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RODNEY KENNEDY

a life in art

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History & Theory under the supervision of Dr Peter Leech at the University of Otago.

Figure 1: Portrait of Rodney Kennedy
Colin McCahon, 1940

by

Richard Dingwall

September 1998
CONTENTS:

Abstract \(v\)
Acknowledgments \(vi\)
List of Illustrations \(vii\)

Preface
An Artist's Instinct for Style \(1\)

1. The Portrait of Rodney Kennedy (1909 -1946)
   Prologue: Breakfast with Rodney \(7\)
   Beginnings \(11\)
   R.N. Field, Artist and Teacher \(15\)
  Friendships of the Thirties \(21\)
   Rodney Kennedy and R.N. Field \(21\)
   Kennedy and Ursula Bethell \(24\)
   Kennedy and Toss Woollaston \(28\)
   Other Friends \(38\)
   Theatre in Dunedin in the 1930s \(40\)
   Pacifism \(44\)
   Detention \(46\)

2. The Portrait of Rodney Kennedy (1946 - 1989)
   The Bath Street Studio \(49\)
   Rodney Kennedy and Charles Brasch (1938 - 1946) \(50\)
   Employment \(54\)
   Overseas Study 1955 - 56 \(62\)
   Rodney Kennedy and Charles Brasch (1946 - 1989) \(65\)
   A Home of His Own \(71\)
   Work, Retirement and Death \(75\)
   Kennedy's Bequest \(79\)

3. Flowers in a Vase
   The Paintings of Rodney Kennedy \(82\)
   The Last Two Surviving paintings \(90\)
   R.N. Field and British Art Theory \(94\)
   M.T. Woollaston and Cézanne \(99\)
   The End of Painting \(104\)
4. The Friend of the Painters
   Support for Art in New Zealand up to 1946 109
   Charles Brasch and Art in New Zealand 111
   Institutional Support for the Arts 115
   Rodney Kennedy and Support for the Arts 122
   Rodney Kennedy and Colin McCahon 134
   Conclusion 145

5. Kennedy's Collection
   On Collecting 146
   The Collection 149
   Rodney Kennedy and his Collection 152

Appendix I: Paintings and Drawing in the Estate of Rodney Kennedy 159
Appendix II: Works donated to the Hocken Library by Kennedy. 162
Appendix III: Kennedy's Collections Graph 166
Appendix IV: Overseas Study Leave Report by Rodney Kennedy 167
Appendix V: A Survey of Rodney Kennedy's Theatrical Career 174

Bibliography 176
Abstract:

Rodney Eric Kennedy (1909 - 1989) has long been of interest to historians because of his friendships with a number of significant figures in New Zealand cultural history. He has been consulted by those writing about such important individuals as R.N. Field, Sir Mountford Tosswill Woollaston, Colin McCahon, Doris Lusk and Ursula Bethell among others. It has long been claimed that he was not merely a witness to important events but that he helped shape the culture. This he did through an exercise of taste. This thesis examines this claim in a number of ways.

1) It examines the friendships noted above in the context of his life. It is not, however a complete biography.

2) It briefly examines his career in theatre. While theatre is not the focus of this work his practice offers insights into his ideas on culture.

3) It examines his brief career as an artist and reproduces all six of his surviving paintings. Some of these are here reproduced for the first time.

4) It examines his engagement with various institutions dedicated to the encouragement of artists, especially the Hocken Library.

5) It discusses his own collection of art.

The conclusion reached is that Rodney Kennedy did indeed have a significant effect on the development of a distinctive culture in New Zealand. His interventions were unusual in that they were not a consequence of extraordinary wealth or high intellectual standing. His influence was exercised through friendship, personal contact and a keen eye for a good painting. His artist friends respected him partly because he was an artist himself and was able to exercise both fine aesthetic judgements and an understanding of the difficulties that faced an artist. It is concluded that such informal engagement was particularly effective during the period up until the mid-1960s when there were few formal mechanisms for the support of artists.

Richard Dingwall
September 1998
Acknowledgements

This thesis was written with the support of a University of Otago Scholarship. My original proposal was to look at patronage and the way it shaped Dunedin. In choosing to examine one individual I hope I have broadened our understanding of art in New Zealand, particularly in the period 1930 - 1960, and also enriched our appreciation of the Hocken Library Collection to which Rodney Kennedy contributed. I am grateful to my supervisor Dr Peter Leech for his scrupulous reading of the many drafts of this work and for his incisive commentaries during the development of this work.

Many people have given their time and help to the completion of this thesis. Tim Garrity and Peter Entwisle allowed me access to their own notes on Rodney Kennedy. I am grateful also to the staff at the Hocken Library and at the Hocken Pictures collection who were alert to any documents that might be germane to my research. Annette Facer allowed me access to the Kennedy Collection which is on deposit with the Hocken Library. Here I found the letters from the poet Ursula Bethel as well as many useful documents and photographs. Among others who gave of their time were Sir Mountford Tosswill Woollaston. James Mack, Professor Jocelyn Harris, Anna Petersen, Donald Reid, Marilyn Webb, Peter McLeavey, Derek Ball, Ellespie Prior, Ian Prior, Valmai Moffet, Dr Pam Smart and Michael Newell.

I did not know Rodney Kennedy. All those that I spoke to who did know him gave their time because they held Rodney Kennedy in high regard and remembered him with great affection. I hope I have repaid their trust.

Richard Dingwall
August 1998
List of Illustrations  
(Except for Figure 1 all illustrations are opposite the page number shown here.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure No.</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
<th>Illustration Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Portrait of Rodney Kennedy Colin McCahon, 1939, pencil on buff paper: 261 x 206mm. Given by M. &amp; M. Hitchings, Dunedin, 1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Portrait of Rodney Kennedy, Derek Ball, 1968, oil on canvas: 915 x 705mm. Bought with the assistance of Hocken Library Endowment funds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Rodney Kennedy with his Parents (photograph) Hocken Library Kennedy Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>The Art Department at King Edward Technical College, 1928. (photograph) Hocken Library Kennedy Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>The 'Six and Four Club' (photograph) Hocken Library Kennedy Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Design by Rodney Kennedy for a Memorial Plaque for Effie Pollen (Scanned image) Bethell Correspondence, Macmillan Brown Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Rodney Kennedy and Toss Woollaston at Mapua c. 1937 (photograph) Hocken Library Kennedy Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Patrick Hayman, Colin McCahon, Ellespie Forsyth, Doris Lusk, and Rodney Kennedy at Mapua 1939-40 (photo) Hocken Library Kennedy Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Rodney Kennedy at Mapua c. 1937 (photograph) Hocken Library Kennedy Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Landscape, Tahunanui Toss Woollaston, 1934 oil on canvas mounted on board 483 x 610mm Hocken Library Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Portrait of Rodney Kennedy Toss Woollaston, 1936, oil on card, 365 x 254 Te Papa Tongarewa National Art Gallery Collection, Wellington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11a</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Portrait of Rodney Kennedy Toss Woollaston circa 1935-36 oil 474 x 408mm (irreg); on canvas: 477 x 420mm (unstretched) Hocken Library Given by Mr R.E. Kennedy, Dunedin, 1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Figures From Life Toss Woollaston, 1936, oil and charcoal on grey paper, 627 x 478mm, Auckland City Art Gallery, presented by Colin McCahon, 1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Harbour Cone from Peggy's Hill Colin McCahon, 1939, oil on board, 750 x 1340mm, Hocken Library, John and Ethel McCahon Bequest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Whitanui Detention Camp (photograph) Hocken Library Kennedy Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Drawing of Rodney Kennedy Colin McCahon, 1940, pen &amp; ink on paper 262 x 205mm. Given by Rodney Kennedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16a</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>The Bath Street Flat (photograph) Hocken Library Kennedy Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>The Cast of Pirandello's &quot;Six Characters&quot; (photograph) Hocken Library Kennedy Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17a</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Rodney Kennedy as Itinerant Drama Teacher (photograph) Hocken Library Kennedy Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Rodney Kennedy In 1955 (passport photograph)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Rodney Kennedy, Desmond Digby and Brigid Lenihan in Brighton (photograph) Hocken Library Kennedy Collection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
20 *Charles Brasch and R.M. Cox* John Crockett, (c. 1940) oil on board, Hocken Library Collection.

21 *In The Kitchen, 1975* (photograph: Gary Blackman) collection of the artist, used with permission

22 *Rodney Kennedy's costume for Feste in Twelfth Night* (photograph) Hocken Library, Kennedy Collection

23 *Flower piece* Rodney Kennedy, 1934 or 1936, oil & sand on plywood, 539 x 441mm. Estate of Mrs E.M. McCahon, Geraldine, John & Ethel McCahon Bequest, 1973

24 *Stylised Signature Incorporating the initials REK* (Scanned image) Bethell Correspondence, Macmillan Brown Library

25 *Homage to Virginia Woolf* Rodney Kennedy, 1933, oil on canvas on card; support & image: 530 x 436mm. Given by Rodney Kennedy, 1988

26 *Nelson Landscape* Rodney Kennedy, 1934, oil on canvas, 458 x 355mm (trimmed, attached to board). Given by artist to H.V. Miller as wedding present, 1934. Hocken Library (Given from the estate of H.V. Miller, Dunedin, 1986)

26a *Still life with flowers* Rodney Kennedy, 1936 oil on canvas, Hocken Library

26b *Otago Peninsula* Rodney Kennedy, [n.d.] oil on gesso on card: 288 x 347mm, Patricia France Bequest, Dunedin, 1995


28 *On the Roof at 34 Brunswick Square* Duncan Grant, 1912

29 *Christ at the Well of Samaria* R.N. Field, 1929, Te Papa Tongarewa National Art Gallery Collection, Wellington

29 *The "Kennedy" Otago Peninsula*, Colin McCahon, 1946-49, gesso and oil on board, 1220 x 2440mm, Dunedin Public Library, Rodney Kennedy Bequest

30 *Otago Peninsula Landscape: preliminary drawing*, Colin McCahon, 1946-7, pencil, 130 x 200mm, Hocken Library


32 *Numbers. Sketch for University of Otago Library Mural*, Colin McCahon, 1966, oil (Monocoat) on board, 590 x 1010mm, Hocken Library

33 *The Garden* (photograph: Gary Blackman) collection of the artist used with permission

34 *View of the Otago Peninsula from Rodney Kennedy's Living Room* (photograph: Gary Blackman) collection of the artist, used with permission

35 *Rodney Kennedy at Home circa 1975* (photograph), Hocken Library, Patricia France collection

36 *Charles Brasch's Living Room, June 1973* (photograph: David Lloyd), Hocken Library, Brasch Collection

37 *Rodney Kennedy with "Vicarage Bed"* Doris Lusk, 1979 pencil & watercolour on paper: 418 x 236mm (attached to board), Hocken Library, Given by Rodney Kennedy, 1988
PREFACE

An Artist's Instinct For Style

This thesis aims to record the extent and nature of Rodney Kennedy's involvement with the artists of his day. Kennedy has been a source for scholars seeking to increase their knowledge about the life and art of various important figures in New Zealand cultural life. He has been consulted by those writing about Toss Woollaston, Colin McCahon, Doris Lusk, R.N. Field and the poet, Ursula Bethell. Rodney Kennedy, however, was not merely a witness. He was also an active participant in the development of New Zealand's cultural life. In his early years he was an artist. Later, he was a supporter and encourager of other artists. (He was also an active participant in the development of amateur theatre). A function of this thesis, then, is to examine these twin aspects of his engagement with the visual arts, that is, his life as a painter and his life as a friend of painters. Given this, the thesis naturally divides into two main sections. Chapters One and Two deal with aspects of his life, and Chapters Three and Four with his brief career as an artist, and then his involvement in the development of an art economy. A final chapter looks at the significance of art in his life especially through his collection.

In the earlier sections I have had to engage in more biography than I had initially anticipated. Kennedy's life in the 1930s was a complex network of friendships and alliances: he was

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1 Charles Brasch in Part XV of his verse sequence *The Estate*. Quoted by Tim Garrity in *The Kennedy Gift* p 14:

*His bounty flows upon all*
*Who need him, who warm to his laughter,*
*Makes no distinction, condition,*
*Nothing to own but his ardour,*
*His artist's instinct for style.*
a student then a friend of the artists R.N. Field and W.H. Allen; he befriended Toss Woollaston and organised his first solo exhibition; he was involved in innovative theatrical projects; and he was closely associated with the Christchurch Group in its early years and exhibited with the ill-fated New Zealand Society of Artists in 1933 and 1934. Late in the decade he became involved in the pacifist movement and, in 1942, was sent to a detention camp as a conscientious objector and remained there for the duration of the war. After the war he and Charles Brasch shared a house for twelve years.

It seemed to me impossible to deal with all this complex material in a straight narrative account. So, while chronology has not been abandoned altogether, I have chosen to take my lead from Kennedy himself and have identified a number of significant relationships that were formed during this period, and which have a bearing on the later sections of this essay. The particular relationships examined are those with R.N. Field, Toss Woollaston and Ursula Bethell. Late in the decade he met Colin McCahon and they became fast friends, and about this time also he encountered Charles Brasch who, when he returned to New Zealand in 1946, became Kennedy's close companion.

Those that knew Kennedy will protest at the inadequacy of this list. They may point to the pleasure he had in the company of women and his claim sometimes to prefer the art of Anne Hamblett (later McCahon) over her more celebrated artist husband Colin. They may remember his close friendship with Doris Lusk. He and Lusk enjoyed an affectionate relationship. They loved to talk (and drink gin), and religiously exchanged Christmas cards. Yet he owned few of her works and no major paintings by her (although, it should be noted, he owned some charming minor ones, including a portrait of Kennedy himself). Furthermore there was no sense of Kennedy's continuous engagement with the art of Lusk in the way that he seemed so involved with the work of
Woollaston and McCahon. So Doris Lusk has a smaller part in my account than she had in Kennedy's life.

Also virtually absent from my narrative are such colourful figures as Max Walker, the artist and cartoonist, who bequeathed Kennedy his Bath St studio when he went off to London to become an assistant to Cecil Beaton, or Patrick Hayman, the English artist who landed briefly on these shores, or many other of Kennedy's friends over the years. Rather than present a full account of his life, my intention in Chapters One and Two is to give a sense of the man and his history. This is necessary preparation for the later chapters where his art, his support for other artists, and his collections are examined.

Chapter Two also contains discussion of his work as a peripatetic drama tutor and this puts his theatrical practice in a context. While theatre is not the focus of this study important productions are mentioned, and a list of his theatrical work is provided in an appendix. This is by no means but exhaustive it includes all his major productions and gives a flavour of his practice.

A further omission resulting from my strategy of examining what I have identified as key relationships must be remedied here. Rodney Kennedy was a homosexual. To acknowledge this is not to engage in any retrospective "outing" but simply to make the historical record accurate. Sexual acts between consenting adults of the same sex were illegal in New Zealand until the 1980s, and attitudes to homosexuality have changed so radically that it is hard to recapture the threat of disgrace that hung over those men and women who might be publicly exposed as gay. When

---

2 This can still be a contentious subject as can be seen by the controversy raised by Allan Roddick's refusal to allow the inclusion of Charles Brasch's work in a recent anthology *Best Mates: Gay Writing in Aotearoa New Zealand* (eds Peter Wells and Rex Pilgrim) Auckland, 1997. Wells (p 12) claims that Brasch's work can be read in a homosexual context whereas Roddick argues that since Brasch never declared himself to be gay that it would be inappropriate to associate him with a collection whose existence is predicated on the idea that the writer's sexual preferences represent a sufficient community to justify a literary anthology.
Kennedy was growing up such relationships were rarely discussed; secrecy was second nature.\(^3\)

Kennedy's sexual orientation naturally influenced his relationships. There seems to have been, for example, a good amount of infatuation, never reciprocated in any sexual way, in his admiration during the 1930s for R.N. Field. And his early relationship with Toss Woollaston appears to have contained a large measure of sexual attraction. Furthermore, throughout his life he had a number of partners. A consequence of my choosing to examine only selected relationships is that these are not mentioned despite the fact that they were clearly important in Kennedy's life. The artist Marilyn Webb has commented that Kennedy "supported a lot of boys rather than girls"\(^4\) implying by this remark that his homosexuality was integral to the discriminations he made about art and there is some justice in this remark. However, there were, in the hostile climate of the time, good reasons for being protective of vulnerable young men.

Chapter Three deals with Rodney Kennedy the artist. Only six of his works are known to have survived, so an authoritative survey is not possible. Instead, I have chosen to reproduce the works and then attempt to place them in a context. I have found a fatal attraction in Kennedy's work for the English Post-Impressionism of R.N. Field. Fatal because, while this style seemed radical and innovative in its time, it proved to be something of a dead end for Field and the artists around him. In a section on Field and British Art I have argued this point to some length. This is because I want to contrast Field's theoretical understanding -and in particular his reliance on the ideas of Roger Fry and Clive Bell- with Toss Woollaston's ideas about painting. I argue that there was a distinct and qualitative difference between the conceptions of Field and those of Toss Woollaston. Woollaston's ideas develop from his contact with the artist Flora Scales, and from his

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\(^3\) As Peter Wells has pointed out there is an irony in the fact that the supposed extent of homosexual influence on culture is one of the few contemporary confirmations that homosexuality existed at all in New Zealand: *Best Mates* p 12. Wells is referring to A.R.D. Fairburn's accusations of a "Green International."

\(^4\) In conversation with the author March 1997.
own readings in Jacques Maritain and of Fritz Novotny's essay on Cézanne.

Among a certain group of young professional people, support for Woollastons art became a test case for the advance of New Zealand culture. As Charles Brasch put it, if an artist like Woollaston could survive here, then New Zealand had finally reached the stage of a mature culture. The drive to secure that maturity, to create a place where an artist like Woollaston could survive and work, forms the first section of Chapter Four. Here I argue the role that Charles Brasch played in this process. These may sound like the familiar arguments about nationalism in New Zealand culture but there are some aspects of the analysis that are novel. I argue that the mid-1960s see the culmination of a drive to make the administration New Zealand culture more professional, a drive that Brasch promoted, even if he was not entirely happy with its consequences. These changes can by symbolised in the formation of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council in 1964, but many other examples are given. This drive for professionalism brought with it an expectation of higher standards and a consequent centralisation of culture in the larger centres of population. These changes had a profound effect on Rodney Kennedy's relationship to art and artists. He becomes more implicated in the institutions that support art than previously in his life. It is in this context that I have discussed Kennedy's involvement with the Hocken Library and, in particular, the body of work that he deposited there which is known as The Kennedy Gift.

After this I examine his relationship with the work of Colin McCahon. If the Hocken Library stands for his relationship with the institutions that supported artists, his relationship with McCahon is the best example of his closeness to an individual artist. In The Kennedy Gift alone there are over ninety works by Colin McCahon. Beyond these there are a number of significant

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6 Many of these are single items in sets of drawings such as the 21 drawings of the Otago landscape many of them associated with the _Otago Peninsula_ painting of 1946 - 49, or the 27 drawings for the set of the play _Peer Gynt_ (1953).
works by McCahon that bear the name Kennedy and commemorate their enduring friendship. Many of these were part of his personal collection when he died. In this section I have looked at these works and suggested ways in which the relationship might have shaped it.

In the Chapter Five I have examined his collection of paintings and, rather than analyse specific works, I have made some observations on the collection as it stood at his death. There was no obvious plan to Kennedy's acquisition of work, and some might doubt that Kennedy was a collector at all. However, I have argued for the collection as a discreet entity with a significance of its own. In doing this I have tried to show how the collection was built up and how it acquired the particular shape that it had. I have sought meaning in the collection. What was he doing with this art work and what did it mean to him? Much of Chapters Three and Four deal with culture in a general way. This has been done to provide a context in which Kennedy's own contribution can be seen most clearly. But, given the character of the subject, it seems appropriate that the final conclusions should be of a more personal nature. Charles Brasch described Rodney Kennedy as a "painter and a friend of painters" and it is as a "friend of painters" that we now principally remember him.

