationship with the large run-holders who were a major force in the power elite and who favoured the lease-in-perpetuity structure which gave them considerable economic advantage (provided that the leasehold cost was maintained at a low level). The Reform Party, with the "small-farmer" Bill Massey at the helm, had drawn much of its support from small farmers[51] and urban businessmen and so it goes almost without saying, that its attitude to land ownership would favour those interests. This meant an attack on the leasehold policy of the Liberals, an attack which helped defeat a dispirited Liberal Party government led by

[51] Primarily North Island dairy farmers.

Joseph Ward. Massey's 1912 government, as an early legislative move, enacted legislation allowing freehold tenure of leased land, a policy pursued by the Farmers Union.

FIGURE 68: *THE GREAT LAND SALE*

The irony of this initiative is highlighted by Gilmour's *Canterbury Times* cartoon published in 1913 (Figure 68) not long after Massey had secured the freehold policy. The skillfully drawn cartoon shows the little farmer unable to participate in the land auction because of the crowd of wealthy landowners and big farmers who are monopolising the buyers' positions in the sale room, and who are in a much better place to buy the freehold land and make a profit from the transaction, than Massey's intended target, the small farmer. The demand for land led to a speculative boom which was unsustainable, and when the 1920/21 depression hit, the boom burst. Meanwhile Labour, in common with socialist parties the world over, had been pursuing a policy position that called for the nationalization of land. This was not electorally

popular as it allowed for attack from the conservative right on the dangers of electing a "Russian stooge" to any position of power in New Zealand. Labour moved away from the doctrinal pursuit of land nationalization (which resulted in Labour's position on land purchasing becoming like that promoted by the Reform Party).

William Massey was in indifferent health when the Reform Party was reelected in 1922. In the post-war period, Reform showed itself to be a strong supporter of anti-Catholic and anti-Labour politics. Massey also endorsed, very publicly, the need for stronger British imperialism, not only because he was, at heart, an ardent imperialist himself, but because he was also an anti-Communist who believed that Bolshevism was a dangerous philosophy that had to be countered by any means possible.

FIGURE 69: QUEUING FOR COAL IN A DEPRESSION[52]

The Government's reaction to the 1920/21 depression showed Reform's hand in relation to budget matters: local and central government expenditure was used to balance out dropping farm incomes; to balance its budget, public servant wage reductions were instituted; and maneuvers in the Arbitration Court brought downward pressures on wage earners. This policy package was ineffective in turning the economy around and, importantly, provided a set of deflationary policies which were also to be pursued, with disastrous results, in the Great Depression later in the decade. It was a telling rehearsal which showed that many years of conservative economics had not, to that point at least, succeeded in teaching lessons about how to increase economic activity in a depression. An economic recovery arrived just in time to help Reform win 46.5% of the vote in the 1925 election. Earlier in the year Massey died

[52] This photograph of people in Wellington queuing in bad weather for supply of coal appeared in the *Weekly News* (April 1920) and was referred to as a "pitiable sight in this land of plenty".

aged 69. After a brief interregnum (Francis Bell was an interim Prime Minister) J. G. Coates became leader of the Reform Party and Prime Minister.

FIGURE 70: WILLIAM MASSEY'S FUNERAL PROCESSION

Gordon Coates was an enigmatic figure. From Hukatere in the Kaipara region where his family had a small leasehold farm, Coates was basically homeschooled, had to look after the family farm with his father's bipolar illness and gradually became involved in farmer politics. He was fluent in Te Reo which has not been a common skill for New Zealand Prime Ministers. He entered Parliament in 1911 as an Independent although aligned with the Liberal Party. His experience of involvement with a leasehold farm and Liberal's opposition to changing to support the "Freehold" model, saw Coates change his allegiance to the Reform Party. He worked with politicians from across the political spectrum and assumed responsibility for a variety of Cabinet positions including Works, Railways, Native Affairs and Justice. He also served with distinction in the First World War. He won a caucus ballot for Prime Minister on 30 May 1925.

FIGURE 71: P. M. COATES AT NGĀRUAWAHIA

FIGURE 72: COATES ADDRESSING PARLIAMENT

Coates campaigned strongly in the 1925 election. He ran an upbeat campaign and used a slogan “Coats off with Coates” which caught the imagination of the voters (particularly against an opposition of Harry Holland, Labour, and George Forbes in the remains of the Liberal Party). Coates won with close to an outright majority. Then followed a Prime Ministership which was renowned and castigated for profound inaction. This is why I labelled George Coates “an enigma:” he was an intelligent man with a very good public image; he had compassion for Māori and was a friend of Apirana Ngata; he was the progenitor of many of the policies for which Labour got the credit in the 1930s; and he had led Reform to its strongest electoral victory. However, the Reform Party was in thrall to agrarian interests and was, effectively, required to pursue a policy agenda based on the

interests of the small-farmers of the North Island. There was not much evidence, at least in the public's perception, that Reform was caring for the interests of the urban population. And, even though Reform did, historically, get support from the business sector as well as its support from farming interests, voter concerns about the state of the economy made Reform and Coates vulnerable electorally. Coates exuded confidence and had an innovative election campaign, but this was not enough to convince voters to stick with Reform, and the public's perception of government inaction and, probably, fear of the encroaching recession, combined to consign Coates and Reform to electoral defeat after one term in office.

FIGURE 73: CHRISTCHURCH 1928—WAITING FOR THE RESULTS

In 1928, the Liberals returned to power for the final time under their "United" identity (which in the 1930s became the National Party in a coalition with Reform and conservative interests). In a surprising reach into the past, the leadership of the United election coalition was given to an obviously sick Sir Joseph Ward.

FIGURE 74: JOSEPH WARD'S RETURN

Ward had made confusing electoral promises about borrowing which had created a belief in the electorate that a Liberal government would return the economy to the good times of earlier years by borrowing heavily and injecting significant amounts of borrowed funds into the economy. This did not happen as the economy and the Government fell into the Great Depression. As had the Reform Government earlier in the decade, the Liberals based their management strategy on contraction. This worsened the situation facing the New Zealand population and lengthened the period of economic and social misery in the country. The town/country discourse was recorded in photography and cartoons but there is little evidence that a fine-art response to one of the major events in New Zealand's history, was forthcoming. In the relatively short period from the end of the First World War to the Great Depression some significant discourses were being played out in New Zealand: traditions were being overturned; new alliances were being formed; questions about income distribution were being raised and debated; the social and cultural conditions were being established in which major and far-reaching political change would be achieved. As far as art was concerned, art galleries were being opened and art exhibitions, often with an international emphasis, were being mounted; art education was undergoing strengthening and change; and the foundations were being laid for the modern approaches to art that were a feature of the mid to late-1930s and into the future.

In this chapter on New Zealand politics in and around the 1920s, while providing details about the personalities and actions of the party leaders, it is possible to conclude that the relatively tepid performance of the economy, and the industrial and social unrest that

occurred throughout the country, had much to do with the quality of leadership in the main parties and the inadequacy of their, and their parties', policies. To borrow from the title of this thesis, there did seem to be a wasteland in New Zealand, but it was more to do with politicians than artists. Just when the country was getting over the pain and disruption of war and the influenza epidemic, there needed to be a leader standing up and, with intelligence, energy, and soundly-based plans, showing the country that they were in good hands. Coates showed that he might have been such a person, but he froze in the face of the challenge.