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Figure 2

Portrait of Rodney Kennedy (1984) by Derek Ball
1. THE PORTRAIT OF RODNEY KENNEDY
(1909-1946)

Portraits for me are more than just the business of recording physiognomy. I only ever painted the portrait of people that I knew and wanted to give some further insight into them. I had been to Rodney’s house many times before I painted the portrait and I wanted to put into one painting as much as I could of the man. Not only his beloved view out the window of the city the Peninsula the harbour...at the other end of the room the McCahon painting.... but also show something of his omnivorous taste in the sense that little bits around that painting.... there are touches of Turkish carpet, touches of exotic fabric and collectibles....I was trying to give the setting that he made for himself, out of his life.
......Derek Ball on painting of the portrait of Rodney Kennedy

Prologue: Breakfast With Rodney

In 1979 Rodney Kennedy had staying with him at his house in High Street the artists Toss (later Sir Mountford Tosswill) Woollaston, Edith Woollaston, Colin McCahon and Anne McCahon who were in Dunedin for an extended visit. Present also was the art curator James Mack who had recently taken up a post at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery and was staying with Kennedy. It was during this visit that Sage Tea, the first volume of Woollaston’s autobiography, was written. Woollaston got up each morning and wrote a new chapter and then read it to the company over breakfast. It was a magical event. Kennedy prepared an elaborate meal and Woollaston sat in an old cane chair and performed as his audience sat around in the window seats and listened, making appreciative comments.²

The story illustrates the life of Rodney Kennedy nicely. He is seen at the centre of a major event in New Zealand’s cultural history: Sage Tea, after all, is not only an essential insight into the development of one of our most significant artists, it is also widely admired for its literary qualities. The setting for this event has been carefully prepared long before:

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¹ Interview with Derek Ball in his office 31/7/97
² The account is as given in an interview with James Mack 16/6/87.
Rodney’s house was a wonder because at one end sitting directly over the gas fire was the large Otago landscape [the painting *Otago Peninsula* (1946-9) by Colin McCahon] and at the other end was a landscape window which Rodney had put in which totally and absolutely embraced the peninsula and, as an experiential thing, that is the best description of Rodney’s sense of theatre. It was a house where he knocked the walls out of a couple of rooms to make this long room which was always freezing bloody cold but it was glorious.³

So it was in this dramatic setting that they sat. Colin McCahon was located between his early masterpiece and its motif. Woollaston was indulging not only a long held literary ambition but also a delight in showing off, a sort of social theatricality that being around Kennedy seemed to bring out in him:

We all sat in the window having breakfast that Rodney had cooked and Toss sat in one of the old chairs and did this big number. And he loved every moment....When you got him and Rodney together at the same time it was really rather dreadful some times.⁴

What is more, not only did Kennedy cater and stage manage the event, he was one of the heroes of the narrative as it unfolded, having, as he does, a whole chapter to himself in *Sage Tea*. The chapter is entitled ‘Rodney, Dunedin’. This refers to Kennedy’s notorious reluctance to leave Dunedin for any length of time, and his jokey habit of signing his name after the manner of an Anglican Bishop who uses only his Christian name and the name of his diocese.⁵ It is easy to visualise this scene as Woollaston read: the sun is streaming in the window, his narrative is met by interjections, reminiscences and much laughter.

It is likely that the occasion for the gathering that James Mack describes was Rodney Kennedy’s seventieth birthday, August 20 1979. At this time Toss Woollaston was about sixty-nine years old, Edith Woollaston also in her sixties, Colin McCahon was sixty and Anne

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³ Ibid p 3.
⁴ Ibid p 4.
⁵ Toss Woollaston *Sage Tea* (Auckland, 1980).
McCahon, sixty-three. Woollaston's story of his early determination to be an artist must have spoken to them all of the difficulties that they had endured to enjoy the relative security and high reputation of their later years. What they were listening to, then, as they sat in the long gallery looking out over the Peninsula and eating Rodney's special breakfast, was their own story.

The final point that needs to be made about this scene I have painted is that it is not entirely accurate. Woollaston's biographical impulse had a long history. In the preface to *Sage Tea* he describes how in 1938 he was encouraged by the poet Ursula Bethell to write down everything he could remember about his childhood. Edith, the artist's wife, gives an account in her letters of Woollaston working on his autobiography at this time. The manuscript was never published and, in fact, was kept by Miss Bethell in an envelope inscribed 'Not to be read'. Later, in 1966, there were discussions with the publisher Janet Paul and many readings such as the one described by James Mack, some in public situations such as the National Art Gallery, others before friends. There are elements of autobiography too in the essay *The Far Away Hills - A Meditation on New Zealand Landscape* (1963) which was actually revised and extended for possible publication in 1977.

The point here is not to discredit a particularly exquisite piece of testimony. There is a deeper truth to the events which James Mack describes and it is this: that Rodney Kennedy created myth. He set the stage for events and he was ready for them when they arrived. It was not that he created his long gallery specifically for Toss Woollaston to test his writings but the space was waiting and when the moment came Rodney was ready with his breakfast, his window seat

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6 Macmillan Brown Library Ms 38 Bethell Correspondence Box 15 Edith Woollaston [EW] to Mary Ursula Bethell [MUB] Sunday June 18...Sunday June 25 [ no year given].

and his wit.

The address of Kennedy's house was 431 High Street but most visitors came in through an entrance round the corner in Alva Street. Access to the house was through the back door. The visitor arriving by this route discovered that Rodney Kennedy, as well as being a talented set designer and director of plays, a teacher of drama and a discriminating collector of art was also a gardener of some skill and dedication. Charles Brasch refers to this multiplicity of talents in part fifteen of his poem *The Estate*:

> Can you follow him as without a pause  
> For rest, economy, strategy,  
> He plunges from project to project  
> From friend to friend inexhaustibly,  
> Shedding goodwill as he goes?

The characterisation is of impulsiveness as well as energy; of an almost manic drive. This variety of activity, sometimes undertaken without strategy or rest, is enacted with his "artist's instinct for style." Indeed the very point of variety may be to explore the limits of this instinct, to attach it to as many aspects of life as it can possibly bear. And it is the breadth of this aestheticism that is so remarkable and that may have made him such a convivial companion for artists. The potential for art was everywhere and he was always ready to discover it.

There are, of course, limits to this. It is hard to imagine Rodney Kennedy being interested in conceptual art, in post-object art, or in those areas of art that strayed across his domain of theatre such as performance art. Although a passionately moral man, he was not interested in political art, unless producing Genet in Dunedin in the early 1970s with an all male cast can be said to be political. His interest in art was in the pursuit of beauty. This study does not seek to anatomise this idea of beauty. It is not a work of aesthetics. Rodney Kennedy's approach to art was characterised by whole-heartedness and enthusiasm, and it is one of the assumptions of this
thesis that this marks him as a man of his time; a time when wholeheartedness and enthusiasm were sufficient responses to painting, and when it seemed that the chief end of art was pleasure. It is hoped that this study will serve to illuminate our understanding of that time, and the role played in it by Rodney Kennedy.

**Beginnings**

Rodney Kennedy was born in Milburn, South Otago, on August 20th 1909. There was a family association with Milburn. His parents were married on April 11 1906 and among the witnesses was a William Neason, who gave his occupation as labourer and his place of residence simply as Milburn. Kennedy's father, Alexander Kennedy, a descendant of the Kennedys who were the first Scottish farmers to settle on Saddle Hill in South Otago. As a young man he had been a soldier and throughout his life he had various occupations, describing himself as at different times as a plumber and a carpenter and, at the time of his marriage, as a labourer.

Kennedy's mother, Lillian (Lily) Ellice Brown, was of Irish descent. She was born in Invercargill, and was living at 129 Maclaggan St, Dunedin when in 1906 she married Alexander Kennedy. Rodney was the second child of the couple. The first was also a boy, Quentin Alexander Bryant Kennedy, who lived only two weeks and died in September 1907.

The family moved from Milburn to Dunedin when Kennedy was about three years old and when he was five Kennedy contracted poliomyelitis. While he was not left crippled by this illness it seems to have contributed to his failure to thrive at this early age, and possibly to his short stature. (Even as an adult he was less than five feet tall.) The illness lasted two years and he spent about a year of that time in bed being nursed by various female members of his family. His aunt,

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8 Department Of Justice, Dunedin. Register Of Births Deaths & Marriages, Birth Certificate 1194.
he recalled, used to massage his feet with sea water, and a favourite bedside game was to make
to make hats. In later life he looked back on his childhood and said the key to his personality was
that he had been indulged when young. He remained, he suggested humorously, a spoilt child.9

Through his illness Kennedy was schooled at home by a local girl and then he attended
High Street School and subsequently Anderson's Bay Primary School after the family moved to
73 Somerville Street. Along with his uncle and aunt's farm, the wonderfully named Paradise at
Paradise Road near Highcliff, the house at Somerville St. was to remain his principal place of
residence for almost twenty years.

His High School education was at Otago Boys High School from 1924 -5. This was not
a happy time although he enjoyed the teaching of Basil Howard who taught English and local
history, subjects that stimulated Kennedy's imagination. He particularly excelled in English and
won the Form IIIc Ist Prize. From December 1925, when he was a Fourth Form High School
Student, he worked at Kempthorne Prosser in order to pay his fees to attend English classes at
the King Edward Technical College.

His imaginative life was stimulated within the family too. His mother was an amateur
painter who had attended classes run by W.A. Bollard, one of the more dedicated Otago Art
Society painters of his day. No examples of her work are known to have survived. Theatre also
played an early part in his life. Although he couldn't recall specific plays, Kennedy remembered
sitting though many performances in the company of his parents. In the days before television and
in the infancy of cinema a trip to the theatre was an exciting experience for a child:

....the great red curtain at His Majesty's..... the richly decorated proscenium
arch...and the feeling that people were dressed for the occasion... [There was]
a vitality and glamour more real and lasting in effect than the novelty of

9 Peter Entwisle "Rodney Kennedy" op cit p 2.
Figure 3
Rodney Kennedy with his parents
There was, in fact, a strong family interest in the theatre. In Kennedy's family albums (originally kept by his Aunt Mary) there are photographs suggesting that his mother's family were active in amateur dramatics. The family had a holiday house at Macandrew Bay and this seems to have been the location for rehearsals and dressing up games. His mother's younger brother, Eric, features regularly. In one shot he is in full Charlie Chaplin costume standing on the verandah. In another a line of seated men with Eric at the end are shown in a staged photograph, all reading from a journal called Theatre.

Kennedy seems always to have been closer to his mother's family than to his father's. It was his mother's family that looked after him when he was ill. His Aunt Mary was the eldest of the Brown children. She married Jack Mathieson and it was the Mathieson's farm that Kennedy spent so much of his time on as a child and a young adult.

Kennedy's grandfather, William Brown, came to New Zealand from Scotland, as a coach builder and for a time ran a boot shop in Lawrence. Together he and his wife had eight children in all. The Brown children seem to have come in two waves. After Mary there was the oldest boy William Orr Brown, and then another boy James Alexander then Eric from whom Kennedy inherited his middle name. Lillian was the eldest of the next group which comprised four girls. After Lillian there were Janette and Ivy. The youngest was Marion, known as Mem. It was this aunt that Kennedy had most to do with as an adult. He visited her regularly and wrote to her when he was overseas in 1955-56.

Kennedy left school at age sixteen. In a pattern that was to be repeated over the next ten years or so he also spent some time out at his uncle's farm milking and doing other farm labouring

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\(^{10}\) Quoted by Tim Garrity in Garrity et al p 7.
jobs. His periodic stops at the farm in the early 1930's seem often to have been initiated by family considerations. A brother, Noel Alexander Robin Kennedy, was born in January 1917 and this placed a strain on domestic space. Kennedy when he writes in August 1936 complains of not having a room to work in "with a table all my own" at Somerville Street. What's more his presence on the farm provided a welcome pair of hands. Despite his early illness and short stature Kennedy was a willing and conscientious labourer and pitched in with the milking or heavy digging where required and seems to have relished hard physical labour. His love of the Otago Peninsula was formed at this time. The farm was a second home for him and his friends were welcome there. Toss Woollaston, a country boy himself, enjoyed trips to the farm.

In 1926 Kennedy went to the School of Art at the King Edward Technical High School. He attended Evening Classes part-time from June 1926 to June 1930 and as a day student full-time from June 1928 to June 1929. He was awarded a 2nd class pass for his 3rd year grade in 1928 and a 1st class pass in 1929. In 1930 he attended for two terms.

In 1928 he taught for a few hours as a part-time teacher. It was reported that Kennedy "showed himself to be energetic, serious and imaginative, and at the same time versatile and original. At all times keen, his work during and since the school courses has borne throughout the distinction of true artistic worth."11

Kennedy's career at the art school began shortly after the arrival of a number of important teachers at the school. Kennedy met one of them first at the New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition (1925-6) at Logan Park. At the time he was working at the night school at the King Edward Technical High School of which the art school was part. He was "giving out samples", presumably of industrial materials, and was immediately smitten with R.N. Field:

11 King Edward Technical High School. Student records, 1935 (Hocken Library Ms 47/87 (3))
Figure 4
The Art Department at King Edward Technical College, 1928.
Rodney Kennedy is front left. W.H. Allen is on the left at the back. R.N. Field is in the rear centre.
...I can always remember the sensation he caused in Dunedin walking through town, he was just off the ship and he was very bronze in a pair of shorts and a silk shirt and he looked like a Greek God. I suppose that influenced me to go to Art School.\textsuperscript{12}

Robert Nettleton Field (1899-1987) and William Henry Allen (1887-1977) were recruited under the scheme organised by New Zealand's first Superintendent of Technical Education, William Sanderson La Trobe, who sought to upgrade the teaching of art in Technical Schools and art schools by recruiting staff from Britain.

Anna K. Petersen has published a photograph of the Art Dept of the King Edward Technical High School, 1928, which features members of the staff, including R.N. Field and W.H. Allen, in the back row. Next are a row of senior students and then two rows of day students. The day students are in school uniform. Rodney Kennedy sits in the front row, wearing not a uniform but a dust coat over a collar and tie. The senior students, according to Petersen, were above average ability and interested in art. Kennedy's position sitting at the front isolates him from the senior students but it also diminishes the effect of his short stature. We can see the characteristic neatness of his appearance, his correct upright posture as compared to the boys with whom he sits. In this picture he is around nineteen years old and likely to have been at least a couple of years older than even the senior students.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{R.N. Field, Artist and Teacher}

Field arrived at a time when the teaching of art in Dunedin was at a significant low. The Art School had been closed in 1920 and art teaching was divided between the Teacher's College and the Technical College. In 1921 Robert Donn was appointed as Drawing Master at the

\textsuperscript{12} "Rodney Kennedy talks to Tony Mackle" 29/3/84 p 1. Hocken Library Artist's file: Kennedy.
Dunedin Teacher's College and in 1922 two English graduates of the Royal College of Art in London, Frederick V. Ellis and Thomas H. Jenkin were appointed to the Technical College. Jenkin and Ellis both resigned in 1924 and it was to fill their posts that Field and W.H. Allen were recruited in August 1924. Despite this administrative disarray Field and Allen showed commitment to the task of developing a teaching programme. One can imagine that the challenge was in some ways exciting. The two men had come from England where they were not able to get a job and suddenly they were thrust into positions of responsibility. They were confronted with groups of students eager for instruction and a Department that was ready for development.

Allen was by five year the older man and he seems to have been the more organised of the two. He was made Head of Department in 1927. The artist Harry (H.V.) Miller was a third year Teachers' Training College Art Specialist, a sort of tutor, at the school in 1928 and he contrasts the teaching style of the two men:

It was Allen who was more of a teacher...One could also learn from his painting style, which was decorative and pointillist, and he really taught etching and lino-cuts and lettering...

Field was much less systematic and less concerned with style or communicating specific techniques:

We found Field was more of the true 'artist' with a mild, moody, dreamy style which now and then woke up to more practical teaching; and his work was more influencing in its (at that time) very modern colour and rhythm. His sculpture was truly modern, with rhythmic beauty and tremendous effect on students.

In a well known account Toss Woollaston describes something of Field's approach as a teacher:

14 Gordon Brown op cit pp 18-23.
15 Both quotations are from H.V. Miller's unpublished Autobiography. They can be found in A. K. C. Petersen: R.N. Field: The Dunedin Years (Manawatu Art Gallery, 1989) p 23.
The first thing I asked Bob Field was how to paint as he did. I could see at once that I had shocked him.

"You must find your own way to paint," he explained gently, "the way that expresses your personality and belongs to you."

This was exactly what I had been trained it was wrong to do - but nevertheless what I had always wished I might.

Field tried to help me by saying things like "Look at that foot, how it splashes into toes" - of a plaster cast in the studio. I looked, and it did. But I couldn't have said such a thing for myself.

There was no diploma here, or any mention of such a thing. You came to art classes because you wanted to paint, or make sculpture. You were a person from the beginning.

It was Field's paintings in the 1931 Group show that had first attracted Toss Woollaston's attention: "it conveyed directly, without the intervention of 'subject', the excitement of the act of painting." However, it was Field's undogmatic teaching style that was the true liberation for Woollaston and the other students. In an excited letter of 1933 he writes:

I am still responding to Mr Field although he has gone. I have heard them say here "there is no technique". It seems that when one falls victim to the idea that "technique" is to be acquired more or less the whole before creative work is possible one also falls victim to whatever variety of technique one is influenced by. To aspire to a professional standard of technical excellence is to aim at something pre-determined, therefore prejudiced. To try to approach art per technique is like trying to get to Heaven by believing the Bible only literally, I should think.

With R.N. Field it is a very simple and definite putting aside of all common professionalism and looking straight at realities - marvellous realities with childlike faith and wonder. There is no more mystery nor difficulty than that in his "modernism". There is no [one] way to paint and draw.

The Art School was a semi-autonomous administrative unit whose entrance was from Tennyson Street at the back of the main college. (In fact in Rodney Kennedy's day some of the teaching was done in a building on Moray Place behind the City Chambers.) But the Art School

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16 Sage Tea p 231.
17 Ibid p 221.
18 Field had recently left for England after the death of his father.
19 Macmillan Brown Library Ms 38 Bethell Collection Correspondence Box 14 MTW to MUB 20th Jan [1933].
Figure 5

The 'Six and Four Club' showing Rodney Kennedy seated front left. To his right is Toss Woollaston. Seated to the right is R. N. Field. Back left is Robert Fraser. To his left is Tui Northey (later Macfarlane) and next to her is Lexie MacArthur. Other founding members of the group were Helen Glasgow, Marie Buchanan, Doreen McCusker and Doris Eberhart.
had teaching responsibilities to those students doing industrial and technical courses. Despite this, the teachers remained committed to the idea of the practising artist. Furthermore, the training that he and W.H. Allen offered emphasised the connection between Art and Craft. Art did not mean only painting and sculpture, but also architecture, furnishings, lettering, pottery, textiles commercial art and design.20

Field and Allen were comfortable working alongside students in an informal manner. Kennedy, for example, went on a painting trip to Central Otago in 1928 with Field and Allen.21 Meanwhile in Dunedin a small group of promising students from the senior classes at the college started to meet at Field's home. Toss Woollaston joined this group in 1932. Calling themselves the "Six and Four Art Club" the group met every Saturday afternoon. The name signified that the original membership comprised six women and four men. These included the two teachers, Field and Allen, and among the students, Rodney Kennedy.

The formation of separate group smacks of an avant garde response to an indifferent establishment. This view receives some encouragement from the choice of name for the group which deliberately echoes the "Seven and Five Society" an avant garde group which had been formed in 1920 in Britain and which, by the end of the decade, had been become identified as the vanguard of English Modernism.22 To the students involved this must have seemed like an exciting and radical organisation. They were encouraged to discuss their ideas about art and these views were taken seriously, and they were encouraged to experiment with various media. Woollaston when he met them was impressed and a little intimidated by the freedom of artistic practice which

20 Petersen op cit p 23.
21 From the notes of an interview between A.K.C. Petersen and Rodney Kennedy.
they espoused.

These were obviously exciting and stimulating meeting for the young people involved and they must have been pleasant social events for the Fields (Robert Field had married Marion Campbell Iverach in January 1928) yet they must be viewed as extensions of the college programme and of the teaching of art to a select group of interested and able students. Field participated initially as a benign paternalistic figure presiding over the meetings rather than as a committed member of an avant garde group. The surviving photographs of the group were taken in 1932 by which time Toss Woollaston was a member. They show Field sitting, perhaps on the back of a couch, within the group but also above it just as the earlier photograph on the steps of the King Edward Technical College had the staff at the back and at the top of the picture. Marion Field stands to the side looking fondly on. This shot was probably taken by Rodney Kennedy who appears in another taken at the same time. This time Marion Field was the photographer. Here Field is more integrated with the other members although we still have a sense of him as the presiding genius of the group. Marion Field's description of the events makes clear the relationship:

Each week these students had a project to produce a piece of work -given theme- and many of them would come to our Anderson's Bay home and work on stone or at painting all Saturday afternoon, then meet as a club in the evening for mutual evaluation of work done. It was very stimulating indeed.23

Marion catered, providing pikelets and playing Chopin on the gramophone.24 The distinction between the group and the teachers was underlined by the exhibiting arrangements. The group staged a number of private exhibitions first at the Field's home where one room would be devoted simply to Field's work and the other to the rest of the group. Rodney Kennedy

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24 Petersen op cit p 26.
showed what was to become a familiar flair for display by finding a small shop in the Broadway Arcade where they exhibited. The largest show was at the Vedic Tearooms in Princes Street and although these shows were advertised there were no reviews. The exhibitions were supported mainly by friends and relatives of the artists. The meetings of the Six and Four Club did not survive for long after the departure of Field to Britain in 1933. Field, however, returned to New Zealand in 1936 and re-instituted a regular monthly meeting at his home.

This period up till 1936 was Kennedy's most productive period as an artist. In 1932 he exhibited at the Otago Art Society, the show being reviewed by R.N. Field who points to Kennedy as among the most talented of the emerging young artists of Otago but neglects to discuss the particular work. In 1933 Woollaston wrote, presumably reporting Kennedy's own ambitions, that he will "possibly exhibit in the 1933 Group." Clearly Woollaston's comment reflects a degree of satisfaction that Kennedy himself felt towards his own painting.

In fact, Kennedy never did exhibit with the Group although he became one of its most loyal supporters. In 1934 and 1935 he exhibited with the Christchurch based New Zealand Society of Artists being listed as Rodney H. Kennedy. Following the model of The Group the Society aimed to be an artist driven organisation: new members were to have the support of three-quarters of the membership and to support the Society's objective of "encouraging original

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25 Ibid p 44
26 During his brief period of formal training as an artist the young Colin McCahon was one of the students who attended these Saturday meetings at the Field home.
27 R.N. Field "Otago Art Society's Exhibition" Art in New Zealand 18 (December 1932) pp 125-128.
28 MTW to Mary Ursula Bethell (MUB) Jan 20 [1933].
29 The Society grew out of a dissatisfaction with the Art Society network in New Zealand. Its membership was taken from the ranks of emerging young artists and the imported, mostly English, teachers who had taught and encouraged them. In the first exhibition in 1933 among the contributors were Christopher Perkins, T.A. McCormack, Olivia Spencer Bower, Rata Lovell-Smith and Louise Henderson. The Group itself went into abeyance during the life of the Society. It was revived only after the administrative burden of the new organisation proved to be arduous and expensive. In the end one of the strengths of the Group proved to be its informal structure.
It aimed to be a professional organisation for serious artists and Kennedy's participation represented a degree of seriousness about his art.

**Friendships of the Thirties**

Rodney Kennedy had a talent for friendship. The years he spent in Dunedin from the late 1920s to 1942 were, in retrospect, very busy and the events complex. Rather than pursue a narrative thread I have identified key relationships which he formed at this time and which have a particular significance for his career in art. His devotion to Robert Field, for example, was very strong although it did not survive the 1930s. It was in this period he met and corresponded with Ursula Bethell. Toss Woollaston, one of his closest friends, came to Dunedin in 1932 and quickly fell in with Kennedy. Doris Lusk and Anne Hamblett were students at the Art School from 1936, and in 1938 Kennedy collaborated with a "young art student" Colin McCahon on the photograph of Kennedy's set and costume designs for The New Left Club's production of the Capek brothers' *The Insect Play*. Also in 1938, although this friendship did not blossom until 1946, he met Charles Brasch for the first time. Kennedy's relationship with these last two will be discussed more fully in later chapters.

**Rodney Kennedy and R.N. Field**

The first of the powerful relationships that Kennedy formed during this period was with Robert Field. It differed from the others in that it did not survive the decade. The original relationship was between student and teacher, however by the mid 1930s Kennedy counted Field
among his friends. This friendship was strained after Field returned from England newly converted to the Oxford Group, a proselytising religious organisation also known as the Buchmanites. Kennedy attended a few meetings of the Group out of loyalty but was uncomfortable with the confessional style of fellowship.

In 1936 after the Woollastons, newly married, had left Dunedin Kennedy spent the evening at the Fields' house helping him prepare work to be sent for exhibition in Christchurch:

Last night I was at Fields the first time since W's left here and helped Bob sort out quite a number of things for exhibition there. He has been doing a lot of paintings lately so you will have ample opportunities of viewing them. Also his wire sculpture which he is sending (much too abstract for your taste I think) It is the first time I really felt at home with Bob (vile expression) - we were both painting- the problems involved threw us intimately together - It was like being at school again with Robert the adored master and friend- I am very fond of him and jealous of his group interests....31

His admiration for the "Greek god" who walked up Stuart Street in his shorts and silk shirt had persisted. When an exhibition of Chinese Art was in town he wrote that he would have liked to have Robert on his own to "to speculate on the glazes and appreciate the shapes." (Field had returned from England with an interest in studio pottery). Field's membership of the Oxford Group denied Kennedy the intimacy that he hoped for in his relationship with Field.

Both Kennedy and Toss Woollaston felt that the Oxford Group weakened Field's discrimination and that his painting suffered as a consequence. One show that Kennedy visited was being held to raise money for Group funds. Kennedy had noted that work was not selling and that Field decided to accept offers. On another occasion he finds Field doing portraits for one shilling and sixpence for Art School funds. Kennedy strongly disapproved what he saw as a squandering of talent.32

31 REK to MUB 1936 [no date given]
32 REK to MUB Tuesday May 3rd 1938 & Sunday Dec 11th [1938].
By 1938 Kennedy's activity as a visual artist was beginning to decline and his friendship with Robert Field had also cooled. When Field returned from England newly converted to the Oxford Group, Kennedy confessed himself jealous of the intimacy that Field had with his co-religionists. This cooling of the relationship between the two men is illustrated in the history of an article written by Woollaston, at Kennedy's instigation, about R.N. Field's painting.33

In the article Woollaston criticises Field's work for a lack of seriousness and, perhaps most tellingly of all, claims that Field is not a New Zealand artist. The article seems to have been conceived and perhaps written while Kennedy was up in Nelson with the Woollastons in early 1938. Woollaston described it as being written quickly because "Rodney demanded haste". The article was sent to Field, himself, presumably by Kennedy who then asked Field for its return. Field meanwhile wrote to Woollaston a "strongly Marion-tinctured little letter" saying he felt "hung, drawn, and quartered or filleted" after reading it, and didn't think it should be published.34

Part of the need for haste, as Kennedy saw it, may have been that Art In New Zealand were planning a feature on R.N. Field and he wanted to get Woollaston to publish his opinions. An article by W.H. Allen did appear with illustrations in the June edition but Woollaston's piece which was never published.35

Over the decade of their acquaintanceship Field had moved from being Rodney Kennedy's master to being his friend, from being Mr Field to Bob. More and more, however, Field's proselytising became an obstacle to friendship. For a while Kennedy seems to have been quite besotted with Field and the significance of the Woollaston article for him seems to have been that

33 See Chapter Four for a more detailed discussion of this article.
34 MTW to MUB 16.4.38 Marion was Field's wife and among some of their friends her Christianity was felt to make her small-minded and conventional and to have the effect of making Field himself rather petty with those who were not, like them, members of the Oxford Group.
it provided a symbolic emotional rejection that then allowed his feeling to subside.

There is only one further reference in his letters to them meeting on intimate terms after early 1938. At this meeting Field sought out Kennedy to "see about" his coolness. Field suggested that more involvement with the Oxford Group would renew their friendship but Kennedy rejected this advice. He had recently become a member of The Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers). After this visit relations between the two remained cordial but Kennedy no longer sought Field's company with the same passion.36

Kennedy and Ursula Bethell

It is a feature of his life that Kennedy replaced his family ties with those made in the worlds of culture: art, theatre and literature. In this a key transitional figure is the poet Ursula Bethell (1874 - 1945). She helped form his taste, she provided a model for independent living and acted as a sort of maternal substitute. Miss Bethel recommended books and lent them too; she offered encouragement and spiritual support and, on occasion, she chastised him when she disapproved of some aspect of his behaviour: she felt he was being too intrusive in the Woollaston marriage and made her feelings known.37 On another occasion she was critical of the group of young people who shared the house at Mapua in the summer of 1938 when the Woollastons were away managing a farm in the Marlborough Sounds. Colin McCahon, who was one of that group, characterised her rather as "storming up in her 'johnstones' ".38 He was never quite under her spell in the way that others of their group were. Even late in his life, Rodney Kennedy would never have used McCahon's comical language to describe her. She was a potent influence on him at a

36 REK to MUB Tuesday May 3rd 1938.
37 MUB to REK March 2 1939. See below p 38.
time of uncertainty.

Not long after he came to Dunedin, Toss Woollaston, who had known Miss Bethell for some time, wrote to her saying he had met Rodney Kennedy whom he believed she already knew. This connection came through Kennedy's friendship with the artists Olivia Spencer Bower and Evelyn Polson (later Page):

Olivia Spencer Bower was the one who was most friendly with Miss Bethell. Through Olivia, and going to the Group Show that I first met her. She always went to the opening of the Group Show.

Miss Bethell was a woman of independent if somewhat straitened means. Her fortunes rose and fell depending on the size of the wool cheque. She had lived in Cashmere with her companion, Effie Pollen, until 1934, when her friend died. She never completely recovered from this loss and grieved deeply each year on the anniversary of the death. Of Kennedy's circle, she was friendly not only with Woollaston, who was her gardener for a while, but also with Robert Field.

On her friend's death, Miss Bethel moved to a house in St Albans and dedicated herself to an extensive network of correspondence through which she hoped to help young men and women decide on the course of their lives. However, even given this, the exchange of letters between her and Rodney Kennedy is quite extraordinary. There are over two hundred letters from her to Rodney Kennedy lodged in the Hocken Archive and most of these were written between 1936

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39 MTW to MUB Macmillan Brown Library Bethell Collection Correspondence Box 15.
40 In an interview with Alison Mary in 1988 Kennedy suggests he met Bethell through the two artists Page and Spencer Bower. In 1989 he seems to have suggested to Peter Entwisle (p 6) that it was through Canon Whitehead he met her. Peter Entwisle, Rodney Kennedy (An unpublished essay in the Kennedy file at the Hocken Library Picture Collection.)
41 Alison Mary "Interview with Rodney Kennedy, 8 Alva Street, Dunedin 12/8/88." Hocken Pictures Collection, Kennedy File
42 Although, in fact, she owned both a house in Cashmere, "Rise Cottage", and owned the house in Webb St, Christchurch where she occupied a small room. This house she gave to the Anglican church for the training of Deaconesses.
In this Room for Wayfarers—
the LOVING KINDNESS of

EFFIE-HENRIETTA DOROTHEA POLLEN
Is to be
Continued and remembered.

E.H.D.P
Daughter of Dr E.Henry Pollen of Wellington
Spent the last two years of her life
at Rose Cottage, Cashmere Hills
and was Closey Concerned
with St Faith's House in its early days

Figure 6

Design by Rodney Kennedy for memorial plaque for Effie Pollen.
and 1942. Around seventy of his replies still exist in the Archives of the University of Canterbury. Kennedy offered her consolation for the loss of her friend. In 1934 he sent her, apparently at her request, a design for a commemorative plaque, done in a restrained *art deco* style, and executed in green ink. In her turn Ursula Bethell offered Kennedy artistic encouragement and a maternal solace for the insecurity and loneliness that overcame him at times.

Kennedy liked to project an air of sophistication. He was well-read and had an opinion on everything. When Woollaston expresses an interest in the sculptor Epstein, Kennedy has his opinions ready:

> I am rather intrigued about that book "Conversations with Epstein" .....Rodney (the know all) tells me Epstein hasn't got sculptural quality- is a portraitist and delineator of character who paints as it were in clay- an illustrator.43

Yet we can gauge how brittle that sophistication was from a letter Woollaston wrote to Ursula Bethell:

> Rodney and I are very fond of each other. Between us it is now quite recognised that he does not take his frivolity seriously. It took me some time to articulate this in my mind, as I had never been used to sophistication and felt baffled by it. What he is apart from this running fire of frivolous criticism I do not know how to say but can give you this clue from the dark side. In answer to something I said about Isadora Duncan's book which I had just read he said.... "Unhappy -the root of my unhappiness is in your passionate outburst on reading Isadora Duncan. The skeleton of me moves and responds to set stimuli -but inside it is like rat poison burning away and consuming everything." .....he rarely unveils himself this is the only time I have known him to, except insofar as he can retain the whip-handle of his sophistry. It is a queer disease.44

Woollaston treated Kennedy's black mood with cautious respect. The vulnerability of Kennedy seems to have be acknowledged between Miss Bethell and Toss Woollaston. They were

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43 MTW to MUB "Tahawai" Tahunanui Nelson Monday 28th.
44 MTW to MUB Bethell correspondence. Letter is dated 26 Feb and is probably from 1935.
in agreement that he sometimes needed looking after. Consequently, Miss Bethell was indulgent of him as he sought to find a creative expression for himself. She encouraged Kennedy as a painter, and also with his drama. On one occasion she wrote agreeing with him that embroidery would be much more to his liking than knitting and, on another occasion, that he should keep up the singing lessons. When he sent her a print of a Renaissance portrait she said how much she enjoyed it but gently insisted that he take it back with him the next time he visited. On one occasion he sent her his poetry; her response to this has not survived.

On his trips north to Nelson, or to art exhibitions in Christchurch, Kennedy invariably visited Miss Bethell. The difference in their ages influenced their relationship: "We were treated like the London urchins. We were her poor boys."45 On one occasion he claimed she did not influence him personally. She was much more interested, he told Tony Mackie, in the young women, Olivia and Eve.46 He did, however, acknowledge the influence she had on his generation:

Tremendous conversation. She'd talk about the latest things she'd found and books she'd read. She did form our taste. And she was interested in us getting on our bikes and going somewhere. Not being defeated by lack of money. She was waving the flag for getting up and going. Exuberance I got from her.47

At a time when many other friends were distracted or forgot him -when he was in the detention camps for conscientious objectors- Ursula Bethell was one of his most steadfast correspondents. His father, a former soldier, disowned him and they never spoke again.

The correspondence with Ursula Bethell was maintained up until the poet's death in 1945 when they exchange tender last letters of touching affection, he from Whitanui where he was

45 Ibid. Miss Bethell had worked in the East End of London helping the children of the poor.
46 This did not hinder her from encouraging the writer Monte Holcroft into the priesthood (he became a journalist), or supporting Toss Woollaston in his endeavours as an artist. See also "Rodney Kennedy talks to Tony Mackle" 29/3/84.
47 Alison Mary "Interview with Rodney Kennedy, 8 Alva Street, Dunedin 12/8/88." Hocken Pictures Collection Kennedy File
under detention, she dictating from her hospital bed from where she conscientiously sent out messages to all her friends. In July Kennedy wrote, quoting T.S. Eliot:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting. 48

He continues:

Goodbye dear Sparrow. I would have loved to have said this to you personally. I think I had better stop here. So many words and too many meanings I don't feel capable of selecting with precision. The spirit is very tired. There is a full moon shining over on the snow on the Tararuas. Sharp and frosty and remote. I would be there.

Rodney

This is the last surviving letter from him to Ursula Bethell. Communication was hampered by his incarceration, by the difficulties of wartime communication and by her illness. Her last letter to Kennedy is a simple postcard written about a week before she died:

Oct 9 1944
Love for the narcissus poeticus and for the remembrance.
au revoir
M.U.B.(Dictated)

**Kennedy and Toss Woollaston**

In their letters Rodney Kennedy and Ursula Bethell discussed art, literature and their network of mutual friends, including Toss Woollaston. It was agreed between them that Woollaston was a serious artist, although it must be said that Miss Bethell sometimes confessed her inability to understand "modern art".

Woollaston came to Dunedin in the spring of 1932 and stayed two terms before returning

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48 From T.S. Eliot *East Coker* (1940).
to Mapua for the apple picking season. He and Kennedy were to become life-long friends. This period, from 1932 through to the beginning of the war, was the most intense of their friendship. Woollaston had cycled to Dunedin after seeing R.N. Field's painting exhibited with the Christchurch Group. In 1934, when Woollaston had returned to Mapua, Kennedy emulated his friend's mode of transport and Kennedy cycled to Nelson. Thereafter, every year until 1942 Kennedy travelled to Nelson -by bus, train or bicycle- for the fruit picking season. These visits continued even after Woollaston had married Edith Alexander and their first child was born.

There was a strong mutual attraction between the two men. Woollaston was later to write that "the first night I walked home up the long hill with Rodney I found he loved me"49, implying, perhaps, a sexual attraction. Kennedy was later to dismiss Woollaston's account as wrong. Nonetheless, it is clear, whatever the details, that the relationship had the passion of youth.

When Woollaston first saw Kennedy's painting he describes him as "quite a brilliant painter."50 Kennedy was starting to exhibit regularly and Woollaston was impressed, and perhaps a little intimidated, by his friend's sophistication and apparent confidence.

Kennedy read widely and participated with enthusiasm in the intellectual debates that his artist friends engaged in. John Summers, the poet and bookseller, was a friend from Dunedin. He spent the autumn of 1940 picking fruit with Kennedy, Woollaston and McCahon. Summers' interests were in philosophy and theology and he felt puzzled by the artistic judgements that his friends made such as McCahon's distinction between an 'illustration' and a 'painting' proper. During what he described as those "charmed Mapua nights" Summers asked Kennedy why the novel The Near and the Far was considered so much better than Anthony Adverse. The answer

49 Sage Tea p 237
50 MTW to MUB Jan 20 [1933].
came back, "Well you see, Hervey Allen's book is just an escape, Johnny."51

Kennedy's judgements when it came to painting were even more acute. An incident in Summers' studio betrays his shrewdness:

I'd painted a picture in watered-down inks which had flowed and fused. In truth, I thought no more of this than the silhouettes of gum trees I'd put on my wallpapered wardrobe, and little more than of the watercolour Christmas cards I'd made and sold to Toc H members......Rodney visited me, and, on spotting this painting lying on the table in front of my window...his forehead became more even more crinkled and his eyes widened in astonishment at my -as it were- spontaneous effusion. He told me that it was good, very delicate. then he looked at me shrewdly and added, 'and I know even if you don't yourself, and he will have been right.52

Kennedy's ability to spot good painting extended beyond John Summers' single work. He offered Woollaston advice on his painting and became one of his strongest advocates. This advocacy had its earliest expression with the exhibition of Woollaston's painting that Kennedy organised in a shop front in Dunedin in 1936.

The idea that one could mount such an exhibition obviously came from his association with Field. The "Six and Four" had hung their work in Field's home, and then in a shop in Broadway that Kennedy had found. This pattern was repeated when it was decided to mount a show of Woollaston's paintings. A shop front was rented at 32 Broadway and the exhibition opened on Saturday 25th July 1936.

The exhibition was opened by R.N. Field who bought a painting.53 Another painting was sold to a local art teacher. Kennedy wrote to Ursula Bethell from the exhibition at the end of the first week:

It has snowed without and everything is thawing, thousands of weary cold

52 Summers op cit p 55.
53 The work Mapua was presented to the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1982.
people bedecked with partisan ribbons bolster each other with pseudo heartiness: a football match. They parade along the streets, they pass our side street, flatten their noses against the window, bitten by their restlessness they dispiritedly move on. Inside the window propped with cushions and enjoying this gloriously warming sun we sit impervious. Nobody visits us except small boys with hoops and dogs.

So far this exhibition has been a great success. My friend John Moffett of the Times has given Toss an extraordinary amount of free publicity. The Harris's very thrilled about it have talked .......

Yesterday Bob Field paid the rent for another week and Miss Copeland (the Training College lecturer on Art) bought a picture. That clears the framing bill and a few pounds over....

Kennedy's sense of occasion required that the event be treated momentously and the first paragraphs of this letter consequently smack of self-conscious literary endeavour. However, he had clearly learned the value of publicity from the earlier exhibition he organised. Woollaston's show was advertised in the local paper, there was a feature by John Moffett, and a review appeared in the Monday edition. John Moffett was a reporter on the Otago Daily Times and was later to become the paper's editor. He was sympathetic to arts coverage and friendly to Kennedy. It was through him that Kennedy arranged that Woollaston should review Ursula Bethell's book of poems Time and Place (1936). This small Broadway show was later described, with some satisfaction, as Woollaston's first solo exhibition and, although sales were moderate, it was the first of a series of attempts to promote Woollaston's work with which Kennedy was involved.

Kennedy, in fact, held a privileged relationship to Woollaston and his painting. There was none of the prickliness or rivalry that marked the relationship between, for example, Woollaston and McCahon. This became so difficult that the two men agreed not to talk about art at all.