Chapter Four: Arts and Culture

> That one will be the painter, the true painter, who will know how to wrest from the life of the present its epic aspect, and make us see and understand, through colour and drawing, how great and poetic we are in our cravats and patent leather boots."[53]

According to Peter Tomory, a well-educated and forthright art historian who was the Director of the Auckland City Art Gallery in the 1950s (and did much to improve the reputation and acquisitions of that establishment), New Zealand the 1920s was a wasteland. In an essay on the visual arts in *Distance Looks Our Way* he wrote[54]:

> Those years between the First World War and the depression were indeed a wasteland. Meanwhile the land lay waiting and its people, in Gothic fear, cultivated their English gardens; secure within the palings of their quarter-acres from the pagan wilderness of hills and native bush … Land for the European painter has provided a multitude of profound images … the land has held a dominant position in myth and legend … most [New Zealanders] are at the initial stages of topographic identification. They can recognise the visual form but they cannot read the felt image. (1961, 72)

Tomory was typically blunt in this rather florid example of his writing and raised a number of matters that will be addressed in this chapter. He outlined his wasteland trope, pointed to the New Zealander's devotion to things British, alluded to the nature and content of painting in the period, and, by means of a glancing blow, provided a critique of the depth of artistic comprehension of "most" of the country. In this latter assessment it can be assumed that the art society and its supporters were targets given the actions taken at the Auckland City Art

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[53] The quotation from Charles Baudelaire, "Salon de 1845." was used by T.J. Clark in his book *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (1999, 271). In the1920s New Zealand we were without an Edouard Manet but, and with apologies to Baudelaire, we did have artists (not necessarily easel artists) in a variety of media who were able to bring to life New Zealand in that period.

[54] Keith Sinclair edited the publication *Distance Looks Our Way* as well as contributing an essay in which he offered a commentary on some of the drivers of New Zealand's development. Other contributors included R. M. Chapman, C.K. Stead as well as Tomory.

Gallery under Tomory's direction, towards art societies and amateur (or perhaps non-professional) painters. Another matter, and from a New Zealand viewpoint a very important one, is the absence of consideration of Māori art. As will be discussed, art by Māori artists and craftsmen made an important contribution to 1920s visual culture and its steady growth—a revival of sorts—was a significant element of New Zealand's national cultural scene.

Was New Zealand in the 1920s the wasteland for art that Tomory repeatedly claimed? The remark was consistent with his attitude to artistic development in the Dominion and one repeated (perhaps not with the same vigour) by some of the leading art commentators (Gordon Brown and Hamish Keith, in particular).[55] In their influential publication *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting 1839-1980* their position was stated as:

> P.A. Tomory's comment that the "years between the First World War and the depression were indeed a wasteland" is, in many ways, a justifiable, though over-simplified assessment of the general artistic situation found in New Zealand. However, like the eighteen-eighties, the decade and a half following the war saw a real attempt to consolidate the visual arts, even if this attempt was more successful socially than notable for the quality of its paintings (1992, 97).

This statement was notable for a number of reasons. Brown and Keith appear to be hedging their bets about the full-scale acceptance of the Tomory thesis; they talk about consolidating the visual arts and that could imply the acceptance of such "artistic" presentations as photography, commercial art and cartooning; the emphasis on social success is significant for a number of reasons, most particularly because it is a reasonable assumption that the "art society" ethos was, probably, a major contributor to a lack of experimentation and innovation in New Zealand art.

In *Distance Looks Our Way*, Tomory put forward a structure which he used to explain the development of New Zealand art. It had three components, with time periods embedded in them, that provided a useful taxonomy which "distinguished the three distinct strata of attitude which were to be found in early settlers' society." The first, which Tomory called the

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[55] Gordon Brown and Hamish Keith both worked in the Auckland City Art Gallery and the extent to which they "adopted" the Tomory viewpoint remains an open question.

"romantic individuals", could be found in the army, as surveyors, or missionaries and were mainly creating topographic images; the second group (which came later) were "the speculator settlers" who confined their artistic interests to "scenic attractions"; and the third set, the "economic immigrants", spent "a great deal of their time searching in every part of this land for something that was forever England." (1961, 66,67).

Translated into cultural terms, Tomory's model can relate to the early painters in New Zealand, for example he refers to the Reverend John Kinder, the surveyor John Buchanan and, from the military, Charles Heaphy. Buchanan's Milford Sound is reproduced below (Figure 75) and it is hard to disagree with it being classed as "an early masterpiece in New Zealand landscape painting" (Docking and Dunn 1990, 36). Although being categorised as a "topographic" artist,[56] Buchanan has captured the magnificent grandeur of Milford Sound and given it an almost mystical quality.

FIGURE 75: *MILFORD SOUND* 1863, JOHN BUCHANAN

As far as the second group is concerned, Tomory is critical of painters that could be associated with that group, such artists as John Gully and J.C. Hoyte (see Figure 76), who, as professional painters, were influenced by patronage and "soon succumb to the repetitive production of popular devotional images, either nostalgic or super-scenic".

[56] The topographic artist was concerned to represent, accurately, the arrangement of natural and artificial features to be represented on a map of the area.

FIGURE 76: *ENTRANCE TO WHANGAREI RIVER*, 1871. JOHN HOYTE

The third stage - "images of home"- could be aligned with our period and the art that was influenced by 19th century Victorian romanticism. This art was the basic staple of the art societies and their annual exhibitions. Tomory obviously disliked art from this third period as shown by his actions in refusing to continue the practice of holding art society exhibitions in the Auckland gallery, with the justification for this being that the showing of poor-quality art would undermine the mission of the gallery to educate the public about quality art and to improve the viewers' taste in art. While it is hard to criticise Tomory's model as it is logical and aligns with the realities of early New Zealand, but the discourse is simplistic and composed for polemical reasons as well as providing Tomory with a vehicle with which he could promote his attitude to New Zealand art prior to the appearance of the canonical group of artists in the 1930s who were regarded as the "true heroes" of the modern movement in this country[57]. As Courtney Johnston wrote in her 2004 MA thesis *Peter Tomory: The New Zealand Years 1956 – 1968*:

[57] Rita Angus, Toss Woollaston and Colin McCahon were heavily promoted by Tomory and ACAG as occupying a central role in New Zealand's art history.

> The criticism most often levelled at the Gallery's exhibition policy (and therefore at Tomory and other Gallery staff, namely Keith and Brown) by post-nationalist critics is that exhibitions of New Zealand art at this stage[58] served largely to construct a canon of New Zealand artists approved by nationalist writers; a canon of painters who responded to the supposedly unique character of the New Zealand landscape and the New Zealand light. (2004, 99)

Notwithstanding the brilliance of the art created by Angus, Woollaston and McCahon, there were many artists (including artists classified as photographers, cartoonists, and commercial artists) working in New Zealand to create images that met their own needs or those of their patrons and audiences, who supported "art" and had respect for visual images: these artists could be overlooked, or discounted, by calling the post-war period a wasteland. The use of the term by art historians and, as a consequence, the qualitative judgements made about art and artists active in the 1920s, has created a false understanding of the importance of the period to New Zealand's art. This thesis cannot be sufficiently comprehensive to properly redress this issue, but the following analysis of the art of the period, and the visual evidence supporting the 1920s' political and economic discourses, may contribute to further research and a wider debate about the issues initiated by Tomory's trope.

Analysis of the necessarily selective sample of visual material associated with the earlier chapters showed how embedded visual material is in the discourses that most people confront each day. Because of that, visual material helps to explain the content and significance of these ubiquitous discourses but, beyond interpretation, the public confrontation with visual material helps to create new discourses or new interpretations of old ones. The political discourse provides a good example of this: the speed with which the cartoon artist can prepare and publish pertinent observations about political events enables all the discourse participants to be constantly aware of the issues and regularly analysing them. This could make the political process more effective, but that may be a vain hope.

[58] The period in the 1950s and 1960s associated with Tomory's leadership of the Gallery.

Art in the 1920s

A dialogue between the then President of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts,[59] Mr H.S. Wardell and the Mayor of Wellington, Alfred K. Newman (who gave a speech at the opening of the 1909 Annual Exhibition), exposed an issue that remained with the public's appreciation of New Zealand's visual culture, for decades:

> The mayor was thankful to see that the rubbish called the impressionist school was nearly wiped out of existence and "deliberately" said that this school "was a retrograde step in art and he cared not who said no". (Prompt cries of dissent from the artists present). It is just as well that he was not exposed to the avant-garde of his day: how would he have reacted to a Braque or a Picasso? (Kay and Eden 1983, 52)

Mayor Newman was unrepentantly voicing an opinion that may have been out of place at an art exhibition (although he was at least aware of Impressionism) but its essence would be repeated at saleyards, rugby clubs, pubs and similar locations throughout the country. He at least used moderate language to convey his prejudices: in a letter to the Wanganui Chronicle, a reader, reflecting on a modernist exhibition in the Sarjeant Gallery, admitted agreeing with the "critical" reviewer who had concluded that "such daubs should not be hung in public, and their painters hung" (Wanganui Chronicle 1927). Although the Chronicle writer may have been resorting to flamboyant language to emphasise a point, the substance of the remark was the same as that proposed by Mayor Newman nearly two decades previously. If the mission of the art societies included educating the public about the beauty of art and its contribution to a civilised society, they were involved in a very difficult task.

Anthony Mackle, in a thoughtful essay for a National Art Gallery catalogue in which he commented on touring exhibitions organised by Mr and Mrs Murray Fuller (for which various art societies were willing partners), outlined an important element in the conservative approach to artistic innovation in the 1920s (and 1930s). He wrote:

> The conflict between tradition and innovation … [the] Fullers, both as dealers and influential members of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts organised large touring exhibitions of British art … For the most part they consisted of the work of

[55] A grand name for what was, effectively, the Wellington-based art society.

> members of the Royal Academy and were therefore traditional in orientation …the New Zealand public … were not confronted by any new or stimulating concepts. Entrenched expectations and ideas tended to be reinforced rather than dislodged by these exhibitions. (National Art Gallery 1984, 12).

The painting *The Angler* by Sir William Orpen RA (Figure 77) is a good example of the situation outlined by Mackle. It is an attractive post-impressionist painting by a respected and popular member of the Royal Academy but, notwithstanding its likely appeal to many members of the viewing public, it does not break new ground. Across the English Channel, artists in Germany, Italy and France were following their own revolutionary vision[60] at the same time that Orpen painted, probably for a patron (related to the subject?), this very pleasant portrait.

FIGURE 77: *THE ANGLER* C. 1912, SIR WILLIAM ORPEN

[60] The Orpen work was painted at the same time that Picasso was creating *Ma Jolie*, Juan Gris his *Portrait of Picasso*, Braque *Man with a Guitar*, Boccioni *Dynamism of a Cyclist*, to name but a few of the artists changing the way we saw and thought about modern life.

The art societies faced a number of issues which contributed to this lack of innovation and the authority of tradition. They were wedded to the regular (usually annual) exhibitions which offered exhibitors with an opportunity to sell their works; they had a relatively un-discriminating public that did not always view new works favourably; their membership was often dominated by well-meaning citizens who, while perhaps not themselves being artists of the first rank, had strong views about who and what should be hung.[61] The works hung, donated, borrowed or purchased (for lodging, eventually, in the local art gallery) gave a good indication of the cultural attitudes of local populations. The photograph below (Figure 78) is of the Council of the Academy of Fine Arts selecting works that would be hung in a 1928 exhibition. The photo suggests that the Council is dominated by middle-class white men of a certain age. M. E. R. Tripe is the sole woman and would, along with Nugent Welch, be artist members of the Council. The membership of the Council and, as a consequence, the decisions it makes about who was an acceptable artist producing a suitable body of work, was important in that it channelled artists to produce works that met the real or imagined standards of their Society.

Building a Collection

A good example of the impact of a devotion to British and Grand Master art on local art galleries and their creation of a collection of New Zealand, let alone modernist, paintings, can be detected in the 1920s acquisition policies and practices of Whanganui's Sarjeant Gallery. Henry Sarjeant, "a prominent local farmer" died in 1912 leaving a bequest of thirty thousand pounds to establish an art gallery. The Sarjeant Gallery was officially opened by the New Zealand Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. W. F. Massey, on 8 September 1919 (Thomson 1981, 31). The Prime Minister was reported as saying that "the time would come when the Gallery…would be filled with works of art by New Zealand artists and works of art from other countries."[62] In a report written in 1935 for the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the authors commented:

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[61] Give Tomory his due: he was heavily critical of judgements on artistic merit being formulated by committees of amateurs, arguing for the need for professionalism in art administration.

[62] *Wanganui Chronicle*, 8 September 1919, p5. Massey's enthusiasm for New Zealand art did not align well with the public view that art from "home" was the gold-standard for art quality.

FIGURE 78: COMMITTEE SELECTING EXHIBITION WORKS 1928

> At Wanganui, the art gallery, library and museum, three separate buildings in which modern ideas of lighting have been successfully applied, are located on a pleasant hill near the centre of the town, and they form an admirable example to every town of a similar population in the Southern Hemisphere (Markham S.F. 1933, 85).

Wanganui had its "admirable" new art gallery leaving the challenge of building up a collection worthy of its modern (for the time) gallery. An article from the 22 September edition of the Wanganui Chronicle reporting on the opening exhibition gave an indication of the local reaction to "splendid" painting:

> Over 2000 people have already visited the exhibition, which is indeed a magnificent one, so many famous artists are represented by fine examples of their work … *Sunny Hours* by Sir Ernest Waterlow, R. A., is a splendid picture … we are fortunate in having a picture by such a famous man … *The Wizard's Garden* by C. D. Leslie, R.A., is another fine picture.

The exhibition policy involved making maximum use of loan paintings. Mayor Charles Mackay, in a review of the opening exhibition, was struck by the success of the exhibition and the fact that 10,000 people attended it in the 12 months it was open. He put forward a plan for the following year which incorporated a loan exhibition for three months while, at the same time building up a permanent collection with works of outstanding merit. The loan exhibition, while ambitious, would involve, in Mackay's words "requests to each of the leading artists of the Dominion to exhibit a certain number of pictures … private collectors … Art Societies in Australia and America … the French, Italian and Japanese Governments". He further mentioned a point that would impact on the quality and coverage of the Sarjeant Gallery collection—"Mr and Mrs Neame while in England would endeavour to arrange for English paintings."[63]

Mr. And Mrs. J. A. Neame were prominent members of the Wanganui Arts and Craft Society. Neame was Assistant Master at the Wanganui Collegiate School and Mrs Neame (previously Mrs Sarjeant) had married him after Mr Sarjeant's death. They both had a strong interest in art with tastes that preferenced Victorian art and classical works. In a letter dated September 1920 from Neame to the Wanganui Borough Council he wrote:

> Mrs Neame and I are going to Italy again for the winter and shall take steps to acquire the plaster casts for which the Borough Council gave us instructions. And we shall continue collect posters of art design and workmanship to make an exhibition worthy of the Sarjeant Gallery. You will be relieved to hear we are not in any way taken with the ultra-modern schools of Cubism and similar cults.[64]

The point pursued here is that Mr and Mrs Neame had a considerable influence on the artworks accessioned by the Sarjeant in the 1920s. The Gallery records show the impact of the Neame purchasing activities and the works consigned to the Sarjeant from Europe. At a

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[63] The comments on the opening exhibition are all taken from the Wanganui Chronicle of 22 September 1920.