54 John Harris was the University Librarian. He and his wife were very involved in the local arts scene. They were both active in left-wing political activity and had a part in running the left wing book shop, Modern Books, in Moray Place. See Rachel Barrowman A Popular Vision: The Arts and The Left in New Zealand 1930—1950. Victoria University Press, 1991 pp 125 —6.
55 REK to MUB 73 Somerville Street, Anderson's Bay, At 32 Broadway, Noon Saturday.
56 ODT July 28 1936 p 14; ODT August 1 p 14.
Figure 7
Rodney Kennedy and Toss Woollaston at Mapua c. 1937

Figure 8
Patrick Hayman, Colin McCahon, Ellespie Forsyth, Doris Lusk, and Rodney Kennedy at Mapua 1939 - 40.
Woollaston was able to trust and respect Kennedy's judgement without feeling threatened:

...Rodney is here...Edith is away...It is very lovely having Rodney again—he is my one really capable appreciative critic—that is, he talks while Edith is mute mostly. He always gives an exact value when he criticises, so that I am feel with him that I am having what I have done endorsed correctly in his pronouncements. Therefore his condemnations are like necessary and healthful pruning. Painting for him is like striking one's thoughts upon a responsive instrument. With the rest of you I always feel excited to resistance against your reactions of perplexity and pained amazement lest they should make me nervous and deflect me from truly following the one point of perception given me to probe all I meet with....57

The quality of this praise can be measured by his response to criticism he receives elsewhere. He and the writer Roderick Finlayson carried on a brief but intense correspondence in the late 1930s, discussing art and literature. They sent each other drawings and poems. Woollaston was gently critical of Finlayson's drawing but enthusiastic about his writing. He, in fact, initiated the correspondence after reading something Finlayson wrote in the left wing journal Tomorrow. In a letter that is missing from the sequence, Woollaston had responded sharply to Finlayson's criticism of his verse. He apologised and explained in the next letter:

I have felt guilty of making you feel, for all I know, that I have resented the criticism you sent of some of my verses. If you have felt so it is really my fault, and it is a guilty conscience that makes me fear you do feel so. For, to be quite honest, I do not like criticism.58

Perhaps unsurprisingly, not only did Woollaston not like criticism but he went out of his way to deflect or defuse it when it comes especially in the direct form of a personal communication:

......when adverse criticism comes, I seek out someone whom I secretly hope will oppose it and get him to re-instate me in my conceit of myself. I think that was why I sent some verses to you. I find I hate the self-criticism of the person whose indulgence I enlisted against yours. I am not a very pleasant

57 MTW to MUB March 8 1937.
58 MTW to RF Hocken Misc Ms 75 July 12, 1940.
Figure 9
Rodney Kennedy at Mapau c. 1937.
As Woollaston made clear in this extraordinary piece of self-analysis, the business of receiving criticism is fraught with difficulties. The value of someone whose opinions you can accept without question are obvious.

Of course, there may have been particular features of the interaction with Finlayson that made the interchange between the two particularly volatile. Like Rodney Kennedy, Woollaston seems to have formed intense relationships but often these were short-lived. Intellectually he engaged with people, the friendship flared while the ideas were hot and then the relationship died, exhausted of its motivating energy. Such seems to have been the case with Finlayson. Furthermore, Woollaston seems to have been particularly vulnerable to criticism of his poetry. He apparently had a higher opinion of his verse than the people to whom he sent it soliciting criticism and expecting praise. In one letter to Ursula Bethell from around 1934 he responded to her criticism of his verse less intemperately than to Finlayson's. Nonetheless, there is the sense that Woollaston still thought perhaps he was right after all and she was wrong. Her repeated declaration that she cannot hear the rhythm in his poetry made him wonder, he wrote ironically, whether he knew what rhythm was. He then did what he had described himself doing in the Finlayson letter: he recruited a second opinion. Rodney, he wrote, raved about the rhythm of his lines. He quoted the lines and, lest she miss the point, added the stresses.

For Woollaston, as for any artist, the business of criticism of his work was fraught with complexities. He seems to have been more clear-sighted in his assessment of his own painting than his poetry but, nonetheless, the role that he ascribes to Rodney Kennedy at this time was

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59 Ibid.
60 MTW to MUB Letter dated Monday 28th [1934?]
Figure 10
Landscape, Tahunamui, 1934 by Toss Woollaston

Figure 11
Portrait of Rodney Kennedy, 1936 by Toss Woollaston
clearly a privileged one. In fact at the end of the 1938 - 1939 apple season Kennedy stayed on in Mapua in a hut that Woollaston intended to try out as a studio but, as Edith Woollaston commented in a letter to Ursula Bethell:

...having Rodney there Toss feels rather an advantage than otherwise -he has been accustomed to painting with R. present on many occasions and there has been no hindrance- also R. might act as model which is a distinct advantage.61

Rodney could be invisibly present while Woollaston painted, perhaps working alongside of him; or he could be the subject of the work itself; or he could be the voice probing the work, testing its strengths and weaknesses. Early in their acquaintanceship, during Woollaston's first visit to Dunedin, Kennedy seems to have been fairly dogmatic in his advice:

Rodney took my painting in hand, advising me (as Field would not) to look and see that the earth was crimson for instance, the foliage viridian with chrome yellow, the shadows violet. Two colours most necessary were lacking in my palette- cobalt violet and cobalt green. The sharp, lightish sea-green the latter afforded was essential. (It was Rodney's favourite colour.) My greyish colours abdicated in favour of a somewhat garish use of these unfamiliar ones, my patterns began to writhe and dance. I had never consciously painted patterns.

Dance -that was the thing, the flow and rhythm of it through the landscape.62

This advice, although not given by Field, was gleaned from his practice and from Kennedy's study in the work of such British artists as Mathew Smith and Harold Gilman. Its influence can be seen in the Landscape, Tahunanui of 1934 [figure 10] in which he uses violet and yellow to describe the distant hills. Painted from a high viewpoint they have equal pictorial value as the nearer detail of road and trees. More strikingly, this influence can be seen in the portrait that Woollaston made of Rodney Kennedy (1936) [figure 11]. He paid homage to his friend by portraying him using the green and violet that were among his favourite colours.

61 EW to MUB Letter dated Monday 17 [1939?]
62 Sage Tea p 238.
Figure 11a
*Portrait of Rodney Kennedy*
by Toss Woollaston ca 1936.
It seems, then, that a feature of the close friendship the two men shared was that Kennedy's criticisms could be accepted by Woollaston as free of the taint of destructive rivalry. However, the intensity of this friendship seems for a time to have placed a strain on the Woollaston marriage.

Toss Woollaston had met Edith Alexander at the Field's house during one of the Saturday afternoon meetings of the Six and Four Art Club during Woollaston's two terms at the Art School in Dunedin in the years 1932-3. They met again in 1936 when Woollaston was in Dunedin for the opening of the exhibition that Kennedy had organised. The exhibition was not the only thing that Kennedy organised. He claimed to have arranged the marriage that followed within two months. Woollaston remembers with some amusement that Kennedy said he "gave" him Edith as if she, herself, had no say in the matter.63 What seems more likely is that Kennedy's deep attachment to Woollaston complicated his relations with Edith especially as he was insightful enough to recognise the strong attraction between his two friends. For a time, as he explained to Miss Bethell in a letter actually written from the rooms in Broadway where Woollaston's first exhibition was on display, he experienced a strong attraction of his own to Edith:

Edith Alexander is a very courageous person- you will approve of her-if not this wild romance- It is very inadequate to discuss her in one word but I shall write more of her anon. I cherish an unrequited love for her. This Toss does not know. I have regretted my last outburst to you and think it needs this explanation. An experience very beautiful has wiped out this ugliness.64

It is from the marriage of Toss and Edith and their departure for Nelson that we get a sense of Kennedy's assessment of himself at this time:

Toss hopes to get away on Tuesday....I shall miss them dreadfully when they

63 MTW to the author in an interview in January 1997.
64 REK to MUB Letter not dated but the exhibition was reviewed in the Otago Daily Times on July 28 1936.
go the loss of the friendship and understanding of those two people will not be appeased by any tail waggery and hearty grins...\textsuperscript{65}

The description of his cheerful "tail waggery and hearty grins" with its puppyish associations shows the acute emotional intelligence that Kennedy possessed. He has already rehearsed his parting and its brightness will be complete and convincing when he bids his friends farewell.

When Edith Woollaston married Toss and went to live in Nelson, Kennedy took on her job at the University as a medical artist. This was poorly paid - he received a pound a week - but it did give him a room at the University where he worked. This afforded him some of the privacy that he lacked at home, and friends came to visit him there. The job was restricted to University term time and so it had the additional advantage that it left him free to spend the summer in Nelson Province.

The "giving" of Edith and the Woollaston marriage of 1936 does not end or even simplify matters between the three. Encouraged by Kennedy, who was keen that they should like each other, Ursula Bethell met and formed a friendship with Edith Woollaston. She visited the Woollastons in Mapua sometime in 1938 and Edith then seems to have confided in her how intrusive Kennedy was being in the marriage relationship. Edith was always a self-effacing woman and had not raised the issue directly with him, or, apparently, with her husband. Since 1934 Kennedy had been visiting Nelson, picking fruit and tobacco, and staying with the Woollastons sometimes for as much as three months of the year. Given the Woollaston's cramped quarters and presence of their first son, Joe (b. 1937), living must indeed have been close and feelings high especially if Kennedy was competing for Woollaston's time and attention with Edith and her son.

\textsuperscript{65} REK to MUB [1936]
Figure 12
*Figures from Life*, 1936 by Toss Woollaston

The figure on the left is Rodney Kennedy. With him is Edith Woollaston, the artist's wife.
Miss Bethell acted on the confidence and seems to have written to Kennedy about his behaviour. Again the letter is missing as is Kennedy's written response but its presence can be felt in the letters the friends wrote to each other. In March 1939 Ursula Bethell wrote to Kennedy after receiving a "very severe letter from Toss." She had apparently written to Kennedy about "a relationship where I do not belong." She apologised for any hurt but not for her comments which, she wrote, were intended to be helpful. 66

When Kennedy and Colin McCahon cycled up in late 1938 they first joined a summer school run by W.H. Allen who by this time was teaching at Nelson Boy's College. In the New Year they then stayed on the property of Arnold Wells, the brother of Decimus Wells, on whose property the Woollastons had their mud brick house. Arnold Wells' property was closer to the tobacco picking which, seasonally, preceded the fruit-picking. McCahon eventually came over to stay in an old hut on the Deci Wells property earlier than Kennedy, and it is clear from Edith Woollaston's letters to Miss Bethell that the reason for his lateness was his hurt at being identified as intrusive. When he did arrive there was some tension and Edith was distressed at having been the cause of this hurt. She wrote to Miss Bethell that she didn't really feel that Kennedy needed "putting wise" about her particularly, she noted, in view of "his recent development of spirit - which you admitted while here- and by which he must have recognized his faults and wherein they lay." 67 Nonetheless she went on to concede, in a later letter, that perhaps some good had come of the crisis and they were all on a new footing. 68 Certainly Kennedy, despite the deep hurt he experienced, seems to have recovered quickly and within a few weeks was again corresponding with Miss Bethell on the same terms as before.

66 MUB to REK March 2 1939.
67 EW to MUB, Second Sunday in Lent [1939].
68 EW to MUB, Monday 17th [April, 1939].
Other Friends

It may be that the cooling of the intensity of his feeling for R.N. Field was hastened by other attachments that were formed around this time. The first of these was to John Niemeyer Findlay, Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy at the University of Otago. Kennedy had known him at least since the previous year when he had been a member of the New Poetics group at the University. Although he does not ever seem to have contemplated taking a degree Kennedy was attracted to the intellectual atmosphere of the University. New Poetics was a discussion group organised by Archdeacon Whitehead of Selwyn College and including several young academic intellectuals. Kennedy characterised them as "superior intellects but rather low on aesthetics." One cold night he gave a lecture on Jean Maritain's *Art and Scholasticism* to a meagre audience of six or seven which included Professor Findlay: "We sat and froze ....and when I finished every one was too cold to discuss much so we went home. " He had borrowed the book from Ursula Bethell for his preparation.69

The following year Kennedy was recruited by Findlay to design the costumes and the set for the Left Book Club production of the Capek Brothers' *Insect Play* which Findlay was directing. Shortly after that Findlay left Dunedin to take up a post in the United States and Kennedy, somewhat in puppy dog mode, mourns his passing:

"Dr Findlay left here on Thursday for America....He was good to me. I shall miss him. He left me a most flattering testimonial."70

The second of his attachments was of a different sort and was to prove more enduring. In sending Miss Bethell a photograph of his design for the play and one of the actors in costume,

69 REK to MUB May 19 1937.
70 REK to MUB Nov 13 1938.
Kennedy wrote that the photograph itself was the result of an artistic collaboration with a young art student, Colin McCallum. Despite the ten years difference in their ages the two became close, and for a time, almost inseparable friends. By the end of the year, they were on bicycles heading for Nelson for the fruit picking season. In 1940 and 1942 they were in Central Otago picking apples together and in 1941 they attended the inaugural meetings of the short-lived Dunedin branch of the Fellowship of Conscientious Objectors.

On the occasion of the 1939 Otago Art Society Annual Exhibition, Kennedy again had the opportunity to explore his pleasure in controversy. The Otago Art Society had been courting young artists and encouraging them to submit work for its exhibitions. As a token of this new good will Harry Miller was voted onto the committee. When the young artists submitted work to the hanging committee all were accepted except Colin McCallum. His work was an early version of one of his paintings of the Otago Peninsula. The younger artists including Doris Lusk and Anne Hamblett and Kennedy himself, but not Harry Miller, removed their work from the exhibition as a protest. They had felt that it was customary that each member should have one work accepted. Kennedy led the withdrawal of the younger artists. He remembered that it was at the opening that they noticed McCahon's absence. The work was apparently accepted at first, then removed at a later stage. There was talk of an alternative exhibition. Kennedy wrote to Woollaston asking him to send work for a "Salon des Withdrawals". In the end the McCahon work was accepted and

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71 REK to MUB September 7th 1938.
72 Edith Woollaston to MUB 19th May 1940 & Friday Jan 30 1942; See also the minute book of the Dunedin Branch of the Fellowship of Conscientious Objectors in the Alexander Turnbull Library Ms 3884 Lincoln Efford Collection.
73 Apart from its challenge to the more refined Art Society style the fact that McCahon's painting was a relatively large work may have contributed to its rejection. There seems to have been a feeling that he was somehow cheating by submitting a big painting: MUB to REK Nov 22 1939: "It sounds as if Colin had been attacking the spirit if not the letter of the Exhibition rules by sending so large a canvas!"
74 MTW to MUB (undated) return address: Havelock.
Figure 13
Harbour Cone from Peggy's Hill, 1939 by Colin McCahon
hung but it left the artist with a sense of bitterness. "It was my first battle" he told Gordon Brown. For Kennedy it caused a breach with Harry Miller which was never fully to heal even though they lived in the same city for many years. He regretted this since he was fond of Miller's wife, Vespa.

McCahon and Kennedy collaborated on the dioramas at the Museum in 1940. McCahon had applied from Wellington and been awarded the job and took on Kennedy as his assistant. The work had been started by an earlier technician who had left to go to Britain. The job was to create a scene at Little Papanui inlet which could be used as a background to display sea birds. Kennedy completed plaster work which was part of the cliffs while McCahon painted the scene.

Theatre in Dunedin in the 1930s

From about 1936 Kennedy's interest began to turn to theatre. He found more pleasure in set and costume design than in painting. Increasingly this interest intersected with a broader concern among his friends about the political situation in Europe.

In Spain the Civil War had become an ideological battleground for fascists and socialists. Increasingly the New Zealand newspapers carried reports from Europe about Hitler and the Nazis. Some of these reports were sympathetic and reassuring, but increasingly there was a sense of impending war. This was particularly strong in the pages of the left wing journal Tomorrow where the issue of conscription was hotly debated. The fervent pacifism that had sprung from the experience of the 1914-18 War had been rejected by the Methodist congress in 1936 and was increasingly seen as irrelevant. Ursula Bethell comments in a letter to Kennedy: "The pacifism of

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75 McCahon remembered that the other artists withdrew on opening night but this seems unlikely since there is no mention of the event in the newspaper reviews. Gordon Brown Interview with Colin McCahon p 2.
77 REK Interview with Tony Mackle 29/3/84 p 12.
several of my friends has been severely strained lately." Kennedy and Miss Bethell rarely moved outside the calm waters of international art, however the same unease that she reports was widely experienced:

...I think it is important to record the change so quickly developing in the atmosphere here. Of course allowing for the temper of the peoples about this so important election.......Somehow peace and the feeling for pacifism has taken a holiday. A RC young lady remarked, "All those pacifist young men I know seem to [be] polishing brass buttons..."

To many intellectuals and artists this polishing of brass buttons was repugnant. Some form of direct action was required. Artists like Lois White began to use their pictures to make political commentary in such images as White's *War Makers* (Auckland City Art Gallery, 1937). Theatre was seen as an ideal medium to alert a community to political issues.

It was in this milieu of intellectualism and political activism that Kennedy's interest in theatre grew. As early as 1936 he designed and made the sets and costumes for a one act play by Gordon Bottomly, *King Lear's Wife*, (Kennedy describes it as a prelude to Shakespeare) for the British Drama League. This production was chosen for performance the next year at a Drama League conference, a national event. While this was hardly radical theatre it may have been through this success, and others like it, that he was recruited to design the set and costumes for the Left Book Club production of the Capeks' *The Insect Play*. This was performed at the YMCA Hall in Moray place in October 1938. Colin McCahon was involved with the design for the play *Professor Mamlock* by Friedrich Wolf (1888-1953). These plays, like the very popular play by Clifford Odets (1906-1963), *Waiting For Lefty* (1935), had strong associations with the popular left. Their themes were all related to issues of social justice and totalitarianism, and the

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78 MUB to REK Nov 5 1938.
79 REK to MUB October 6 1938. The Labour Government were re—elected with an increased majority.
80 REK to MUB no date [1936] & June 8 1937.
performances addressed the impending war. The cooperative action of producing a play was seen as reinforcing solidarity among the members of the group.

This notion of the social significance of theatrical activity is perhaps challenged by the 1941 production of T.S. Eliot's verse drama *Murder In The Cathedral* (1935) by the Dunedin Repertory Society. The "Rep" was associated with more traditional theatrical events (the Eliot play was seen as a radical departure from their usual style) and was not political in its aims. Furthermore, since the programme for the play included a banner congratulating the society on its "excellent efforts in raising funds for Patriotic purposes" it is perhaps surprising to find that the stage set was designed and executed by four young artists: Doris Lusk, Anne Hamblett and the by now avowed conscientious objectors Rodney Kennedy and Colin McCahon.¹

This may be explained by the fact that although the proceeds of the play were going to "patriotic funds" they were destined for St John's Ambulance and Nursing Services.

The question of whether a surviving painted arras that functioned as a backdrop to the play was a work by Colin McCahon has prompted Des Smith, the stage manager, to reminisce on its construction. The memories give an insight into how the four worked together on a project:

> A lot of research was done by all parties to establish the authenticity of the period: going into fine details such as architecture and furnishings etc. One query was whether there were stained glass windows in the Cathedral and if so what type of glass? To solve this the artist group suggested an arras be designed and hanged behind the altar. This was adopted, and arras and matching altar cloth were drawn out on a paper "cartoon", collectively by the four artists.

> If my memory serves me well, the "cartoon" was taken away from the theatre and the design transferred to calico and the finished arras was brought back and hanged...... Everyone, including the artists were very pleased. It did not appear to be the sole work of McCahon, but rather the collective work of the

¹ A copy of the programme and a number of items relating to this production have been lodged in the Hocken Library. Hocken Library. 94-143-4 Watson.
four artists. 82

The principal actor, however, actually remembered that the altar cloth was by Kennedy alone:

Rodney Kennedy....was responsible for designing the set for Murder in the Cathedral. His main work was to create a large tapestry to hang over the altar. 83

In all likelihood a single artist, quite possibly Kennedy, designed the work and, perhaps even prepared the cartoon from which all four prepared the finished arras which was painted on mutton cloth. Des Smith gives a useful insight into the ingenuity of the four artists working under the constraints of war-time shortages:

It may be of interest to note. that during the War years, imported materials of any kind were non existent as were Art supplies of any kind including tube or powder paints. So artists used house paint and most stage painting and props and costumes, were makeshift from, sometimes, flimsy non-lasting materials. In most cases they were not made to last much longer than the production and the arras is remarkable in it has, lasted so long. The altar cloth was of a like fabric with matching motifs and muted tonal values. The wooden hewn alter cross was embedded with what appeared to be giant uncut jewels of all colours. In reality, they were giant confectionary soft jubes from a local confectionary manufacturer. 84

Another left leaning group that used theatre extensively in its programme was the Workers Educational Association (WEA). In 1935 Kennedy was issued with a certificate of studies from the King Edward Technical High School, some five years after he had finished his studies and it may be, as Tim Garrity has suggested, that this documentary proof of academic achievement marked the beginning of his involvement with the WEA. 85 The WEA had long been involved in

82 Murder in the Cathedral Dunedin Repertory Society, 1941, Recollections by the Stage Manager Hocken Pictures Artists' File: Colin McCahon.
83 Merilyn Dick "50 years of stage, radio and TV -the reminiscences of Roland Watson." Dunedin Star Weekender Sunday July 17, 1994, p 16.
84 Murder in the Cathedral Dunedin Repertory Society, 1941, Recollections by the Stage Manager Hocken Pictures Artists' File: Colin McCahon.
85 See The Kennedy Gift pp 10-11.
drama. Kennedy was friendly with John Brailsford who since 1930 had been Dunedin's director of the WEA. Colin McCahon told Gordon Brown that his own involvement with theatre came through the WEA and then the Left Book Club. He comments: "We were all staunch WEA-ers in those days."