[64] This letter from J. A. Neame was take from the Sarjeant Gallery website on October 7, 2002. https://collection.sarjeant.org.nz/persons/8996/john-arms. In it Neame's strong affirmation of his taste in art (albeit couched in the negative) is prophetic. He also indicated that he and his wife were regularly in Europe and pointed to them being given an art purchasing role by the council while they were there.

time that New Zealand was modernising rapidly, when efforts were being made to improve artists' skills, when the viewing public needed to be exposed to examples of art from "the ultra-modern schools," the Sarjeant, through its purchasing agents, remained firmly rooted in the past.

Building a collection for a small city like Wanganui, must have been a daunting task and required the use of different methods to achieve, in a relatively short time, a good outcome. Accessioning records for the 1920s[65] indicated that the Sarjeant used a range of tactics including: using purchasing agents like the Neames (Figures 79 and 80); accepting gifts of artworks (the large collection of Lydia Larden's watercolours donated by Mrs W. Birch (Figure 81) gave a good example of 19th century British painting of "interesting" quality); being gifted of paintings or collections by bequest (the Barraud bequest was a major acquisition see Figure 85); receiving artworks from wealthy donors (e.g. The collection donated by Lord Leverhulme[66] see Figures 83 and 84); and purchasing works from the Art Society exhibitions, travelling exhibitions and dealers (Figure 82). In relation to one dealer's exhibition it was impossible to miss the Chronicle writer's adulation for the works included:

> A beautiful array of works of art … a veritable gallery generously filled with choice treasures culled with artistic discrimination from some of the Motherland's notable collections. Royal Academicians whose creative genius has won them high standing in the world of art … [thanking Wellington's McKenna Art Galleries for the] acquisitions of pictures that come into markets of the old country through the dispersal of house and gallery collections. (*Wanganui Chronicle* 31 July 1926)

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[65] https://collection.sarjeant.org.nz/objects?query=acq_date%3A%5B1919+TO+1930%. Searched October 7, 2002.

[66] The following comments were from the *Wanganui Chronicle* of 9 January 1924: "Lord Leverhulme is one of the leading patrons of pictorial art in Great Britain. Sarjeant gave part of his estate … to establish the Gallery … not necessarily to favour works of colonial artists. Leverhulme [after being asked to provide picture loans] couldn't provide a loan collection because works were not available given the demand in Great Britain…he felt the Gallery was worthy of encouragement and undertook to send a 'collection of pictures'… in that they would serve as an inspiration to the people of Wanganui". Two examples of Leverhulme paintings, the content of which does not surprise, are reproduced (Figure 83, Figure 84).

FIGURE 79 (TOP LEFT): *THE APPEARANCE OF THE VIRGIN TO ST MAURICE* C. 17TH C, TREVISANI

FIGURE 80 (TOP RIGHT): *THE GLEANERS* DATE UNKNOWN, CIRCLE OF JEAN-FRANCOIS MILLET

FIGURE 81 (BOTTOM LEFT): *NEAR WATERSMEET, LYNMOUTH* 1877, LYDIA LARDEN

FIGURE 82 (BOTTOM RIGHT): *THE CAFÉ RESTAURANT* 1911, FRANK BRANGWYN

FIGURE 83 (TOP LEFT): *THE TOAST IS ENGLAND* C. 1900, FRED COE

FIGURE 84 (TOP RIGHT): *CURIOUSITY* 1891, EUGEN VON BLAST

FIGURE 85 (BOTTOM LEFT): *PRISONERS OF WAR* 1900, FRANCIS PHILIP BARRAUD

The preceding section was included to give examples of artworks that were accessioned by one New Zealand gallery in the 1920s and to demonstrate the nature of the works being

given, bought or borrowed for display in the Sarjeant Art Gallery. Although it is only a moderately sized sample, it seems that other galleries were operating on the same model. Susan Butterworth, writing about the Suter Gallery in Nelson in the inter-war years commented:

> The emergence of a "collection policy" is a rather grand way of describing the fact that the gallery could actually buy the occasional picture rather than depending upon donations of works…there was [in the 1920s and 1930s] a tendency for members of the trust board or art society when travelling overseas—usually to Britain—to be empowered to buy on behalf of the gallery … it has been noted that during the 1920s and into the 1930s the few New Zealand art galleries, including the Suter gallery, became fixated upon British academic art and to some degree turned away from the native product … these acquisitions were not even the best work of the artists concerned. (1999, 43)

The domination of the collecting process by people or groups that prided themselves on their capacity to recognise "good art"—city councillors, middle-class businessmen, art society electees and devoted members, art critics, and the occasional artist, to name a few—had a major impact on the type of art collected and shown and, by its anti-modernist character, the gallery presented an image to the public that was both conservative and traditional. It would have been a major disappointment for (generally) younger artists, students, and certain art lovers, to see their local gallery and art society staying distant from the social and economic changes that were being experienced in New Zealand and internationally.

In hindsight, many of the traditional works of art were being acquired at a time when modernist works were being sold in Europe and the United States at prices the New Zealand galleries were probably able to afford. Displaying even a few of the finest modern works in New Zealand would have had an impact on New Zealand art that was not seen until the late 1930s and 1940s when the country's canonical artists were becoming noticed. The example of an American collector in the 1920s, Earl Horter, is instructive—it shows that it was possible to buy artworks (the prices of which have since appreciated enormously) for relatively modest prices. As a young New York/Philadelphia advertising artist, Horter became devoted to modernist art about the time of the 1913 New York Armory exhibition. Late in that decade and through the 1920s, Earl Horter, using his own savings (he was not independently

wealthy) collected modernist works which he bought from dealers, contacts, and art shows. By the time he was financially devastated by the 1929 Great Depression, Horter had over 10 Picasso paintings (including the *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*), works by Matisse, Braque and Gris, Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase NO.1*, a large collection of American modernists, and sculptures by Brancusi (see Figures 86-89). "Because Horter's taste ran counter to that of most post-war collectors…he was no doubt able to acquire works for his collection at comparatively modest prices." (Shoemaker, Clarke, and Wierzbowski 1999, 39)

FIGURE 86 (LEFT): *THE CLIFFS* 1921, BENTON

FIGURE 87 (RIGHT): *PORTRAIT OF DANIEL-HENRY KAHNWEILER* 1910, PICASSO

FIGURE 88 (LEFT): *PIPE AND NEWSPAPER* 1915, GRIS

FIGURE 89 (RIGHT): *DANAIDE* 1913, BRANCUSI

Māori Art

A major historical discourse being discussed in this thesis is associated with Peter Tomory's judgement that the period between the end of World War One and the Great Depression, was a wasteland as far as art was concerned. Perhaps, because most Māori art was being created in environments that did not rate as important or relevant to a sophisticated city-dweller, or the art produced by Māori would not be classified as art (being seen as utilitarian decoration - see Figure 90), it is difficult to explain why Tomory, a well-educated art historian, would gloss over the art being created by Māori in the 1920s. It is not the place in this thesis to provide a comprehensive account of the work being done and the artworks being created by Māori artists, but a few examples of 1920s Māori art should provide a further perspective about Tomory's critique of art in the decade.

FIGURE 90: MĀORI MEETING HOUSE

It may be unfair to single out Tomory and his apparent oversight in not taking account of the artistic contribution of Māori in the 1920s. The art historian grows up with the texts emphasising the fetishist nature of the carvings, masks, and rituals of the Other.