Pacifism

It was within this milieu of political uncertainty and excitement that Kennedy decided on his pacifist opposition to military conscription. He started attending Quaker meetings and, late in 1937, he joined the Religious Society of Friends. He and Toss Woollaston joined at the same time. Kennedy writes of them both being "waited on" by two Friends as they had applied for membership of Quakers. In November of that year he was making banners for a Red Cross International appeal and looking for shop windows on the Octagon where he could display posters designed by himself "and his artist friends" with messages of Peace. As ever with Kennedy there is a personal dimension to all this. He wanted to hang his posters in a window which "an Oxford Grouper uses to display latest Bond St. styles for men." The gesture (whether it was ever enacted or not) was planned as a retort to the religious affiliations that seem to have taken over the life of his teacher and friend, R.N. Field. Membership of Quakers was seen as the umbrella that protected Kennedy from what Ursula Bethell and Woollaston called the "Group

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66 John Brailsford was a Quaker and had been imprisoned as a conscientious objector during the 1914-18 War. He was distantly related to one of the "New Poetics" group that Kennedy was a member of, the philosopher, Arthur Prior. Among the subjects he taught for the WEA were classes in drama. Kennedy was close to the family and sometimes stayed over at the Brailsford's house if he missed the last tram home.


68 REK to MUB Nov 23 1937.

69 REK to MUB Nov 23 1937, and eleventh of the eleventh [1937?].
deluge."^90

Whatever its origins Kennedy having taken a stand against militarism and conscription stood firm. Toss Woollaston had as a young man declared himself a conscientious objector and was, anyway, exempted by the Appeal Boards that were set up to administer military defaulters since he was employed full time on a local orchard, work that was regarded as essential to the war effort.^91 Colin McCahon was found medically unfit for military service due to a heart condition consequent upon childhood rheumatic fever. He was reportedly told by his physician to go away and "work hard and die" or "work hard and live".\(^\text{92}\) Of the three, only Kennedy opposed the war in his actions.

In December 1941 his appeal against his call-up as a conscientious objector was declined. Members of the Religious Society of Friends were generally considered favourably by the Appeal Boards but Kennedy did not cite his membership of Quakers since he felt he might be judged as having joined simply to avoid conscription. He subsequently refused to present himself for medical examination where he would have been passed as unfit for military service by virtue of his height. On February 14 1942 he was sentenced by Senior Magistrate H.W. Bundle to one month's imprisonment for refusing to be medically examined. He was then to be detained for the duration of the war. When asked if he was ready to carry out his duties as a citizen Kennedy replied, "I think I have carried out my duties as a citizen." The magistrate then observed that, "If everyone were like you it would be a sorry state of affairs." To this Kennedy replied that there wouldn't be any war if every one were like him.

\(^{90}\) MUB to REK Oct 10 1937.
\(^{91}\) Barnett \textit{op cit} p 51.
Figure 15

Whitanui Detention Camp near Shannon
Detention

Usually the defaulter was sent to for a month to Paparua Prison in Christchurch. This was the standard punishment meted out for refusing to attend a medical examination. Thereafter he was to be sent to one of the Detention Camps set up for Military Defaulters. However, on February 23, a little over a week after his sentencing, he wrote to Ursula Bethell from Strathmore Camp near Rotorua commenting that this was apparently where he was going to stay in the mean time.93 One former detainee remembers meeting Kennedy at Hautu Camp six miles south-east of Turangi. If this was so then Kennedy was not there long. Hautu was set up as the "bad boys" camp where the more difficult detainees who refused to cooperate within the camp system were sent until they were willing to cooperate. However, the numbers of detainees became too much for the facilities at Strathmore and Hautu was used briefly as an overflow. He seems to have been sent on, fairly soon, to Whitanui camp near Shannon where was held until his release in 1946.94

Kennedy rarely talked to his friends about his experiences in camp. He managed to avoid the demoralising work of weeding between the flax bushes and ring-barking willow in the swamps95 and was detailed instead to the garden at Whitanui. This was undoubtedly hard work, but gardening was his pleasure, and he seems to have gained some satisfaction from it: he had seeds sent in to him, and one detainee remembers dahlias growing in a flower garden. There is a story, too, that he made parsnip wine and, when this was discovered, his friend W.H. (Harry) Scott took the blame for this.

93 REK to MUB Feb 23 [1942]
94 Former detainees Wilf Foote, Percy Gourlay, Chris Palmer and Walter Excell remembered Rodney Kennedy from the camps. See the Kennedy file at the Hocken Pictures Collection. For general information concerning life in the camps see David Grant Out in the Cold (Wellington, 1986) especially pp 147-153 & p 168.
95 The work was pointless. The weeding had no effect on flax growth and the fallen willow branches rooted themselves and the trees grew on with renewed vigour.
Percy Gourlay, a fellow detainee, comments in a letter on Kennedy's constant cheerfulness, his boundless energy, his stoicism in the face of adversity. He remembers Kennedy running art classes although he himself did not attend these, preferring lectures in philosophy instead. He did, however, witness one of Kennedy's theatrical productions, T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*: the same play Kennedy had collaborated on with Colin McCahon, Doris Lusk and Anne Hamblett. Despite the fact that very few of the inmates had acting experience, and despite the very limited resources available in the camps, Kennedy required, and got, very high standards for his productions in the camp. These plays were popular with inmates and with staff at the camps, and, as Percy Gourlay recalled, "although discipline was strict I think the powers that be looked sideways at times when Kennedy borrowed (?) some of the items he needed to make a good job of that particular play."

This positive approach to his detention was evident from the start. One of the most contentious issues for debate among conscientious objectors was the degree to which they should cooperate with the system even within detention. This had been discussed at the Dunedin Branch of the Fellowship of Conscientious Objectors which Kennedy had attended in 1941. Some men refused to do any work and spent long periods in solitary confinement or in prison. Kennedy, having made his stand, was prepared to make the best of a bad situation. He wrote to Ursula Bethell from Strathmore Camp and asked her to send him a pen and a copy of Shakespeare. On Friday nights, he reported, a play-reading group met and they could only manage four books from over 200 men. The men were still living in tents (one of their first tasks was to complete the camp in which they were to be held) and there was a fair amount of "tent lounging" but already moves

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96 Letter from Percy Gourlay to Tim Garrity on file in Kennedy's artist's record at the Hocken Pictures Collection.
were being made to set up WEA classes and Kennedy was already planning a production of the Eliot play. 97

Apart from the Eliot, Kennedy produced modern American plays at Whitanui: *Key Largo* (1939, Maxwell Anderson); *Our Town* (1938, Thornton Wilder); *The Beautiful People* (1941, William Saroyan). The material is startlingly contemporary and this is probably because the choice of play was limited by the availability of scripts. The texts of these plays were reproduced in the American magazine *Theatre Arts*. 98

During his detention Kennedy was only once ever let out. That was to attend his mother’s funeral. Lily Kennedy died on the eighteenth of June 1946. His father was still alive but any affection between the two was severed by his son’s pacifism. In effect, the death of his mother left his Aunt Mem as the only member of his family with whom he had regular contact. 99 Shortly after his mother’s death, Kennedy was released.

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97 REK to MUB Feb 23 [1942].
98 Garrity *op cit* p 11.
99 At his death there was among his effects a Christmas card from his brother Noel dated from the 1980s. It was addressed to: "Dear Big Brother" and was couched in terms of conventional family affection. However, apart from the exchange of Christmas cards Rodney and Noel do not seem to have had much regular contact. When Noel visited the Dunedin Public Art Gallery shortly after his brother’s death he expressed perplexity at the "other" life that Rodney led that he was never aware of.
Figure 16
Portrait of Rodney Kennedy by Colin McCahon
2. THE PORTRAIT OF RODNEY KENNEDY
(1946 - 1989)

The Bath Street Studio

On his release Kennedy lived in Bath St. in a condemned building which an artist friend, Max Walker, had converted into a living space and studio. Walker left for England in 1946 and Kennedy took over his flat. He moved in with two former conscientious objectors, Harold Nixon and Bob Durrant,¹ and lived at Bath St. until 1947.² Living conditions were primitive. The flat had no power or gas when they first lived there although these services were later connected. Despite its primitive appointment, the Bath Street studio provided Kennedy a degree of freedom he had not previously experienced in his living arrangements. First, he was free from the hateful drudgery and uncertain detention of the camp. Secondly, for the first time in his life he had a living space, however precarious, that was his own.

Bath Street was famous for its parties. Studio parties were already a feature of Dunedin artistic life. While the Fields were holding their discreet tea parties during the 1930's Russell Clarke, a teacher at the Technical college and a commercial artist with John McIndoe, was hosting less sober events in his studio flat. Kennedy had attended these as had his younger artist friends Colin McCahon, Doris Lusk and Anne Hamblett.³ Friends from the University lecturing staff came regularly to the Bath Street studio as did visiting artists and performers: members of the New

¹ Robert Durrant was later to become a lecturer in philosophy at the University of Otago.
² Kennedy told Peter Entwisle that the poet James K. Baxter stayed there briefly as well. Baxter was in Dunedin at that time and although living mostly with his parents at Brighton he stopped at various houses about the town for a night or two.
³ REK interview with Peter Entwisle October 1989.
Figure 16a
The Bath Street flat showing the Woollaston drawing of Kennedy's mother above the mantelpiece.
Zealand Symphony Orchestra and the Borovansky Ballet, the pianist Lilli Krauss. On one celebrated occasion Rodney decked the flat out with thousands of daffodils.

When Charles Brasch renewed his acquaintance he expressed the opinion that the Bath Street flat was not a suitable place of residence for a member of the University staff. (Kennedy was by this time employed on a temporary basis as a drama tutor). He persuaded Rodney to move in with him at 31 Royal Terrace. The two men occupied the lower storey of this house which belonged to Brasch's cousin Peter Fels.

**Rodney Kennedy and Charles Brasch (1938 - 1946)**

Kennedy and Brasch had first met on a train from Christchurch to Dunedin in 1938. They already had many connections in common. Miss Bethell and Toss Woollaston would undoubtedly have primed Brasch to keep an eye out for their distinctive friend in Dunedin. Ursula Bethell had certainly written to Kennedy about Mr Brasch. Both men also shared many interests. Both were committed to modern art, both had some interest in teaching difficult children, both were pacifist or at least deeply concerned with impending war, and both were homosexual.

Brasch had been teaching at Little Missenden Abbey which was a residential school for "difficult" children run rather on the lines of A.S. Neill's Summerhill. In 1937 Kennedy, always very good with children, had agreed to teach a young "retardate", a former pupil of R.N. Field's. This was an educationally subnormal boy in which a group of friends seem to have taken an interest,

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4 Garrity *op cit* p 11.
teaching him to read and write. Kennedy earned some money by looking after him and teaching him art.\(^5\)

The two arranged to meet Rodney's pupil. This plan was interrupted by the unexpected arrival of friends and they went instead to see an exhibition of R.N. Field's work. This was coincidentally held in Brasch's former family home on London Street.

Charles Brasch had grown up surrounded by *objets d'art*. His grandfather Willi Fels was an avid collector. Some of this collecting impulse rubbed off on the grandson and stayed with him.\(^6\) Yet, as he describes in his memoir *Indirections*, while his affection for his grandfather was deepening, his satisfaction in simply collecting was diminishing:

> I could not follow him [Grandfather] as a collector. Already I had stopped collecting stamps. His coins, plaques and medals did not draw me........I admired Grandfather's collections -that is, I admired some of the individual pieces in them; but I did not find myself poring over them; my response was sensuous, but otherwise passive; although I did not know this yet, I wanted to steep myself in the sensuous and not to stop, neither clinging to it nor passing beyond, but passing into it, making it mine by becoming it. Nor did the early printed books hold me for long; true I had picked up a few serviceable first editions of Browning, Tennyson and Swinburne, but chiefly because they were well-printed, strongly bound, and readable; I wanted books to read and use, not to admire for their age and rarity and preserve in cases.\(^7\)

During that visit to New Zealand Rodney Kennedy was one of the people he met who were immersed in culture. Not only were these people "in the midst of the sensuous", to use Brasch's phrase, but they were shaping culture, they belonged.
Later in his memoir Brasch compares the artistic status of the poet D'Arcy Cresswell with the painter Toss Woollaston. Brasch, although ten years junior to Cresswell, found himself talking to him as though to a younger man whereas Woollaston seemed much older and wiser. Part of the difference between Cresswell and Woollaston was in what Brasch perceived as Woollaston's rootedness in New Zealand:

Did he [Cresswell] appear so active and youthful because he was detached from New Zealand, whereas Toss, who might have been far his senior, was rooted in it, part of it -yes, he was New Zealand, I saw now, the New Zealand that was coming to be.8

The epiphany by his grandfather's collecting cases -the moment when he realised that the collecting impulse was not sufficient to meet his needs- was the defining crisis in Brasch's life. This was the moment when he decided on what terms the rest of his life was to be lived. The defining action -a consequence of his dedication to the sensuous experience, to art and culture- was his decision to return to New Zealand after the War, and to live there. Such an intellectual decision about where to make his home was in contrast to the unconscious sense of belonging that Kennedy displayed. He was reluctant to live for any time outside Dunedin, and the prospect of living outside New Zealand was never really his to consider.9

Similarly, Woollaston rejected outright any idea that he needed to go overseas to become a fully rounded artist. "I don't want to go Home," he wrote to Ursula Bethell in the late 1930's, "- and I think painters do better to go singly to their tasks than with mixing together...."10

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8 *Ibid* p 310.
9 In conversation with the author Brasch's literary executor Allan Roddick speculated that Rodney's strong sense of belonging was one of the things that attracted Charles to him.
10 MTW to MUB [*no date* letter incomplete probably late 1930's Joe (b 1937) only child].
With statements like this, uttered from the house of clay bricks, Woollaston seemed to embody the ideal of New Zealand male self-reliance and to hold out a promise for a similar self-reliance in a culture which, to Brasch's eyes steeped in the ages of European civilisation symbolised by his grandfather's collections cabinets, seemed precariously rooted:

That even one such artist had appeared in New Zealand at once changed the nature of the country. If Toss survived, then other artists too would appear in time and perform - whatever the cost - their essential fertilising, civilising work; work that before it could be received must disturb and unsettle a society so timid and shallow, so loosely settled on the surface of the country in an order so easily set up and so little questioned. The country had not searched its foundations, nor had it fought for its liberties; such beliefs as it professed had scarcely been tested. To most people, New Zealand was still a poster-country - that was how painters continued to show it, that was how New Zealanders thought of it. In his work as in his way of life, Toss implicitly repudiated and such view; neither, then, would be easily accepted.¹¹

For Brasch, then, Cresswell's way represented if not an intellectual death then a failure to thrive. His work in New Zealand had not engaged the realities of the local scene but rather it sought to import and impose a style from England where it was outmoded. Too far from England to successfully return, too wedded to England, however, to ever take root in New Zealand, where only those hardy plants who adapted to the new conditions were likely to survive, he was adrift between two cultures. This too was Brasch's dilemma, and he risked the same fate if he was indecisive in his choices.

Having gained this insight and having decided to commit himself to New Zealand and to the encouragement of its fragile culture it was natural that on his return Brasch should enter that same circle that he had met when he visited in 1938. Ursula Bethell had died in his absence, but in Mapua Woollaston continued to paint, and in Dunedin he met up again with Rodney Kennedy.

¹¹ Brasch Indirections p 310.
The two men lived together for ten years from 1948 to 1958, first at Royal Terrace then later at Heriot Row after Brasch bought his own house. They shared a passion for art and culture, and this brought them together. Brasch's interests sprang from his upbringing and his Grandfather Fels' interest in collecting, Kennedy's from his delight in the freshness of experience and from his pleasure in the company of those who made art. Their interests were thus complementary. Brasch was of a scholarly cast of mind and intellectual in his approach, but he was attracted to the freshness of new art and loved the sensuality of new experience. Kennedy was interested in intellectuals. He had read widely but his response to art was much more intuitive than Brasch's. James Mack, who knew them both later in their lives, characterised the difference between the two men as being like the difference between Classicism and Romanticism. Brasch with his classical education understood, for example, McCahan's more difficult paintings. These were: "undeniably classical abstractions. Tough, grunty, pithy. A language of emotional poetry in paint." Kennedy was much softer, more emotional, his tastes often swayed by his relationship with the artist.  

Employment

Conscientious objectors were denied full civil rights upon their release. They could not vote in parliamentary elections until 1951 and their release was generally conditional upon their accepting direction to work in designated essential industries. After the war Kennedy was briefly "manpowered", that is, compelled to work as directed in a designated industry. He worked briefly for the firm McSkimmings, manufacturing ceramic tiles. From there he went to work for John

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12 Interview James Mack 16/6/97.
Brailsford at the Workers Educational Association (WEA) as a drama tutor. In February that year John Brailsford retired and D.O.W. Hall was appointed as head of the WEA.

The WEA had been active in New Zealand since 1915. Its activities were a partnership between the University and the Trade Unions. Its spirit imbued the Victorian ideals of self-improvement through education. From its inception the WEA received some funding from the Government. This ceased during the Depression years but after the 1935 general election the newly elected Labour Government reinstated financial support. The Adult Education Act of 1947 established a National Council of Adult Education whose function was to promote adult education and the cultivation of the arts. The National Council directed money to the University who, then, employed full-time staff. There were also four regional councils for Adult Education each associated with a University.

Kennedy was employed in a part-time temporary capacity as a drama tutor during 1947. However, it was soon felt that with the impending 1947 Adult Education Act there was a need for a full-time drama teacher and Kennedy was appointed on March 1 1948 on a temporary basis. This appointment was made permanent on October 1 1948 after a two month extension of the original contract. This was the employment on which he was to be engaged for the rest of his professional life.

The appointment of Kennedy as a full-time drama tutor was justified in the reports of the Adult Education Service by the widespread demand for his services, and by the success of his work on the three circuits he had undertaken. These were the Waitaki Valley Circuit which included Duntroon, Otekaike and Kurow; the Balclutha Circuit which included Milton and Benhar; and the Central Otago Circuit which included Clyde and Roxburgh. In 1949 he visited 18 small centres. By 1951 he had four circuits and in the next year he worked at thirty-four different venues, with
thirty-one different drama groups, supervising a total of 477 people. In the 1953 report it was noted that the pressure of work was such that it could not be sustained. This pressure was compounded by the additional responsibilities Kennedy had taken on acting as stage-manager for John Trevor's touring solo performances of Shakespeare. Trevor was a member of the University staff, lecturing in drama. He had made a small reputation in London for his one man performances of Shakespeare.\textsuperscript{13}

At this time Kennedy also became involved as a performer with Ngaio Marsh's Canterbury University College Drama Society. Kennedy's association with Marsh went back a number of years. She had been a foundation member of the Christchurch Group and exhibited with them regularly between 1927 and 1943. She was also a member of the New Zealand Society of Artists and exhibited with them in 1933 and 1934.\textsuperscript{14} Like Kennedy she had moved from being a painter to an involvement in theatre (although, of course, her principal claim to fame and income was provided by her mystery novels the first of which was published in London in 1934). Marsh's great theatrical triumph was a production of Pirandello's \textit{Six Characters in Search of an Author} with the Canterbury University College Drama Society. On Sept 27 1948 the group presented a private performance for members of the touring Old Vic Company including Laurence Olivier.

It was as a result of this performance that the company went to Australia performing \textit{Six Characters} and \textit{Othello} on a short tour in early 1949. Kennedy played The Boy in the Pirandello and a herald in \textit{Othello}. He also acted as assistant to the company's tour manager Robert Stead. In an article for the \textit{Otago Daily Times}, Kennedy wrote that the company gave 47 performances

\textsuperscript{13} Interview with Patric Carey at his home, December 1997.
\textsuperscript{14} Catchpole \textit{op cit} pp 159 &165.
Figure 17
The cast of Ngato Marsh's production of Pirandello's "Six Characters In Search Of An Author" showing (bottom right) Rodney Kennedy as The Boy and Brigid Lenihan as The Daughter.
mainly at the universities in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra in the course of a two months tour. The company was greeted with enthusiasm wherever they went performed and received uniformly good reviews. They played *Othello* in Canberra at the same time as the Stratford-upon-Avon Players -forerunners of the Royal Shakespeare Company- but the reviewer of the Australian *Listener* found that the English players had much to learn from Miss Marsh's work.

Other cast members included Brigid (Biddy) Linehan who became a close friend. She was considered the star of the company. She played the daughter opposite Kennedy in the Pirandello and was highly praised in many reviews for her Desdemona. Olivier himself praised her performance. After the tour of Australia she acted on advice from him and went to Britain. Other members of the company also went to Britain: Robert Stead the company's touring manager to join the production staff of the Old Vic, Pamela Mann to study production at the Old Vic School and John Knight (later to marry Brigid Linehan) to receive technical training at the Old Vic. Stead subsequently went into television production with the BBC. These contacts were to prove useful when Kennedy visited the United Kingdom in 1955.

By March of 1949 Kennedy was back in Dunedin and back into his job. Under the 1947 Adult Education Act a University Department of Adult Education was created and Kennedy was appointed as a specialist tutor in drama. Later the Adult Education Act of 1963 freed universities to undertake a role in adult education that was independent of the WEA. Kennedy then became a lecturer in the University of Otago. He retained this position until 1970 when, one year before his retirement, he was made senior lecturer.

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15 ODT dateline Wellington March 9 [1949].
16 Margaret Lewis *Ngaio Marsh: A Life* pp 116 -121 contains a fairly detailed account of the tour.
It was in this role as peripatetic drama tutor, especially between 1947 and 1963, that many people encountered Rodney Kennedy. He ranged widely throughout his territory and worked with the same determination in adverse circumstances as he had shown in the detention camps. It was known that Kennedy demanded very high standards of his productions despite the difficulties of performing drama in country halls with amateur casts and his services were highly sought after.

Barry M. Williams recreates the difficulties that faced a specialist tutor in drama. Kennedy had inherited his post from George Worthington who had gone on to work in Canterbury and then Auckland. Here Worthington describes the difficulties facing a tutor who wanted to be innovative in his practice:

People in New Zealand do not want the theatre to be part of their lives, or to stimulate them. They do not want to be moved out of their rut. They want to see entertainment.... Thus entertainment should be quite removed from reality and seen through a rose-coloured glass. Preferably funny - humour not wit - and about twenty-five years old, or at least written in that convention which people still think of as theatre... Private Lives, Quiet Weekend or Nude with Violin. Something that the people will go to see. Something that will make money.

As Williams comments such challenges doubtless faced all tutors. Worthington, for example was 'not only producer, stage-manager, set designer, electrician and prompter' but an actor who could turn in 'an immaculate performance'. In rural areas there were few men available to build sets, rig lights and switchboards, or learn stage managemship. Many rehearsals were at night and then the tutor could not spare time to give instruction in these aspects of theatre, although he often had time on his hands during the day. Often, too, the halls were inadequate for the purpose. Sometimes there was no stage or, often, a proscenium to inhibit the passage of sound.

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17 Barry M. Williams Structures and Attitudes in New Zealand Adult Education, 1945 - 75
18 Ibid p 90
Figure 17a
Rodney Kennedy as Itinerant Drama Tutor with the Department's Ford V8
into the auditorium. Few halls had adequate lighting and switchboards, blocks and ropes, or curtains. In self-defence the tutor took as much as he could cram into his van.\(^{19}\)

The vehicle into which Kennedy crammed his props was a Ford V8 van belonging to the University Extension Department. Kennedy drove perched on cushions. Patric Carey recalls what was to become a familiar story told of Kennedy:

> It was said that if you saw a car being driven very fast and loaded with costumes, showing no evidence of a driver, anywhere between Gore and Clyde, that was Kennedy about his business.\(^{20}\)

Kennedy's insistence on the highest standards included, of course, the material chosen to perform. He was keen that each group produce at least one full length (three-act) play a year. This was to break what he saw as the unhelpful British Drama League (BDL) tradition of performing one-act plays. However, this created a particular tension. The BDL was strong in Otago and this strength created the demand that provided Kennedy with his job:

> Always around about festival time, when the producer is confronted with the problem of finding a suitable one-act play or one of some literary merit, the morass of bad one-act plays induces a spirit of despair. Each year the problem is more acute and one's lethargy grows apace.\(^{21}\)

Against this, he wrote, was his policy to produce at least one three-act play each year. It was, he argued, as much trouble to produce a one-act play as a three-act play. In expressing these opinions Kennedy was taking up a position espoused by the New Zealand Drama Council which was established during the closing years of the war. Its interest was in three-act plays rather than the shorter pieces favoured by the BDL.\(^{22}\) Kennedy was a member of the Council for ten years during the 1960s.

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\(^{19}\) Ibid.


\(^{21}\) Rodney Kennedy "Choosing a Play" Adult Education Bulletin (September, 1951) p 7.

\(^{22}\) Barry M. Williams *op cit* p 92.
In his production methods Kennedy was relatively conventional. A play was chosen and then cast through audition. He was skilful in warming an amateur group to the awkward idea of performing in public or even in front of their fellow actors, and, inevitably, his productions were beautifully designed. Rarely was a play of his reviewed without special mention being made of the costumes and the set. He seems to have had a preference for the more traditional theatre with the services decently concealed. Reviewing plans for a major new theatre in Chichester, England, he commented on its open construction with "a vast spider web of steel cables and girders with a lighting grid running right round the theatre. It is a construction engineer's job, naked and unashamed". And, he added rather wistfully, "not one plaster Cupid." 23

On balance he regretted too the loss of the proscenium arch:

.... one can see from the photos and plans that the emphasis has been placed on the open platform, and though fascinating the acting possibilities may be, we are now stuck with this open stage, and the tennis neck that goes with it. ......There is no doubt that certain plays with large casts and many changes of scene, come off more successfully on the arena stage, but there are moments in the theatre when one is grateful for the once-removedness of the proscenium arch, and the one simple controlled view that this ensures. I think the audience feels safer.
The picture can be too confused, and the eyes too busy crass-crossing a complex choreography. I shall never forget in the Assembly Hall, in Edinburgh at one of Sir Tyrone Guthrie's efforts, my moment of panic, when Irene Worth died at my feet. I was too near. 24

It was one of the functions of the specialist tutors in drama was to instruct the men and women with whom he worked in the craft of theatre. His function was to help plant the interest and the skills in the community where an independent and vigorous theatre group would then flourish. Many circumstances worked against this: the pressure of the BDL Festivals; the limited

24 Ibid.
time the tutor had with the various groups; and the reluctance of the students to learn—they preferred to use the skills of the tutor to enhance the finished performance. Kennedy responded to this by publishing a series of articles on practical aspects of theatre in the *Adult Education Bulletin*. In these he sketches out the principles involved in casting, choosing a play, lighting, stage sets, costumes and other aspects of the theatrical craft. In other articles he offered a range of advice that gives an insight into his own practice. He cautioned, for example, that the producer should never underestimate his audience. Somewhat in contrast to the experience of George Worthington he advised: better a strong but challenging play rather than a mediocre play with popular appeal. On casting a play, he noted that it was a mistake to choose actors with imagined suitability for a part. It was better to project the character no matter who the actor was. Physical characteristics were unimportant.25

These short articles are full of references to different aspects of theatre. His reading in the subject was broad and his judgements firm. In a very few years he had made himself an authority. His expertise, however, was in the field of doing, in the staging, the setting, the acting rather than any higher or more theoretical understanding of theatre.

There are reasons why working in theatre, albeit amateur theatre, suited Kennedy. Theatre gave him an arena in which the flamboyance of his personality could be expressed. And it provided an arena in which it was acceptable for him to camp it up somewhat.26 Here he could behave in a manner that was implicitly gay, even if this were never fully acknowledged. And, finally, theatre


26 Interview with James Mack op cit.
Figure 18

Rodney Kennedy in 1955: his passport photograph.
suited his mercurial nature. Theatre is a domain of transient events, where things either work or don't work.

**Overseas Study 1955-6 27**

By 1955 Kennedy's commitment to art was as a supporter of those involved in its production and its display. His own creative energies were now entirely directed to theatre. And it was through his professional involvement with theatre that Kennedy was given overseas study by the regional council of the Adult Education Department and was able, in June 1955, to set sail for Europe and experience the culture that he had enjoyed so much from a distance.

In London, Kennedy stayed with the Newell family, friends from New Zealand, who offered him a base while he was in Europe and a *poste restante* for his mail. He met up again with Biddy Linehan and with Max Walker and with another friend, Desmond Digby. The four met often during Kennedy's trip. During a trip to Brighton Walker photographed the other three clowning outside Dick's Stores, a shot that was the cause of much ribald humour when the photographs were viewed back in Dunedin.

There was business as well. The next year was spent in a frenzy of cultural activity. In his report Kennedy estimated that he took in during the year some one hundred and fifty plays and two hundred and thirty exhibitions seeing on average three theatrical shows and five art exhibitions a week. He participated in conferences in London and Chichester, visited the Edinburgh Festival then travelled to Denmark, Switzerland, Italy, France and Holland.

27 Information about Kennedy's European trip are based on the letters Brasch wrote to him while he was away and on the report that Kennedy himself wrote on his return. The letters that Kennedy wrote during this trip are not available, probably because they were few in number, however a copy of the Overseas Study Leave Report is in the artist's files at the Hocken Library Picture Collection and a transcription of this is included as an appendix to this work.
He travelled to Edinburgh for the three weeks of the Festival. The careful planning that Kennedy had invested this trip with is demonstrated by the fact that he had booked all his seats for major Festival events before he left New Zealand. During his three weeks in Scotland he saw paintings by French Impressionists, a major Gauguin exhibition and drawings by Poussin. He made little comment on these exhibitions in the postcards he sent home. He did, however, collect catalogues from all the exhibitions and dispatched them to Charles Brasch who, having read them, sent them on to Colin McCahon or Doris Lusk.

Contacts that he had made at the International Theatre Institute conference recommended that he travel to Denmark which he visited for a week. Of particular interest to him was the Eighteenth Century court theatre at Christianborg Castle which was functioning as a theatre museum. After Denmark he travelled through Switzerland to Italy where he spent a month, visiting Milan, Verona, Venice, Florence, Siena and Rome. He returned to England through Marseilles, Vichy and Paris.

Back in England he went to Stratford for the end of the Shakespeare season and was particularly pleased to watch a play in rehearsal at Stratford. In London he spent two weeks at the BBC Lime Grove studios familiarizing himself with television technique and watching the rehearsals of a play and a weekly puppet show for children's television.

Kennedy claimed not to be particularly impressed with the television and his indifference seemed sincere. None of the cast or the producer, he complained, discussed what the play was about. All the talk was of technical matters which he found very tedious.

At Chichester while attending the British Drama League summer school it was discovered that the play that they were working on was to be televised the next Saturday. So the group decamped to the local pub to see the production. Kennedy recorded a sense of anti-climax:
I remember feeling slightly cheated — the words were all there but the impact of them was subtly deflected. It didn't help to have all the resources of the camera to illustrate the fantasies of the text, i.e. the dialogue with the fly in a close-up. The long rhetorical speeches needed the space of the stage to come alive, not the nervous flicker of the screen and shifting emphasis of the camera. It seemed curiously old-fashioned, in the manner of an early Eisenstein film and I no longer felt arty about the miracle of the close-up. 28

Of the television play that he had watched in production he retained no memory at all.

On Christmas Eve 1955 he travelled to Holland for three weeks and visited "all the major art museums." His final months were spent in London where he had private tuition with Clifford Turner at the Central School of Speech and Drama attached to London University. 29 A particular pleasure was the Opera at Covent Garden and Sadlers Wells, and the Ballet. These allowed him to explore his special interest in theatre:

Theatre décor and costume has always been a specialized interest of mine and these ballet and opera performances gave me an opportunity to see the work of many artists in the theatre in a new sphere with different problems to contend with.

The trip finally ended on April 13 1956 and he sailed back to New Zealand on the Rangitata. He wrote the report on his trip promptly and it was submitted dated July 9 1956. He summarised his experiences in a brief final paragraph:

If anything I find I have become a little more critical of standards and what I will accept in the theatre, and it is probably a bit too soon to know how that will apply to my work, but I think I have become more aware of how necessary it is to encourage New Zealand writers to write for the theatre so that they may express our life in this country.

28 Ibid.

29 Turner was one of the most influential drama teachers of his day. He taught at the Royal Academy for Dramatic Arts in London and was author of a number of books including Voice and speech in the theatre (1962) The stage as a career (1963). He became associated with a certain resonant theatrical voice that came to be regarded as old-fashioned.
He was, of course, supported in this trip by his employers who gave him sabbatical leave. The length of time he was away, almost a year, was made possible by the additional financial support he received from Charles Brasch. Brasch, who because of his private income was able to move easily around the world, recognised that this trip was his friend's great opportunity to experience the richness of European culture. And so it proved. Apart from the brief trip to Australia in 1948, this was the only time that Kennedy ever left New Zealand.

The trip had immediate, and more long lasting effects, on Kennedy's work. In the short term it gave more authority to his writings and various pronouncements on theatre. His articles contained regular references to his experiences in London or Edinburgh. The differences between community theatre and professional theatre were much sharper in Britain and he came back with a firmer grasp on his role as a teacher of drama to community groups. Finally, what he saw and experienced during his year away was to provide a platform for his more innovative work in theatre with the Otago University Drama Society in the 1960s.

Rodney Kennedy and Charles Brasch (1946 - 1973)

On his return he moved in again with Charles Brasch. Shortly after this Brasch bought a house of his own nearby at Heriot Row and the two men moved there, resuming their previous existence.

The nature of their relationship has always seemed tantalising to those who knew them. There can be no doubt as to the enduring affection that they held for each other. It may have begun in a protective impulse of Brasch's: taking Kennedy out of the deplorable flat in Bath Street and offering him shelter in Royal Terrace.
Figure 20

Charles Brasch and R.M. Cox (c. 1940) John Crockett.
Brasch was not by nature a talkative man. He was uneasy socially and expressed feelings with difficulty. Kennedy was extremely loyal to all his friends and remembered kindness, and repayed it with friendship. His ebullience must have filled the spaces left by Brasch's reticence. Kennedy had cut himself off from his past and created a new life in the world of art and of theatre. Brasch too had aligned himself with culture, albeit in a much more intellectual way than Kennedy.

The two men entered into a companionable life together. When Kennedy was away on Sabbatical during the years 1955-56 Brasch wrote to him regularly and the letters give a flavour of their life together. There was much domestic news. There were reports on the cat's behaviour and notes on the garden. On one occasion, in late March, Brasch confessed that "the house [is] full of unironed clothes and dirty dishes. I spent an hour gardening for the first time since mid-January..."\(^{30}\)

In October 1955 (Kennedy had set sail in June) Brasch wrote that he was going to Auckland to see a show of Colin McCahon, Louise Henderson and Michael Nicholson but did not want to be away long:

\[\text{the garden delights and interests me too much. So many of your brood are coming up - anemones, lilies, irises, tulips; I water the bamboos religiously; I've started a compost heap; I've been given a Mount Cook Lily which sprouted a second leaf almost at once. I wish you could see it all....}^{31}\]

When Brasch writes that friends are constantly asking after Kennedy he notes wryly that, "I seem to be thought a very widowed bird withering on my bough..."\(^{32}\)

When a friend's mother died, Brasch sent flowers from them both, and he again arranged to send joint Christmas presents from them both to various friends including the Woollastons, the

\(^{30}\) CB to REK March 24 1956  
^{31}\) CB to REK October 5 1955  
^{32}\) CB to REK March 24 1956
McCahons and the Baxters. James K. Baxter's brother Jack, who like Kennedy had been detained as a conscientious objector, came to fix the front door knocker and Brasch himself made a "proper drawer of trays for silver, all with my little saw." Perhaps there was a hint of the usual division of labour in the household when Brasch wrote in December that he had engaged a Dutch girl to "do out" the home once a week and notes wryly that "she does things I had never thought of...."33

Brasch took tea with Kennedy's favourite aunt and visited her at Christmas. He sent reports on her health. Kennedy wrote to her regularly, and Brasch described the pleasure she got from these letters. He urged Kennedy not to write him letters but to send him postcards, to let him know how he was, and where he was in his travels. When a letter did arrive he greeted it with enthusiasm:

Oh the comfort, the luxury of a letter from you. It's been a long wait. I was feeling definitely neglected; but I'm very happy to know that you're enjoying England.34

With as much discretion as could be managed, Brasch gave financial support to Kennedy's trip. In July fifty pounds was sent as a combined birthday and Christmas present (Kennedy's birthday was in mid August). In September, Brasch claimed to have discovered a hundred pounds in a bank account that he had kept in London during the war. He instructs the bank to send it to Kennedy and tells him to treat it as a loan "in perpetuity." At other times he urged his friend, if he needed money, to borrow in his name from his cousin, Mary De Beer.

33 CB to REK December 2 1955.
34 CB to REK September 4 1955.
Kennedy and Brasch had become constant supporters of the Christchurch Group. In his letters, then, it was natural that Brasch should give a detailed account of the Group Show in November 1955 and an account of the works which he bought. He also described the various cultural activities that took up so much of his time. He travelled to Christchurch to administer *Landfall* (he kept a flat there in Durham Street); he talked to Mrs Pearce the director of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery about Frances Hodgkins work; he catalogued Miss Hutton's pictures for the Hocken; he talked to Maurice Joel about his Aunt Grace's pictures.

Given this affection between the two men and the obvious domesticity of the life they shared it is important to note that they may not have actually been in the house at the same time all that often. Brasch's various interests and commitments often took him away - he spent weeks in Christchurch editing *Landfall*, for example- while Kennedy was travelling in Otago most of the time during the week, returning only at weekends. Anticipating Kennedy's return, for example, Brasch writes that he had had:

...a very rushed week in Chch attending to LF, & most of a week, equally crowded, in Wgtn, & since I came home work for the Hocken, the Museum, & a show of NZ painting in Auckland during the Festival.

Kennedy's boat, he thought, would get in about May 15 and he himself would try and get to Dunedin for a few days around May 26 "so that I can hear about the world before Central Otago swallows you up." 

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35 Olivia Spencer-Bower, for example, in an unpublished memoir about the Group, recalls that "Charles Brasch and Rodney Kennedy used to come up every year from Dunedin and nearly always bought something." Olivia Spencer-Bower Papers Alexander Turnbull Library Ms-papers - 1360, folder 2.
36 Notes from interview between Tim Garrity and Valmai Moffett. Artist's file Hocken Picture collection.
37 CB to REK March 24 1956
Several times while Kennedy was away Brasch wrote to him and gave him licence to acquire art works on his behalf. Building a collection at the Hocken was clearly a preoccupation of his and he asks him to keep an eye open for suitable work:

Will you look out for early NZ paintings drawings etc that might interest Hocken & write to me about any you see? Eric McCormick wrote about some he saw at the Fine Art Society in Bond St. He also saw [a] F. Hodgkins [painting] which you might ask him about. You might happen to see things in Edinburgh or Bristol, for example.38

Kennedy was given the address of John Crockett, an artist friend of Brasch's whom he had met first when working at Missenden Abbey. Crockett had got in touch after a silence of a number of years and if Kennedy liked any of the paintings he was to buy one through Mary De Beer. There was an element about this of Brasch doing social work long distance. Crockett, he noted, had no regular job and was very poor.39

Brasch and Kennedy, then, had a close relationship, although, at times, it must have been closer to parallel habitation rather than cohabitation. Nonetheless they shared the same house over a ten year period, and friends and acquaintances clearly identified them as a couple during this time. They were noted on their annual trips to the Group Show in Christchurch, their paintings were shown as a joint collection at the Auckland City Art Gallery, they took holidays together: in the late 1950s they drove up to the Auckland region and travelled around Northland, visiting the artist Eric Lee-Johnson. And yet at the end of that time, when his Aunt Mem died and left him her High Street house in her will, Kennedy seems to have moved with few regrets.

38 Ibid.
39 Crockett's fortunes do not seem to have improved over the years. When the Hocken purchased his double portrait of Charles Brasch and Roger Maddox some years later after Brasch's death they paid 250 pounds to the artist for the work. It came with a grumpy remark on the back to the effect that the price was very cheap. The work was, in fact, catalogued as being a gift of the artist.
Kennedy was to claim later that Brasch visited him only on three or four occasions at High St. Michael Hitchings recalled being at Kennedy's in a group of friends some of whom were to have dinner and others of whom were present for drinks only. Charles arrived for drinks and, although he was not a charismatic man and did not seek to impose himself on company, his presence seemed often to cause an inhibition in conversation and did so on this occasion. Finally, he rose to leave and Kennedy saw him to the door. On returning, he danced around and said, "Now we can have some fun!"\(^{40}\)

By 1959, Kennedy's life had undergone a remarkable change in fortunes. In 1939 he had written rather hopefully to Ursula Bethell that he might like to travel overseas. The difficulties of these plans were never engaged since war intervened, and within three years Kennedy was under detention, unable even to move freely around New Zealand. When he was finally released, he had lived in primitive accommodation, and was compulsorily employed in a tile factory. Thirteen years later, however, he had been on a year long trip to Europe, was employed as a member of the University lecturing staff and his work was highly valued throughout the region. Now he had his own house.

Kennedy was clearly proud of his house. He loved to entertain there and took pleasure in his garden. He remained there for the rest of his life. If there was bitterness in the parting with Brasch it was never expressed save in little disloyalties such as celebrating his departure so that the rest of the company could have fun. It seems likely that the extent or depth of their relationship was never fully articulated; that the original invitation to move in was made in response to a temporary need, and that it deepened into a more enduring relationship whose parameters were

\(^{40}\) Michael Hitchings in conversation with the author.
never tested. However close the two were - and clearly they were very comfortable in each other's company - when the opportunity came for Kennedy to live in his own house, there was nothing substantial enough to keep him at 36 Heriot Row. He claimed, too, that their friendship cooled in later life. Nonetheless he was deeply moved at Charles Brasch's death in 1973.  