FIGURE 91: APIRANA NGATA AND PETER BUCK WEAVING TUKUTUKU PANELS

As Picasso so brilliantly demonstrated with his 1907 work *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, primitive objects (in this painting, African masks) can be transformed into art but, for many, they are not themselves art. This attitude was part of the settler colonial discourse and, as discussed earlier, was part of a deeply held and oft-repeated assertion around art society and 1920s art administrators about what constituted good art. In discussing museography and art, Donald Preziosi wrote:

> Art, in short, came to be fielded as central to the very machinery of historicism and essentialism, the very esperanto of European hegemony … The brilliance of this colonisation is quite breathtaking: there is no 'artistic tradition' anywhere in the world which today is not fabricated through … European museology and museography … in point of fact, art history makes colonial subjects of us all … It [the Aesthetic] represents one end in a hierarchized spectrum from the aesthetic to the fetishistic: an evolutionary ladder on whose apex is the aesthetic art of Europe, and on whose nadir is the fetish charm of primitive people.[67]

It is an open question if Tomory thought along these lines. There is also the influence of Colin McCahon, who was employed in the Auckland Gallery. In an essay written for the exhibition catalogue *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art*, Rangihiroa Panoho, who obviously admires McCahon, nevertheless expressed some ambivalence about McCahon's use of Māori language and motifs in his paintings. For example, Panoho calls McCahon's *Parihaka Triptych* (1972) "a statement of respect for Te Whiti's achievement…with the implications of Te Whiti's stand [being] universal and symbolic, and the means of interpretation abstract." He compares McCahon's approach with that of Selwyn Muru in addressing Parihaka and Te Whiti: 'Muru's series is more specific, anecdotal and tribal. As tangata whenua (people of the land), Muru is able to identify himself more directly with Te Whiti' (Whiting et al. 1992, 128).

It is difficult to accept that McCahon and Tomory did not, in their regular sit-downs at the Auckland Art Gallery, discuss aspects of Māori art and, particularly, how Māori art fitted into the search for a national identity in art. It would be more understandable if the question was being raised in the 1920s and not decades later given that the Pākehā view of Māori in

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[67] Preziosi, 2009. p 493

the 1920s, and therefore of Māori attempts to create a very European venture associated with the creation of art, was overlaid with prejudice and ignorance. It could come down to a circumscribed definition of art with the search for beauty (using a very European definition of beauty) being seen as a critical feature of the artists creative process;[68] or was Māori art being judged as occupying a low position on the aesthetic/fetishistic spectrum and, therefore, not worthy of being included in a catalogue of a country's art; or was Māori art not being seen as an expression of agreeable themes compared to, say, a Gully painting of mountains? In its meeting houses, its carving, painting and decoration, Māori artists and craftspeople were creating, in the 1920s, visual images of beauty and compelling aesthetic quality. From our vantage point a century later, it is easy to accept that in many cases what was being created clearly fitted our conception of art. The images often carried great emotional weight as well as having a decorative intent, but this deeper meaning may be difficult to extract from the image if the viewer has little or no understanding of the cultural context carried by the artist into the creation of the image (see the McCahon/Muru example above).

St Mary's Church and Art

Nestled in countryside on New Zealand's East Coast, a short distance from Ruatoria, on the banks of the Waiapu River and watched over by Mt Hikurangi, is the town of Tikitiki with St Mary's church standing proudly on a hill overlooking the marae. The church was built as a memorial to Māori men from the East Coast who fought and died in the First World War. St Mary's church was built in the 1920s at the instigation of Ngāti Porou leader Āpirana Ngata. An early example of Ngata's efforts to revive traditional Māori arts and crafts, it is regarded

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[68] W Page Rowe, writing in 1928 on Māori art for the Board of Māori Ethnological Research offered "three axioms" which he suggested applied to all art:

1. Art does not aim at imitation, but adaptation to the expression of an imaginative concept.
2. Art is not limited to the expression of agreeable themes.
3. There is no universal concept of beauty.

He suggested that "if we accept these we shall already begin to suspect that the Māori presentation of the human form, for instance, may possibly owe its departures from the anatomical facts to something other than the limitations of a savage mentality" (Rowe, 1928, 4)

as “one of the most beautiful Māori churches in New Zealand.”[69] Its foundation stone has the date of 1921 engraved on it which places its construction and the work done on it, squarely within the time period of this thesis.

FIGURE 92: ST MARY'S CHURCH, TIKITIKI

St Mary’s church is an exceptionally beautiful and spiritual place. Its exterior suggests a traditional English church, but this image is confounded by the spectacular interior with its carving, kowhaiwhai designs, tukutuku panels, patterned glasswork and woodwork creating an artistic creation of the highest order. Ngāti Porou were challenged by Ngata to create a church that incorporated Māori architectural design and exceeded all others artistically—they met the challenge. The Church was consecrated on 26 February 1926, with Prime Minister Gordon Coates, Governor-General Sir Charles Ferguson, Sir Māui Pōmare, and Sir Āpirana Ngata and Peter Buck, as well as a very large crowd of people from all over New Zealand, present in this very small village. The following photographs show some details of the

[69] The description of St Mary’s and some of the photographs were taken from the New Zealand History website on 15 October 2022 <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/tikitiki-church-war-memorial>

church; they make it very hard to sustain a critique that the church and its treasures is not art of the highest order. Considering Ngata's passionate approach to encouraging meeting house construction throughout the Dominion as well as promoting the revival of tribal culture and pride, his views about the importance (and beauty) of Māori art carried real weight and have contributed significantly to New Zealand's visual (and spiritual) culture.[70]

It is accepted that traditional Māori art is not accessible to everyone and even today it will draw very negative comment, with critics of this art pointing to carvings as evidence of cultural shortcomings on the part of those artists who produced the images. The interior of St Mary's church should be a sufficient affirmation of a contrary position which would appease (or educate) the critics, but is unlikely that the following commentary by Roger Neich will make the impact on the New Zealand critic that it should:

> Māori carving is a conceptual art which does not necessarily directly represent things but makes statements about relations between things and between people…From the combination of "stylised" and "naturalistic" representation within the one figural composition in Māori carving, it can be deduced that the conventional aspect of all art was recognised, at least implicitly. Meaning was very much a part of the Māori aesthetic.(2001, 134)

[70] Sir Apirana Ngata was a prodigious worker who worked tirelessly for Māori and for New Zealand. He was prominent in national and local politics and could operate, successfully, in both a pākehā and Māori environment.

FIGURE 93: ST MARY'S INTERIOR

FIGURE 94: PEW, ST MARY'S CHURCH

FIGURE 95: THE CHURCH PULPIT

FIGURE 96: THE CHURCH GATE

The turmoil and distress of the period from the beginning of the First World War to the beginning of the 1920s, could not have failed to leave New Zealanders with deep psychic scars and, for many, emotional and economic exhaustion. In these circumstances it is too facile to promote a view that the fine arts in the decade were without inspiration and innovation. The few iconic painters of the 1930s were growing up and being educated in that decade. At the same time, as I have shown earlier, other artists were painting and creating images that appealed to them and to a large proportion of the viewing public. That these images were conservative, and the subjects were in the traditional genres, is not surprising. I am not sure that it was all a lack of inspiration: I think it could have had a lot to do with recovery from the trauma of war and a global pandemic. At such time people reach for the familiar and secure. The art produced by most artists in the interwar period, reflects recovery and not further disruption. The shock of the Great Depression would have strengthened the search for security. The emphasis, in this chapter, on conservatism in art gallery management and accessioning policies, is consistent with this unwillingness to be confronted by new and disturbing concepts in art. Māori art, although appearing to be conservative and based on traditional forms and patterns is, with its deep spirituality, in a different category. This consistency of design and execution must assist the viewer's understanding of that art.

Conclusion

After reviewing the visual and textual data collected as part of the discourse analysis in this study, and returning to the specific research questions posed earlier, my expectation has been confirmed that the methodological approach taken has generated a sufficient range of insights to address those questions. The questions and subsequent analysis form associations in the following areas: the nature of the cultural environment; social change and the reflection of that in visual material; the role of museums and art galleries and visual culture as a way of enhancing our understanding of historical issues.

New Zealand's cultural environment in the 1920s presented me with a complex picture. I am an economic historian and government policy-maker by background and, more recently, have gained an art history qualification. It has been a rewarding, yet frustrating, experience to carry out this research. Rewarding, because the research has confirmed for me the importance of the period in New Zealand's development and the benefit of having a methodological toolbox like that opened for this project. Frustrating because a review of the project outcomes would conclude that I have only scratched the surface of the subject, and that even with more resources allocated to it, there would need to be many years of research allocated to the 1920s project. Looking more widely, and ignoring the administrative difficulties, an extended inter-war study would be worth doing given the number of things that happened in both decades that have had an enduring impact on New Zealand. We headed out of the First World War and into the Second, and by dint of painful and muddle-headed experience we learned a lot about depression economics. We came to understand that being a colonialist is not all it is cracked up to be. A commitment to multilateral politics was formed (but not wholeheartedly in that, at the same time, Britain was still importing our primary products); and we eventually embraced modernism. Our cultural ambitions were modest and although I am certain that there remained a large number of diehard critics of modern art, New Zealand artists were producing works that showed they had some understanding of international trends in art. These matters could be researched for the inter-war period as a whole or remain confined to the 1920s.

FIGURE 97: *NEW ZEALAND INVITES YOU* 1924, N. Z. RAILWAYS

When thinking about travel posters, the beautiful French art deco posters from the 1920s may come to the minds of many. To see a beckoning Zealandia, portrayed in an off the shoulder Grecian, robe, does not immediately convince as great art. However, it is not as simple as that. The 1924 image (Figure 97) encourages the idea that romance and glamour is beckoning, and New Zealand Railways will get you to it. In the confusion of locations, the diversity of New Zealand scenery is stressed. Children playing on the beach and the man smoking his pipe leave us thinking about the future in healthy and relaxing New Zealand. This analysis may or may not appeal, but it is certain that the picture is part of a development discourse and would have been seen by thousands in New Zealand and overseas. Judging its effectiveness is difficult because our reactions to the fashion statement in the light of current fashions and the changes in fashion appreciation since the 1920s are likely to bias our judgements.

The question relating to the utility of the methods discussed in this thesis has to be faced. Is the use of discourse analysis and visual culture adding value to our historical analysis or are they adding an unnecessary theoretical superstructure to standard art history techniques? In the example set out above have we gained anything from the brief excursion into the analysis of social discourse? In this conclusion I revisit the research questions set out earlier and, in light of the evidence presented in the thesis, arrive at brief answers to the questions posed. I give an example of the manner in which discourses can be constructed and the value of visual culture as a tool to use in discourse analysis.

1920s Discourses: Putting the Theory into Practice

Visual imagery can reflect, interpret, construct, and describe the words and things, items and occasions, people and places that made up various discursive formations. An abbreviated example of how various images focusing on 1920s epistemes can be utilised in developing a discourse, is contained in this section. This thesis uses a number of social discourses (both major and minor) from the 1920s and selectively relating examples of visual culture of the time to them. It is not setting out to discuss a comprehensive catalogue of 1920s discourses or New Zealand's visual culture—an impossibly weighty challenge—but demonstrates the validity of the methodological approaches referred to above to explore matters of relevance to New Zealand's development, as well as providing examples of visual imagery which have a bearing on the questions posed by Peter Tomory's criticism of the period being a wasteland for art. The approach taken may be best illustrated by the following brief examples of a number of issues that emerge through discourses of the time which show how the images factor into the discourse analysis and help us develop a wider understanding of those issues. The discourses relate, in broad terms, to New Zealand social, political and economic history; issues to do with land and the nature of agricultural production; resettlement and the value of Government promises; infrastructural development; and urban growth. The resulting narrative will demonstrate, in a greatly abbreviated form, how one of the major discourses discussed in my thesis—New Zealand's social development in the 1920s—can be constructed.

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FIGURE 98: *MT SEFTON FROM THE RED LAKE,* C.1919 CHARLES HOWORTH

This attractive but relatively traditional landscape by Charles Howorth *Mt Sefton from the Red Lake* c. 1919 (Figure 98) shows the magnificence of New Zealand's scenery, a significant drawcard for potential immigrants who could believe in the trope that here was an untamed and unpopulated land, ripe for domestication. The paradise that might be imagined from a romantic interpretation of the Howorth painting ignores a few realities: land ownership and the rights of Māori; predations of the early settlers and their political and economic actions; and government settlement policies; to mention but a few. The Howorth landscape, while well-painted is typical of a significant proportion of the paintings exhibited at art society exhibitions. In her thesis on Howorth, Sarah McLintock makes some pointed comments about the generally positive public reception of Howorth's painting (particularly landscapes) and his place in the art-history discourse. She concludes:

> Charles Howorth has been ignored for a reason; it is impossible to discount the stagnation inherent in his paintings, works of art that represent an aesthetic that is removed from what is expected in great works of art. He is not, and would never have conceived of being, on the same level as Colin McCahon—but is this reason enough for us to ignore him entirely? Howorth's paintings may not represent the evolution of New Zealand art as part of an avant-garde process, but they can be understood as an

> important part of a movement in New Zealand art at a time when the country was undergoing great social development and unease. (2008, 96)

Priscilla Pitts, writes in *Headlands* about depictions of the landscape[71] in New Zealand art: "the New Zealand landscape of the tourist brochures (one might well say, the New Zealand of the imagination): idyllic, fertile, sparsely populated, clean, its tranquillity titillatingly ruffled by the promise of the 'primitive', the untamed wilderness" (Whiting et al. 1992, 87).

A post-war boom was set in train by the Liberal Government's policies of extending loans for housing and farm purchasing. These credit initiatives were aimed at returned servicemen, in particular. The 1917 cartoon from W. Blomfield and published in the Observer Settling the Returned Soldier (Figure 99), says it all. Easier credit enabled a boom in land purchasing and resulted in many ex-servicemen owning land which was difficult to farm and often located in poorly serviced places. Added to the farming difficulties facing many, often new or inexperienced, farmers, the gearing level the farm purchaser had to accept left them highly exposed to adverse price movements. Because many had relied on the continuation, for a number of years, of high prices for their wool and meat exported to the British market, they were particularly vulnerable to adverse price movements.

[71] Commenting about landscapes like the Howorth painting reproduced above.

FIGURE 99: *SETTLING THE RETURNED SOLDIER*

FIGURE 100: HIGH COUNTRY SHEEP STATION

With the growth of sheep farming in the backcountry the competition for land intensified and with it the political competition between, in this case, the Liberal Party representing traditional values (often those of the large land holders) the small farmers' party (Reform) and worker interests (Labour). The discourses relate to land-use competition, i.e. maintaining the landscape in its clean and idyllic state or turning this landscape of the imagination into a productive reality where the discussion is about stock units and wool clip. There was a land boom at the end of the First World War which was fuelled by speculation and good returns from continuing British demand for primary products. But this was not sustainable and with Great Britain moving to peace-time trade management the high prices experienced early in decade fell and the country experienced a relatively short depression. The outcome of this early decade reversal of fortune was bankruptcy for many smaller farmers and profits for banks, land agents and the traditionally powerful elites.