A Home of His Own

In truth, there was a sociable side to Kennedy that would never have fitted with Brasch's ascetic style of living. Kennedy enjoyed convivial company, often in the presence of alcohol. As a student during the thirties he had attended not only the tea parties at R.N. Field's house but also the more bohemian events that were held in various artist's studios. The art circle was very close and the same community of friends met at different variants of this social round. After the war there were the parties at Bath St and after he took up his job with the WEA the end of the week was celebrated in the Captain Cook pub until five o'clock closing. After his move to High Street Kennedy was able to indulge this social side of his nature. Friday evenings at Rodney's became an important event on the social calendar in Dunedin.

Friday nights at Rodney's were by and large heavy drinking sessions. These events became an institution shortly after he moved into his own house. Before that the working week was often brought to a conclusion in the Captain Cook pub. James Mack who saw these events when they had matured into a full blown institution found them unpleasant. There were a core group of friends to which visiting performers, and other acquaintances passing through, were often invited.

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41 Ruth Dallas Curved Horizon University of Otago Press, 1991 p 164.
42 From an interview with Donald Reid, one of the regulars at the Friday night sessions.
Figure 21

*In the Kitchen, 1975*  photo: Gary Blackman.
People new to town came once, were vetted and were invited back, or not, depending on how they were received.

Kennedy's pleasure in the company of academics and intellectuals meant that there were often some very brilliant minds contributing to the conversation. The tone was mordant, preferring savagery over accuracy, but was often sparkling, if not, due to the effects of alcohol, memorable. These were also occasions of high feeling. The artist Marilyn Webb, who felt anyway that Kennedy tended to favour "the boys" over "the girls", said she was excluded for a while because Kennedy did not approve of her partner.

There were other forms of hospitality. Kennedy enjoyed hosting a formal dinner and would spend all day preparing for an evening meal if guests were expected. Reports vary concerning the quality of the food. Most people suggest Kennedy was a good cook. Some remember the exoticism of foreign dishes like *moussaka* at a time when meat and potatoes was standard fare in New Zealand. In this, James Mack is again a dissenter:

Kennedy, in fact was a pretty bad cook. Anne McCahon once said to me "Absolutely amazing what he is capable of doing so often and in so may ways with 2 kg of mince". And so things were invariably burnt, things were cooked for twenty two hours. And there Kennedy would be pissed and he would sit at the table and he would -because he sat formal table regularly and he would give a long diatribe about what he had done with the mince to make the meal. and everybody carried on about how wonderful it was. It was in fact actually pretty bad food some times. In fact, pretty bad food most times. 43

The dishes, often based round minced beef, were chosen because they were easily prepared in advance. Kennedy, as ever, liked to be with the company.

Brasch, by contrast, played host much less readily and to smaller groups. There was an air of formality in an invitation to 36 Heriot Row. Charles would take an almost paternal interest in

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43 Interview James Mack 16/6/97
young poets who lived locally. For some, like the young poet Kevin Cunningham, these were scarcely memorable, their interests being elsewhere. For others such an invitation led to a longer association. Allan Roddick, for example, went to Dunedin in the 1950s as a young dental student with an interest in poetry. He and his wife met Brasch and they often accompanied him to the theatre or visited him at his house. Yet he found him always a rather stiff and formal man who was not socially at ease.44

There was one further tension that was likely to have existed between Brasch and Kennedy. This was over sexual behaviour. Kennedy was actively homosexual. Until the 1980s this was illegal in New Zealand. Consequently, Kennedy was not as public in his declarations of sexual orientation as a later generation was to be.45 Nonetheless Kennedy was gay and he had a number of partners. It is questionable whether Brasch was ever entirely comfortable with this, or for that matter ever discussed it.

Casual sexual contacts have long been part of the male homosexual experience, especially where homosexuality is illegal.46 Consequent on this a code of cruising behaviour became part of gay culture. In 1964 Kennedy was arrested for public indecency. He was not prosecuted but agreed to treatment at Ashburn Hall, a private psychiatric hospital. His head of department at University Extension, David (D.O.W.) Hall, was very supportive and he was given leave of absence. It was reported that ill-health prevented him from completing his duties for the rest of the year.

44 His relationship with Brasch has continued. Somewhat to his own surprise he was nominated by Brasch as his literary executor.
45 James Mack commented that Kennedy was horrified by his much more public presentation of his homosexuality.
46 For a useful description of the 'cruising' scene in London before the war see Michael King's *Frank Sargeson: A Life* Auckland, 1995.
This event had a number of consequences for Kennedy. Firstly, he made a number of friends from this incident, demonstrating yet again his considerable personal charm when he cared to exercise it. Ron Gilbert who represented him as a lawyer became one of the Friday night regulars and Dr Reg Medlicott, superintendent of Ashburn Hall, and his wife, Nan, became part of Kennedy's circle of friends. Nan Medlicott and Kennedy were to sit on the Hocken Library Pictures Sub-Committee. It was during his time in Ashburn Hall, too, that he met the artist Patricia France. The two recognised in each other kindred spirits, although their relationship was sometimes stormy. It was founded on a love of art but was often disrupted by raging disagreements. The last of these was unresolved at Kennedy's death. Nonetheless, when they were on terms they provided each other with a sort of mutual support, taking each other to the doctor and the hospital.

A second consequence of his stay at Ashburn Hall was that he became more frank with his friends about his sexuality. Furthermore, he became protective of a younger generation of men who came to Dunedin. Even when he and Brasch had lived together their house was a landing place for men (and some women) passing through. The composer Douglas Lilburn stayed at their house as did Frank Sargeson. People coming to town were advised to keep an eye out for the distinctive Kennedy. This was how James Mack came to meet him when he came to work at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. He'd been told by a mutual friend to look for the little man covered with cigarette ash and that he might get on well with the homosexual milieu that surrounded Rodney.

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47 Patric Carey remembered Kennedy gathering a group of theatre friends together and telling them solemnly that he was a homosexual. The announcement was met with laughter. The news was no surprise to them.
When in 1971 Mack got into similar trouble with the law as had Kennedy in 1964, Kennedy provided considerable support for his friend and helped him though a difficult period. His employers, the Dunedin City Council, were not as supportive as Kennedy's had been, and he became embroiled in a wrangle over his employment. Kennedy counted Mack as a close friend. Furthermore, he credited Mack, in his position as Deputy Director, as responsible for the shift away from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery's earlier policy, of collecting second rate "masterpieces" from Europe, in favour of establishing a collection of New Zealand artists. Mack's contract was not renewed and the gallery incurred the enmity of Rodney Kennedy, Charles Brasch and many of those in New Zealand who were disposed to a more advanced view of art and culture. Brasch was not re-elected to the Gallery council and, in fact was absent from meetings subsequent to Mack's dismissal even though he was still a member. It may be significant in this context that, when he died in 1973, Brasch's collection of art works was donated to the Hocken Library. It is certainly true that Rodney Kennedy deliberately shunned the Public Art Gallery and made his last bequests to the Hocken Library and to the Public Library. Only a small R.N. Field sculpture came to the Gallery.

Work, Retirement and Death

Kennedy's professional career saw him as being increasingly involved in drama nationally. He was elected Vice-President of the New Zealand Drama Council in 1961 and 1967 and was a member of the executive nine times in all. Under the Education Act of 1963 the department

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48 This issue is discussed in greater detail below in Chapter Five in the section entitled "Charles Brasch and Art in New Zealand."
became known as the University Extension Department and was funded and administered exclusively by the University without any financial support from the Government. Kennedy's position became officially that of lecturer in drama. He had finally become part of the academy.

The department, however, had been under increasing pressure. Its funding had remained static since 1955. Over time Kennedy spent less time on the road and more time lecturing in Dunedin or attending conferences and workshops. In 1967 he produced a three-act play in a mere four centres.

From the early sixties Kennedy had been involved with the Otago University Drama Society (OUDS). He designed sets and made costumes for them. He functioned as a patron for the Society for ten years. It was with OUDS that he did the theatrical work that he is best remembered for. His first full production was John Arden's *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance* (1959) in 1965. That quintessentially Sixties British play *Little Malcolm and his Struggle Against the Eunuchs* was given an enthusiastic reception in 1967, and his production of Jean Genet's *The Balcony* (1968) became his most celebrated theatrical presentation. It was a New Zealand première and was seen as adventurous in its use of male actors to play female roles.

In November 1973, Patrie Carey retired from the Globe Theatre. Kennedy was elected briefly to replace him as artistic director. By the Annual General Meeting of 1975, Mary Middleditch was now artistic director "always working in close consultation with Rodney Kennedy." In fact he kept in fairly close contact with the Globe concentrating mainly on his particular interests of stage design and costume.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ *The Globe Theatre (A Celebration of 25 Years, 1961-1986)* published by the University Extension Department of the University of Otago (unnumbered).
Figure 22
He also directed (or produced) several plays for the Globe including *The Ballygombeen Bequest* by John Arden (1974) and *The Sea* by Edward Bond (1976). The choice of Bond and Arden was significant of the approach that Kennedy favoured. Both writers set out to challenge theatrical conventions, and both wrote from a politically socialist perspective.

In 1970 Kennedy was made a senior lecturer. This was undoubtedly a recognition of his service to the Department over the years and would secure him a more generous pension when he retired the following year in 1971 aged sixty-two. So identified was he with the Department car—a Ford V8 van—that on his retirement he unsuccessfully tried to buy it.

Retirement meant that Kennedy could travel. The pension from his university position and his "universal" pension—which he started receiving in 1974—made him financially secure. Using public transport, he made regular trips to visit his friends. These trips were part of a social circuit that took in Riwaka to see the Woollastons, Wellington where he saw Margaret Scott and visited the artists John and Tania Drawbridge, Auckland where he stayed with the McCahons and Matakana near Warkworth, North of Auckland, where Archie and Peggy Dunningham lived in retirement.

In 1972 he travelled to Great Barrier Island with Peggy Dunningham and spent a week there. The trip was timed so he could be present at the opening of the exhibition *Colin McCahon: a Survey* which opened at the Auckland City Art Gallery in March. In 1974 when he visited Nelson Toss Woollaston was in hospital. In 1976 it was Kennedy who suffered infirmity. He fell from a

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51 At about this time the terminology changes. The activity which had previously been referred to as producing now became known as directing. Generally in modern theatre directing refers to the creative development of the script and directing the actors etc and producing refers to the business management of the production. In the earlier days it is likely that both these roles were subsumed under the single title "producer".
ladder while working at the Globe Theatre and suffered broken ribs and "awful abrasions". This accident may well have convinced him that he was too old to be climbing ladders late at night in a theatre. Certainly 1976 was the last year he produced a play for the Globe.

His travels, however, continued. He was in Auckland in 1978, 1979 and 1980. In the early 1980s chronic health problems began to dog him, and occasionally to depress him. He experienced prostate difficulties and in 1983 wrote to his friend Noel Ginn that he had suffered a slight stroke. This made reading difficult and his handwriting almost indecipherable. In a Christmas card written in early 1984 he comments that he had renewed "an old friendship that had ended in an explosion of anger blood pressure and a compensating alcoholic excess."

In July 1984 he was again writing to Noel Ginn about his health. His eyesight he noted was better but clearly improvement had been slow. Ginn had been in Whitanui Camp with Kennedy. He had kept in touch over the years and Kennedy had visited him regularly in Wanganui where he ran a small market garden and lived with his mother. He was an occasional poet. Charles Brasch had thought well enough of his work to publish some of his work in Landfall. By the time of this correspondence he was living in Australia. In these letters to him Kennedy makes a sentimental plea for Ginn's companionship. "I sometimes talk to your photo on the mantelpiece and need your evanescence," he writes in July. Finally, in response to Kennedy's poor health, Ginn agreed to come and live with his friend.


53 Letter from REK to Noel Ginn, Kennedy Collection Hocken Archive.
Kennedy's Bequest

In 1998 the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) received a cheque for around $180,000. This was the residue of the estate of Rodney Eric Kennedy. The terms of the bequest required that the money be used for the relief of suffering overseas. This was something of a puzzle to the Quakers since few of them knew Kennedy, and his exact intentions in giving the money were not clear. Older members in Dunedin remembered that Kennedy, although an infrequent attender, had insisted on remaining on the membership list of the Society and, when contacted, had wanted to be sent all new publications. On making his will he had said that the reason for this bequest was that he was expressing gratitude for the support of Quakers during his time in Detention during the Second World War. The Quakers, he said, were the only people who kept in touch with those men detained.54

The money left to Quakers was what was left in the estate after the will had been enacted. In it Kennedy had instructed that certain works went to friends and to selected public collections, and that the rest of the estate, and his house, be sold off. The paintings were valued by the Christopher Moore Gallery in Wellington and then, according to the terms of the will, the collection was offered to various galleries at advantageous prices. Several works entered the collection of the then National Art Gallery including a painting by Colin McCahon, French Bay (1956), and the Woollaston Portrait of Rodney Kennedy (1936). His small sculpture collection went to the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Amongst this work was a small sculpture by R.N. Field which the Woollastons had given him on his seventieth birthday. It was a work that he had always

54 From a conversation with Michael Newell in May 1998.
coveted and it was given on the condition that it was handed on to the gallery. The rest of the work was sold at auction.\textsuperscript{55}

In 1992 a scholarship was established at the School of Art which allowed $20,000 each year for an outstanding student of sculpture. This was to be known as the R.N. Field Scholarship and was to run for six years. The R. N. Field Scholarship was a nice compliment to his old friend and teacher. At the end of six years the residue of the estate went to Quakers.

In the end, the arts and Quakers benefited about equally from the estate. Quakers got a substantial sum of money (the estate realised more than had been estimated) but on the other hand a number of valuable works were given in to public collections or sold at advantageous prices. This balance seems appropriate and may have been Kennedy's intention when he drew up his will.

A final bequest betrays Kennedy's love of tradition and sentimentality. He possessed a small white vase. This was a commonplace object that the poet Ursula Bethell had found at a market in London and, later, had given to him. In his will it was bequeathed to Jocelyn Harris with the conditions that it be kept stocked with white flowers and that it be handed on to a woman poet. It is currently in the collection of the poet Jenny Bornholdt.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55} This was a process not entirely complete by June 1998 when there were still a few works remaining. In late 1997 I attended an auction at which several items from the estate were sold including a Ralph Hotere \textit{Black Painting} (1968) and an unusual small version of the black painting, also by Hotere; a watercolour by Anna Caselberg, which was dedicated to Kennedy; two prints by Tom Field; and a print by Marté Szirmay.

\textsuperscript{56} Thanks to Professor Jocelyn Harris for this information.
Figure 23
*Flower Piece (1934)* by Rodney Kennedy.
3. FLOWERS IN A VASE

In this chapter I look at Rodney Kennedy's brief career as an artist and in Chapter Four I look at the ways that he helped support other artists, and how his collection arose as a consequence of the relationships he formed with these artists.

The arrival in New Zealand of some form of modern (or modernist) art in the practice and in the teaching of R.N. Field and, to a lesser extent, W.H. Allen is one of the familiar narratives of New Zealand art history. In this chapter I consider Rodney Kennedy's surviving paintings and then link them to the ideas that informed Field's art and teaching. This has been done to enable me to contrast Field's ideas with those expressed by Toss Woollaston. It is argued that, although Kennedy appreciated the sophistication of Woollaston's painting, he could not emulate his friend in originality. The development of his Woollaston's art served to highlight the limitations of his own work which was wedded to the British Post-Impressionism of R.N. Field.1

The Paintings of Rodney Kennedy

Six paintings by Rodney Kennedy are known to exist. Five are in the collection of the Hocken Library at the University of Otago and a sixth is in a private collection in Wellington, a gift from the artist to a friend. The six are:

Homage to Virginia Woolf. (1933)
Nelson Landscape, (1934)

1 Kennedy in later years expressed great admiration for the work, also, of W.H. Allen. During 1938, when Kennedy and Colin McCahon cycled up to Mapua, their first stop was at a Summer School run by Allen. Nonetheless, there are justifications for focussing on the relationship with Field. Kennedy became very friendly with Field and in his letters of the late 1930s it is Field of whom he writes with some passion. In these letters he is interested both in Field's art and his friendship. Furthermore, at the time and in subsequent analyses Field has been seen as the more important artist.
Flower piece. (1934 or 1936)²
Still Life with Flowers. (1936)
Otago Peninsula. (n.d. 1936?)
The Hill in Mapua (n.d. after 1936)³

The first four listed come from the immediate period after he had completed art school. R.N. Field had by this time returned to England but Kennedy’s connections in the world of art remained strong. His friendship with Woollaston was blossoming, and he had links with the Christchurch artists who formed the core of The Group, and with some members of the Six and Four Club. The last two works listed cannot be precisely dated although, as is argued below, they are clearly from later in the decade. They are from a later period when his relationship to the world of art was changing and may represent an attempt by Kennedy to develop a new style.

The early paintings are characterised by self-referential quality where the manner of the painting seems, in some way, to comment on the subject. This represents a kind of modernism in the approach of the artist. It can be best seen in the work Flower Piece from 1934 [figure 23].

Flower Piece is a painting of a jug of flowers on a table in a room. The flowers are set in a jug on a small round table with a striped, perhaps hand-woven, table cloth on the surface. The viewpoint is quite high so pictorial space is flattened out and the table surface is tilted towards the picture plane. The table is in a room although we cannot see much detail. An arched doorway at the rear suggests an entrance and provides a dark background against which the yellow iris is contrasted. To the right just behind the flowers there are alphabet blocks. We can make out the letter "Y", and further back, propped against a wall, is a painting representing a head and shoulders, painted in a geometrical manner that is vaguely Cubist. Flower Piece too has Cubist elements,

² Previous dating has given the later date and either is likely but a comparison with the monogram he used at the head of his letters at this period suggests a probable date of 1934.
³ The title may, in fact, be The Hall at Mapua. The title is inscribed on the back in the artist's hand in pencil but it is not easily read. The owner of the painting believes that the "Hill" is the correct title.
Figure 24
Stylised signature, incorporating the initials REK, used by Rodney Kennedy in his letters and on his paintings.
particularly in its use of a high viewpoint which tends to compress the image. Working against this is a more conventional use of space. The foreshortened blocks, and the picture behind the flowers, lead the eye into the deeper spaces of the image and to the arched doorway at the back. While this is not classical perspective, neither is it Cubism.

The picture is painted in a spare brushy style on plywood with sand in the paint to give a rough surface texture. The colours in the image seem to take their cue from the yellow irises. There is virtually no red in the picture, and only a little blue. The mixing of sand with the paint may have taken some of the richness out of the colour. The effect is to give the image a sort bleached unity.

As a subject, flowers in a vase provide an artist with the opportunity to display refinement in the use of colour and form. The thin stems of the yellow flag irises in this picture are both delicate and strong. These are contrasted with the curving forms of the Shasta Daisy, the white flowers. The small blue flowers occupy an intermediate space, filling in between the strong direct forms of the irises and the sinuous daisies.

The objects represented, a vase and some flowers, are in themselves significant of arrangement, of aesthetic intent. The flowers have their own beauty, their forms determined by the genus. In arrangement, however, accidental effects occur between the firm line of the iris and the curve of the daisy or the tiny stellate blue flowers which occupy an intermediary position.

In *Flower Piece* the skill of the flower arranger is represented in paint by the artist. (Perhaps they are they same person. It seems likely.) By this act of representation the painting does not subsume the other art form but rather implies that between the painter and the flower arranger there is a shared concern for colour and form, and that it is in these relationships that true art resides. What is interesting about *Flower Piece* is the way that the subject seems to comment on
Figure 25
Homage to Virginia Woolf (1933) by Rodney Kennedy

Figure 26
Nelson Landscape (1936) by Rodney Kennedy
the style of the painting itself. This is a painting of an exercise in delicacy of form that is, in itself, an exercise in delicacy of form.

This approach is significant of a change in painting at that time. No work like this was being painted much more than five years earlier in New Zealand. A useful *terminus pro quem* might be the work *Interior* (1928) by R.N. Field (Collection of the Hocken Library). In this work the use of the vivid red to suggest modelling and the unusual cropping of the flower to the right as well as the mosaic like dabbed paint make this a remarkable work for its time in New Zealand and quite different from the more conventional still life work being presented at the Otago Art Society.

Another work by Kennedy, from the previous year, has a strong literary content although it too, in a different way, contains elements of self-referentiality. *Homage to Virginia Woolf* (1933) [figure 25] is full of symbolic references to the work of the English novelist of the title, and particularly to her novel, *To The Lighthouse.*

Kennedy's homage seeks to evoke the novel in a number of ways. The book on the edge of the dinner table and the open text are an invitation to the world of imagination that the novel and the painting share. The room is a symbolic space partly open to the elements. It is almost like a classical *loggia*. There is perhaps a distant echo here of Giorgio de Chirico whose work at this time was being discovered at this time by artists in Britain, most notably by Paul Nash. Whatever its sources the open architectural form serves to give the scene a timeless quality, and helps the painting capture the mood of the novel, of life lived as internal experience.