FIGURE 101: CARTERTON 1923

Taken in 1923, with the impact of the 1922 slump still lingering in parts of New Zealand, The Weekly News published this photograph of Carterton (Figure 101), a "prosperous inland town…centre of a rich sheep and dairying district". The photograph, which would have been widely viewed given the popularity of the weekly photo journal, could not fail to impress with its message that New Zealand was going through a prosperous period (as the caption claimed) as the street scene showed modern automobiles, a good range of retail and commercial buildings, an undoubtedly prosperous land agent and well-dressed pedestrians. It

also shows an economy in transition with cars signalling modernism and prosperity, bicycles being used for local and (probably) cheap transportation, and horse and cart still being used for commercial deliveries. Missing from the photograph were the unemployed (although there are likely to be some on the footpaths) and evidence of the infrastructural work being carried on in the bigger towns and cities and in the rural hinterland.

Visual culture's association with modernism was mentioned frequently in the literature reviewed in the introduction to this thesis. This was often accompanied with information about the significantly large increase in the diversity of genre and quantity, generally, of visual images as well as the technological developments related to the creation, distribution, and reception of imagery. A clear message from the literature was the benefit of being able to create new narratives and understandings about the period being researched, with the researcher not being bound by tradition or the art canon. The images analysed may not necessarily relate in a "direct, causal or epistemic relation to either their context or one another".

The section above demonstrated the application of the methodological tools to a range, visual and textual, of texts that relate to some New Zealand social and economic discourses. The Howorth landscape provided the canvas on which several discourses were painted. New Zealand's landscape is culturally important; it brings economic benefits; it is an immensely desirable asset for wealth investment; and it is the backdrop to many aspects of New Zealand life. In practical terms, the analyst must start with some understanding of the major discourses they want to research and then locate texts relating to the minor contributory discourses. I used this analytical sequence in my research.

Research Questions: A Stocktake

When I was first planning this thesis, I had difficulty choosing a suitable approach to accommodate the wide range of subjects that deserved or required a place in the research agenda. Other than reading about Foucault in art history, the idea of constructing a discourse by forming a whole from component parts had not occurred to me. Nor had Foucault's guiding principle that human beings are produced entities. Utilising both these aspects of Foucault's theories began to open an approach to the research challenge based on assembling a number of issues that impacted on key aspects of New Zealand life and which could be a part of the whole discourse. Another key part of Foucault's approach to discourse analysis is the stress on intertextuality and using the concept to join, into a discursive formation, diverse

pieces of information which may, or may not, make a direct contribution to the overall discourse. The section in Chapter I in which I introduced some Lineham family history was included because I thought the challenges, reversals and rewards my great grandfather's family experienced as English migrants to New Zealand, made a rich contribution to a number of discourses including cultural influences, the practices of the New Zealand Company, exploitation by the holders of institutional power, and, amongst others, the nature of work in the new colony.

Discourse analysis was embedded in linguistics and the analytical focus was on written or spoken texts. However, a number of commentators whose work is cited in the literature review, contend, convincingly, that it is legitimate to use images as inputs to the analytical process. As an art historian I think that this idea, the use of images to record and provide information which will contribute to a discourse, is entirely defensible. Just as a document provides information under the rules applicable to the documentary format, a photograph or a painting can provide information to the analyst in a form suitable and ready for interrogation. This is a key point on which the research design depends. I have made liberal use of an array of images to illustrate activities and developments in New Zealand in the 1920s. Far from the use of these images being considered questionable from a methodological point of view, they add not only information but also texture and visuality to strengthen the analytical work.

The operative title for the discipline that aims at making sense of our world is visual culture (it is discussed in detail in earlier parts of the thesis). The use of visual culture as a key methodological tool has opened up the range and content of the visual imagery available to develop the critical analysis of various social discourses. As an example, one of the key discourses to do with 1920s art, the judgement that Pete Tomory made about the period between the end of the First World War and the Great Depression as a wasteland, may not be contestable if a greater range of visual images than was available from the easels of the fine artists, had been available to contribute to the discourse. I have accessed different forms of visual images i.e. photographs, cartoons, commercial art as well as fine art, and it is clear from the findings of the research, that the diversity of visual material has made a significant contribution to the analysis. I have pointed to the criticism of visual culture coming from commentators who may feel that their academic discipline is under threat from visual culture. Although some of the critics have valid points to make, the advantages that the use of visual culture provide to the researcher of history, heavily outweigh the criticism.

As part of the literature surveyed for the research the writing of Ludmilla Jordanova, Beth Fowkes Tobin, Linda Nochlin and Gillian Rose stood out for the valuable insights they imparted about the research process and the content of an image. They warned the researcher to not leave the analysis at a superficial level and run the risk of missing information of deeper significance. Both Tobin and Nochlin pointed to the negative outcomes that may result from, as Nochlin put it "using art historical categories that preference aesthetic categories applicable to 'great art', [which] may result in the political significance of the artwork escaping us completely." In my earlier work on the 1930s I had noted Tobin's warning about ignoring artworks that "lie crated in the basements of great art museums" because they do not meet the standards of great art. I had wanted to explore this further in the current research, but Covid-19 mandates made this impossible. This is unfortunate because the research objective of developing a comprehensive account of a discourse or of a period, might benefit from information stored in the archives and collections of the few art galleries that were open in the 1920s.

To illustrate the significance of art galleries to the development of New Zealand art and artists I used the example of one new gallery, the Sarjeant Gallery in Whanganui, which was opened by the Prime Minister in September 1919. The Wanganui Council had been left a bequest by a local farmer Henry Sarjeant to establish an art gallery.[72] The art gallery was well-designed and built to high standards—it provided good exhibition spaces which the Council representatives and local art supporters set to fill by a variety of means. The significance of this series of events cannot be underestimated. In Chapter Four I detailed how the Sarjeant went about creating an art collection by a mix of art purchasing, receiving art donations and bequests, being gifted art by wealthy patrons and receiving gifts of their artworks by (often local) benevolent artists. This process was reasonably common to the other galleries open at the time. Given that the availability of trained and competent gallery administrators was extremely limited, the key task of creating gallery policies, mounting exhibitions, and building the collection ended up in the hands of committees of local bureaucrats, art society members and volunteers. The upshot of this was that the art available for exhibiting to the citizens of the wider Whanganui region reflected the refined tastes and prejudices of a relatively small group of men (women's participation was limited). As the

[72] Some information about the beginnings of the Sarjeant Gallery can be found on https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2s4/sarjeant-henry

earlier small sample of the Sarjeant's 1920 accessions shows, most of the art could be described as British Victorian Romantic painting. This bias within the accessions was not uncommon and it was easy enough to understand. New Zealand's colonial experience was still relatively young, and many migrants brought with them the memories of and convictions about British standards of quality—in this case the gold standard for art was British 19th century art.

More often than not, the views of the critic with the biggest voice dominate the discourse. In this case it was the art appreciation of much of the New Zealand population as well as the critics and commentators who influenced their opinions. Internationally, the 1920s was a period of revolution and change with experimentation in behaviour as well as art, being the order of the day.[73] As my earlier chapters have demonstrated the preoccupations in New Zealand were more concerned with accumulation of wealth; improving where people stood in the class structure; coping with economic recession; and building what was, for many, a new country. What most New Zealanders did not want was to see was art that was freely regarded as "modern rubbish" on their walls or in their galleries. This helps explain the preoccupation with British art, particularly if it was painted by an artist who displayed initials after their name which signified the stamp of approval of the Royal Academy or some similar institution. This conjunction of the conservative views of the elite and accession and exhibition practices in the new art galleries had an impact on the type of art available for showing to gallery patrons. It also meant that a local artist who wanted to break the mould and pursue a modernist approach to representation, would struggle to gain acceptance for their work. Examples of international modern art were available in books and magazines, in paintings sent back to New Zealand by expatriates and in the art schools where La Trobe teachers worked, but the weight of tradition was only slowly breaking down.

Galleries and museums have a very important role in not only collecting artefacts of historical significance and interest, but also making information from the past accessible for present or future members of the population. Hooper-Greenhill's comments about the modern museum being a product of the Enlightenment and that the modernist approach to communication of "authoritative subject-based facts" to passive receivers, is poor

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[73] I used a number of references to provide background for one of the major discourses of New Zealand's place in the world, including (Clark 1999; Blanning 1996; *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* 2016)

communication, are still relevant. The concepts underpinning "The New Museology" (the name of the movement initiated in the mid-1980s) include an emphasis on the museum focusing on its audience and paying particular attention to the accessibility of information. Three examples of local museums that are playing a valuable role in the discourse about New Zealand's cultural and economic development are illustrated below. The buildings may not be architectural masterpieces, but they have humility and welcome the ordinary person. With their collections of historical artifacts (often locally sourced) they make a valuable contribution to an understanding of New Zealand's development.

FIGURE 102: EASTERN SOUTHLAND GALLERY

FIGURE 103: RICHARDSON'S TRANSPORT MUSEUM, 1920S TRUCKS

FIGURE 104: DARGAVILLE MUSEUM

FIGURE 105: GUM DIGGING EXHIBIT

In the preceding chapters I explored discourses relating to New Zealand's social, economic, and political development. The advantage I have had in researching the 1920s is being able,

by utilising visual culture, to employ visuality to enhance my understanding of the subject being explored. It is beneficial to be able to see a picture of an immigrant ship or frozen food transporter; to be able to see the infrastructural challenges faced by the government; to get a picture of the leasehold versus freehold debate and the discord the conflict provoked; to see the faces of the politicians who had such an influence on early New Zealand; and to be able to illustrate and make judgements about art and the policies of our art galleries in the 1920s.

The question was posed about the added value provided by the use of a visual culture methodology—this must be answered positively. The 1920s were an important decade in our history and we have a better chance of understanding it by gathering together as much relevant material as possible no matter the format in which it resides, and by ensuring that this material is analysed as extensively as practically possible. The process of trying to capture the public's understanding of the decade beyond a recitation of The Great Depression, the end of the First World War and the Influenza Epidemic, would benefit from a joint effort combining historian, museum, and art gallery to gather material, including from the 1930s, and presenting it in an appropriate institutional setting such as an exhibition.

FIGURE 106 (LEFT): *ZINNIAS* 1926, DOROTHY RICHMOND

FIGURE 107 (RIGHT): *HEADWATERS OF THE WAIMAKARIRI* C. 1930, RATA LOVELL-SMITH

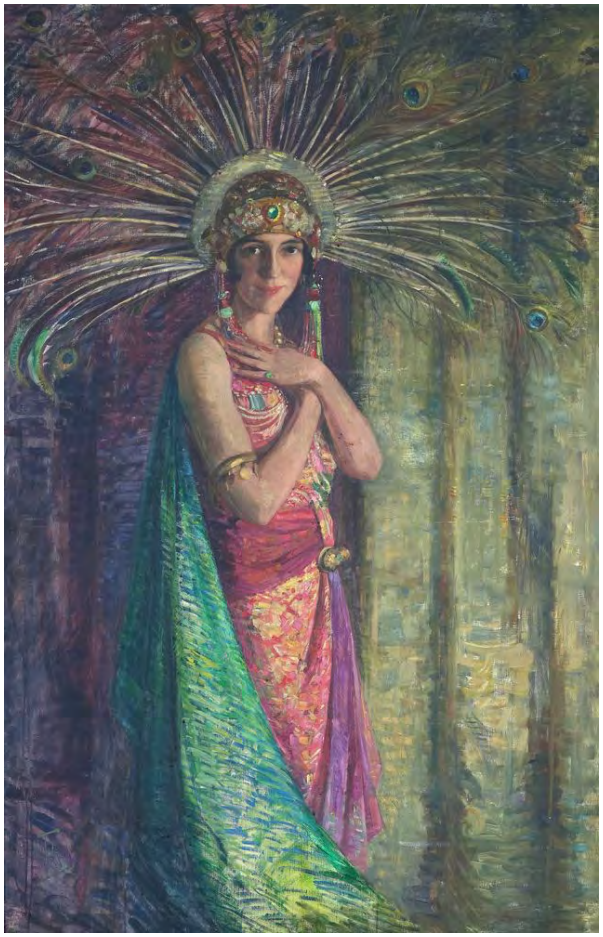

FIGURE 108: *SHEBA* C. 1929, MARY TRIPE

FIGURE 109: *MAY, DAUGHTER OF BRIGADIER GENERAL ANDREW* C. 1925, ELIZABETH KELLY

One discourse still to be addressed in this conclusion is that relating to the nature of art in the 1920s and, specifically, Peter Tomory's contention that the period between the end of the First World War and he 1929 Depression was a wasteland as far as art was concerned. This judgement and an earlier commentary by the writer of the National Centennial of New Zealand Art Catalogue, A. H. McLintock (who treated the 1920s poorly by virtually ignoring them) has become the received art historical wisdom on the art of the decade. Tomory's criticism about the art of the period has the side effect of either condemning all the artists who were creating art in the 1920s, and there were many, to non-existence or asserting that what they did could not be counted as quality art. This was clearly a very elitist position to adopt by a well-educated and experienced art historian who was the Director of the Auckland City Art Gallery (arguably New Zealand's premier art gallery at the time).

An assessment of the art created in the 1920s makes it clear that many good works were created. The catalogue of holdings at Te Papa contains a good number of artworks from the 1920s and while not all the catalogued works would be judged as excellent art, a number of them could be. Tomory and his nationalist colleagues were strong supporters of the iconic painters of the 1930s, particularly Rita Angus, Toss Woollaston and Colin McCahon who, by the end of that decade were starting to be credited as the major modernist artists working in New Zealand. It would have been of importance to Tomory that these artists fitted into his construct about the development of New Zealand art and fitted into the lineage from the topographic painters like Heaphy and Buchanan, the artists like Hoyte and Gully (who could be distracted by the blandishments of patronage) through the serious professional artists such as Van der Velden and Nairn, to the 1930s trio mentioned above. They all fitted the view of New Zealand art he promoted. The 1920s romantic painters did not. There was, therefore, a wasteland unpopulated by quality artists. I disagree on two counts.[74] There was no need to make the reality of New Zealand's art discourse ignore what is so clear, that good art was being created in the period (and there was more if the expatriate artists were, quite legitimately, taken into account). It is also disappointing that such an elitist judgement treats so many painters, even if they paint as amateurs, with condescension.

Another part of the reality overlooked or ignored by Tomory, and this is important from a contemporary New Zealand perspective, is the placement of Māori art in the wasteland. This may not have been Tomory's intention—but it is hard to believe that Tomory did not have regular discussions about Māori art with two of his employees in the Auckland City Art Gallery, Hamish Keith, and Colin McCahon. If he did, it is disappointing that recognition of the beautiful work being done by Māori artists was at best overlooked or neglected altogether by the wording of his trope. I referred earlier to the building of St Mary's Church at Tikitiki on the East Coast of the North Island, which was constructed and decorated in the middle of the 1920s. Even a casual visitor could not fail to be impressed by the beauty of the church as a place of peace and tranquillity as well as being a work of art of the highest quality. It is a powerful testament to the skill of the Māori artists and crafts people who created it. So to answer another of the research questions posed above, the extent and quality of the work and creativity of Māori and Pākehā artists in the 1920s, most definitely enables

[74] See also the critique of Nigel Brown and Hamish Keith's 'nationalism' position (1992) by Francis Pound (Pound 2009).

us to reject the view that, from the perspective of New Zealand art, the years between the First World War and the depression were indeed a wasteland. They were not!

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