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4 *To The Lighthouse* was published first in 1927 and became an international success. It was widely read and held, even at the time, to be one of the greatest novels ever written.

5 Charles Harrison *English Art and Modernism* p 200. Micael Dunn raises the possibility of de Chirico being an influence on the bust in Field's *Interior* (1928) mentioned above. See M. Dunn *A Concise History* pp 70 - 71.
*To the Lighthouse* is constructed of three distinct sections, and the painting tries to conflate these into one image. The first section of the novel is called "The Window". It describes the Ramsay family on holiday with guests including the painter Lily Briscoe. Family tension over a proposed trip to the lighthouse by the youngest son of the family is diffused at the dinner table by Mrs Ramsay. A window in the painting overlooks the sea although not the lighthouse. This, however, is present symbolically in the lamp on the table. The conch in Kennedy's painting is a prominent part of the table decoration in the novel.

Timeless the imagery may be, but time is represented in the painting. The tree whose roots are invading the interior space of the room is an evocation of the second section of the novel, "Time Passes", in which Mrs Ramsay dies and her son, Andrew, is killed in the war, and the house is abandoned. The roots of the tree invading the interior serve to symbolise both the decline of the fabric of the house and the advance of years.

The final section of the novel, "The Lighthouse" describes a return to the house by the rest of the family, and the efforts of the painter Lily Briscoe to recapture her sense of Mrs Ramsay. Kennedy, it seems, is paying a similar compliment to the novelist. What he has painted is Lily Briscoe's painting and so, in a self-consciously literary work, has again employed a degree of the self-referentiality within the image that we saw in *Flower Piece*. It is not only a painting representing the novel, but also a product of the novel in quite a particular way.

*Homage To Virginia Woolf* was a painting he was proud of. It hung in his High Street home and was only given to the Hocken Library shortly before his death.

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6 He wrote, in 1936, of offering the painting to a journalist who had admired it. The asking price was three pounds. She evidently declined and Rodney felt that the failed transaction had caused an enduring awkwardness between the two of them. REK to MUB undated letter 1936.
Like another of his paintings from the same period, *Nelson Landscape* (1934), it uses intense blues and greens in a manner reminiscent of the landscape painting of the English artist Matthew Smith. The framing device of the verandah posts in the Nelson painting suggests an architectural setting rather like the open room of the *Homage*. This gives the viewer the sense of looking out from within.

Both these works have a marked affinity with the work of his fellow student, H.V. (Harry) Miller, especially in their use of colour. Kennedy's work had been strongly associated with Miller's in a review of 1932. The critic for the *Otago Daily Times* that year clearly identified a group of modern young artists. Referring to them as the R.N. Field Group the writer comments: "there is a predilection for emerald green and blue in most of the works". The three artists singled out for individual comment were Field, followed by Harry Miller and finally Rodney Kennedy:

No. 56 "Still Life" by R.E. Kennedy is the best thing he has ever painted. The dainty little group of vase and flowers to the right is delightful.\(^8\)

As if to symbolise the triumph of the new style of the so-called Field Group the writer commented that a group of landscapes by Archibald Nicoll "was passed in our search for the bright colour of the newer school." Nicoll was one of the mainstays of the Canterbury Art Society and a former director of the Canterbury College School of Fine Arts. In reviewing Art Society exhibitions it had been almost routine to start with the landscapes of Archibald Nicoll or the portraits of Elizabeth Kelly, also from Christchurch. *Nelson Landscape* [figure 26] employs a vividness of hue that is characteristic of the "R.N. Field Group" who were the coming thing in 1932.

\(^7\) Sir Matthew Smith (1879-1959) had brief contact with Matisse in Paris and was deeply influenced by the Fauve school.  
\(^8\) ODT Nov 12 1932.  
Figure 26a
*Still Life With Flowers* (1934)
by Rodney Kennedy
Seen together Miller’s paintings can look repetitive and formulaic. The paint is applied in regular shaped dabs with a dogged perseverance. The colour is iridescent. Recession is suggested by superimposing planes in a manner that evokes theatre flats. Nonetheless, by restricting himself to a single mark and by using a heightened and intense palette Miller forged an identifiable style which, mainly through its use of colour, can be attractive.

Kennedy’s paint in Nelson Landscape and in Homage is, by comparison, more heavily worked. A variety of brush strokes are used, not to suggest form or structure in the way that Woollaston, for example, was learning to do, but to convey form by more conventional means through the use of divided tones, moving from light to dark.

Miller was a product of Field’s training at the school of art and in some ways his most successful imitator. He favoured intense blues and greens and their use in the Nelson Landscape may be a compliment from Kennedy to Miller since the painting was given to Miller and his wife Vespa and remained in their possession until 1986. The work is inscribed on the back: Harry and Vespa. With best wishes Xmas 1934.

Still life with flowers (1936) [figure 26a] is another work that remained in Kennedy’s possession until late in his life. A bunch of chrysanthemums is pictured in a tall cylindrical vase. The vase disrupts the radial composition of the flowers in the earlier Flower Piece and pushes the blooms into a tight knot so that the outline of the combined vase and flowers echoes the shape of the flowers, stem and bloom. The composition is almost symmetrical through the long axis of the vase and the flowers. There is, however, a deliberate disruption of a simple balance in the picture’s elements. The blooms are disorderly finding their own places within the outline of the bunch and the bunch itself is cropped by the upper edge of the painting. The vase stands on a circular surface, a table perhaps, but its function is discarded within the painting in favour of values of design. The
surface is tilted parallel to the painted surface providing an arc at the base of the vase which echoes the arc of the flowers at the top.

There may be in the choice of subject and colours a nod to Van Gogh's *Sunflower* paintings. Kennedy has eschewed the characteristic Van Gogh impasto brush stroke but has used his own thick and distinctive mark. His colour too is his own, but it is as if he has shifted Vincent's yellows into the green ranges but retained some of the correspondence between the hues. If homage is intended, however, it is subdued beneath other, more individual, concerns.

Kennedy adopts the dabbing manner of Miller and Field, and adapts it. The success of the painting derives partly from the way the painting manner is unified with the painted subject. He paints with a loaded brush, extending the brushmarks and allowing them to come together. There is no brushiness, as in the earlier *Flower Piece*. The technique is similar in a way to the calligraphic mark of the Impressionist painters but it is an elongated downward stroke. The paint is opaque, and each mark touches the next, leaving no portion of the ground bare. The surface of the painting has an interlocking rigidity. It shows a discipline that is not evident in the other works discussed and, in fact, demonstrates a restraint that did not come naturally to the exuberant Kennedy.

*Still life with flowers* employs the same self-reflexive relationship between the subject and the image that we have seen in *Flower Piece* and *Homage to Virginia Woolf*. The careful articulation of the painted surface echoes the complexity of the chrysanthemum bloom. So the painting gives expression to essential qualities in the subject through a number of metaphorical relationships between the painted surface and the subject. These metaphorical relationships are between the application of paint and the many infoldings of the chrysanthemum bloom, between the colour of the flowers and the tonalities of the entire painting, and between the design of the painting -symmetry along the long axis of vase and flowers- which echoes the form of the flower.
Figure 26b
*Otago Peninsula* by Rodney Kennedy

Figure 26c
*The Hill at Mapua* by Rodney Kennedy
itself. Rather than seeing through the painting to the subject we see the physical object -the painting- as the subject and, *vice versa*, the subject -the flowers- embodied in the way the work is painted.

**The Last Two Surviving Paintings of Rodney Kennedy: when were they painted?**

All Kennedy's surviving paintings seem to be from a period before the war. The only doubt about this is over the last two works. The *Otago Peninsula* and *The Hill at Mapua* [figures 26b & 26c] have certain stylistic similarities that distinguish them from the other work and suggest they may have been painted around the same time. Both are pure landscape paintings and both are painted in a limited range of earth tones that beg comparison with Toss Woollaston's mature style. This poses problems over when these two works were painted.

*Otago Peninsula* has a date written in pencil on the back: Friday 6th March. The handwriting seems to be Kennedy's. The work was donated to the Hocken Library by the artist Patricia France who befriended Kennedy in 1964, so the work had remained in Kennedy's possession over a number of years. The precision of the date is tantalising and if it relates to the date of composition then the work can only be from either 1936 or 1942. Neither date is without problems and the following discussion is necessarily speculative. The question of dating, however, is interesting for stylistic reasons. If the earlier date is accepted then Kennedy seems to anticipate Woollaston's move from the intense use of colour of the work around 1934-6 to the more familiar mature style that emerged around 1938. However, Kennedy was sentenced for refusing military

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10 One possibility that occurs is that it had been in his Aunt's possession and that Kennedy regained ownership with the house he inherited in 1959.

11 Using the "Calendar for Any Year 1780 -2040" in Whittaker's *Almanac*.

12 A useful comparison here is between the work *Mapua* (1935, Auckland City Art Gallery Collection) that R.N.Field purchased at the 1936 exhibition in Dunedin and the later Mapua work of 1938-9. See Barnett *op cit* pp 35 & 40 for the comparison.
service on the fourth of February 1942 and was already in detention by the twenty-third of that month so the date of the sixth of March 1942 seems unlikely. The owner of *The Hill in Mapua* -which is stylistically similar and possibly from the same period- was gifted the work which was painted for her by Kennedy. She is clear that it was given to her after she moved to Christchurch in 1936.

A further explanation for the earlier dating of the *Otago Peninsula* painting may be found if we consider the possibility that it was an attempt by Kennedy to imitate the style of Flora Scales. Woollaston had, in 1934, sought out Miss Scales and got from her the copy of the notes she made at the Hans Hofmann School. Furthermore, Woollaston had arranged for some of her work to be exhibited in Nelson. Woollaston was very excited by the discovery of Flora Scales' work and by the notes she had lent him. Kennedy's work hung near Scales' in the New Zealand Society of Artist's exhibition in 1934 in Christchurch. It was mentioned in a review by Frederick Page in *Art In New Zealand* where, implicitly, Kennedy's painting is compared unfavourably with the work of Scales:

> None of the modernist group *Homage to Virginia Woolf, Civilisation, Mountain Theme for Full Orchestra, Abstract Fantastic*... amounted to very much excepting the pictures of Flora Scales.

Although he is not named specifically the first of these paintings is certainly by Kennedy and the second quite possibly. He had exhibited a work of this title in 1931 at the Otago Art Society where it was described as a design for a mural decoration. The titles of the other works

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13 REK to MUB 23rd Feb [1942] c/o Defaulters Camp, Strathmore, Rotorua.
14 Interview June 1998. The owner could not be any clearer in her dates although at one point she suggested that the work could have been given to her after the war in 1946.
15 There are several letters to Ursula Bethell on the subject, mostly, undated. In one, dated 2nd July [probably 1934] he quotes directly from the notes Flora Scales lent him.
16 Frederick Page "New Zealand Society of Artists Exhibition" *Art In New Zealand* 26 December 1934 p 88.
17 *ODT* Nov 11 1931 p 10.
do not hold out great hopes for their quality and seem to signify a straining for modern effect. If indeed Civilisation, reviewed in 1934, was his work recycled from 1931 then this suggests, too, that his output was not very high, or, at least, that he was not confident of much of his recent work.

There are other reasons for thinking that the Otago Peninsula and the more accomplished work, The Hill at Mapua, probably date from later in the decade. It is the debt these works seem to owe to Woollaston's landscapes of 1938 onward. A comparison between Kennedy's Nelson Landscape (1934) and The Hill at Mapua and the Otago Peninsula illustrates the relationship with Woollaston's painting. In the former we are in an interior space looking out onto the landscape. The use of colour is much more natural in the Mapua work, the intense hues of his earlier work having been abandoned. It is painted from an elevated viewpoint characteristic of Woollaston's later work. In it the foreground, detail and the framing device of the verandah have been abandoned in favour of a much more open space. Both works, however, have a freer, linear style. This is less like Woollaston who was experimenting with the construction of space in his work through the use of planes of colour. But this linear style, in its freedom of application, is looser and more gestural than any of Kennedy's other work.

The inscribed date on the Otago Peninsula, in the end, must remain an unexplained phenomenon. Based on stylistic considerations, and also the testimony of those who had some direct contact with the works, it seems that we can ascribe a date of roughly 1938-1941 to these last two paintings. This would be consistent with the accounts we have of Kennedy sitting on the roof of a hut in Mapua with Ann Hamblett "doing landscapes." Whatever the precise dates of the

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18 Edith Woollaston to Ursula Bethel Monday 17th [April 1938].
two works, then, it is reasonable to note that they are later than the other four, and that they signify a change in style for Kennedy before he abandons painting altogether.

Six painting represent the surviving oeuvre and this seems naturally to form these two groupings: the early works of 1933-36, and the later landscapes in a style closer to the work of Toss Woollaston. The earlier set, especially the still lives are characterised by a reflexive relationship between the subject and the execution that has modernist overtones. The source of this is suggested in the invitations printed by the "Six and Four Club" for an exhibition of Commercial and Decorative Art. They described their work as being:

....by a group of young artists ....[who] ....are desirous of placing their work before the public. It is apparent that the work is along modern lines and the group has endeavoured to follow the best British traditions, viz., originality and simplicity; recognising the limitations of the material.¹⁹

Kennedy's work then was following the "best British traditions" working as it does with the "limitations of the material" -the painted mark in Still Life with Flowers forges a material connection with the subject matter, for example.

Toss Woollaston has noted that Kennedy was an enthusiast for modern British artists while he himself was more taken by Cézanne. Among the artists he identified as being Kennedy's favourites were Matthew Smith, Mark Gertler and Roger Fry.²⁰ In 1984 Kennedy himself told how Field and Allen, when they came out to Dunedin, brought with them a number of art books that were to be resources for the interested student, and through these they learned about Matisse, Picasso and Braque. Kennedy was devoted, he said, to Braque. But it was the English painters that they learned most about:

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¹⁹ Quoted by Petersen op cit p 27. Regretably no date is given but it is likely to have been before January 1933 when Field returned to England after the death of his father (Petersen p. 29).
²⁰ Woollaston interview with the author op cit. See also Sage Tea p 231.
Figure 27
*On the Roof at 34 Brunswick Square* (1912)
by Duncan Grant

Figure 28
*Christ at the Well of Samaria* (1929)
R.N. Field
...we were probably more influenced by their knowledge of the English painters like the Nashes, and Graham Sutherland, and, of course, Field was devoted [to] and had done some work with Henry Moore...  

R.N. Field and British Art Theory.

In this section I want to examine the some of the sources of Field's painting and then the theoretical writings which underpin them. This will provide the basis for a comparison with Toss Woollaston's ideas about art through this period. It is suggested that Woollaston's more adventurous paintings and the thinking behind them convinced Kennedy that he had no future as a painter. There is no doubt that the modern art that was emerging under the influence of the imported teachers had its origins in French art and, in particular, in the practice of what Roger Fry had called the Post-Impressionists. As students these teachers were exposed to some of the excitement of the British artists who had had some sort of direct contact with the School of Paris. But, and the point is crucial, the teachers' understanding of French art was remote, and mostly at second hand.

Field's technique in his most admired paintings such as his Portrait of Miss Kelsey (1931) and Christ at the Well of Samaria (1929) [figure 28] has sometimes been compared to Seurat's pointillism yet it is much closer to, for example, the work of the English artist Duncan Grant. It is evident in such works by Grant as On the Roof at 34 Brunswick Square (1912) [figure 27] and Portrait of Vanessa Bell (1912) that Field's technique displays aspects of what Vanessa Bell called "Duncan's leopard manner" -she was referring to Grant's technique of applying painting in spots formed by the loaded brush- than to any French model. In Seurat the image is composed of tiny

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21 Tony Mackle talks to Rodney Kennedy about Art in Dunedin 29.3.84 (Hocken Library Pictures Collection Artists file) p 18.
22 See, for example, A.K.C. Petersen R.N. Field p 50.
23 Richard Shone Bloomsbury Portraits Phaidon, 1976 p 73.
symmetrical marks derived from scientific theories about colour and perception. The objects represented have a monumental quality. In the work of Duncan Grant circa 1912 and in Field circa 1930 the marks are fatter and tend to become elongated vertically and in Field's *Christ at the Well of Samaria* (1929) they become thick lines that bend in response to the grain of the wood on which they are painted. There is a slippage in these works from Seurat's perceptual theories to a more decorative view of surface.

If Field's paintings derived from French art through some very British channels, so did his theoretical understanding of art. In 1940 he wrote a series of articles which were published in *Art in New Zealand.*

The emergence in the pages of *Art in New Zealand* of any theoretical consideration of art particularly when unrelated to a specific exhibition or event is unusual. Field seems to have had several things in mind when he wrote his articles. Firstly, in a time of war he seems to have wanted to focus attention on the value of art and the way it could transcend the contingencies of everyday life. Secondly, the articles served to sum up his experiences during his trip to England in the years 1933-35. His trip had coincided with a revolution in art teaching methods in England. This was much influenced by the writings of Franz Cizek, Marion Richardson and Roger Fry. These writers all put great value on what was called primitive art and the art of children. Cizek advocated that children be allowed to experiment freely and this clearly fitted with Field's own philosophy of teaching art.24

The series was entitled "Art and the Public". Each dealt with a different aspect of art: Form, Colour, Line and Design. Line was the "backbone" of all art. It defined form. However, none of the elements in art were necessarily independent of the others. Colour, for example, was not

24 Petersen *op cit* p 31.
isolated from subject matter but it appealed directly to the emotions. The artist's special virtue was the way he or she could help the viewer to react on the "high plane of aesthetic feelings":

In the world of nature it is often not possible for us to dissociate ourselves sufficiently from the business of living, to take time to see the colour aspects of common life. This the artist does for us....the artist has enshrined for us in some attribute of his Art that same spiritual quality which we all possess in greater or lesser degree, and all long to find expression for.

The artist through special skill, sensitivity and dedication was able to transport the viewer to a higher plane of experience. Form was the vehicle for this transport:

Much modern work is based on the theory that the geometrical structure of form, in the abstract, has the power to stimulate aesthetic feelings. In architecture many experiments have been made, not without success, to use the very form of the building to express its purpose.

It was Roger Fry's disciple, Clive Bell, who proposed the Procrustean bed on which modern art was to be measured and to which Field's account is so indebted:

For a discussion of aesthetics, it need be agreed only that forms arranged and combined according to certain unknown and mysterious laws do move us in a particular way, and that it is the business of an artist so to combine and arrange that they shall move us. These moving combinations and arrangements I have called ...... "Significant Form."

The indefinable "aesthetic feelings" or "forms arranged and combined according to certain unknown and mysterious laws [that] do move us in a particular way" are what alert the viewer to the presence of significant form, which is defined as that arrangement of forms that provoke these feelings. Significant Form became, for a while, one of the most influential concepts in English art.

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25 Field was an enthusiast for Ostwald colour theory, a system of colour relations organised according to hue, luminosity and saturation.
R.N. Field: "Art and the Public: Line." Art in New Zealand 51 (March 1941) pp 144-146
28 Bell Art (1914) quoted by Harrison p 354 n. 40.
These ideas seem to have reached New Zealand in a variety of levels of complexity. Direct contact with Bell's book seems to have had the greatest impact in New Zealand after it was republished in 1931. There are, for example, no mentions of Bell or Fry before 1934 in *Art In New Zealand* and it is not until the essays published by Field in the years 1940-41 that the arguments become fully domesticated in print. However, rather than being an introduction of new ideas the articles Field wrote seem to be a summing up of his ideas of art, ideas that had already had considerable currency but had never before been formulated in writing by an artist working in New Zealand.²⁹

There were occasional writers who had read more widely and gave more thought to their written comments on art. One of the most significant examples of this is about the work of R.N. Field. James Shelley was the pre-eminent critic of his day.³⁰ His comments on Field's painting show greater understanding than was to be found in any other journal for a number of years. In 1928 he wrote:

In the painting *Christchurch* Mr Field shows the influence of the French tendencies following on Cubism to use colour and form suggestions from nature as themes to evolve a symphony, very much as is done in music. The artist repudiates as waste effort the idea of painting surface resemblances of objects, and is concerned only with seizing a suggestion here and there from external nature to work up into rhythmic line, colour and mass, an expression of a whole living experience that gets its unity from the mind and not from the

²⁹ *Art in New Zealand* was not the only magazine that was read regularly. There was considerable interest in magazines such as *The Studio, Design and Drawing* and *Colour*. These were scarcely more concerned with theory than *Art in New Zealand* but we can find in their pages articles whose themes were to be rehearsed ten years later in the New Zealand journal. For example, *The Studio* shows a regular interest in the art of other cultures, particularly from Japan and China, an interest which is enacted in New Zealand by important exhibitions in 1936 and 1938 and in articles in *Art in New Zealand*. *The Studio* for a time even has a Japanese correspondent. In it pages too we find in a review of R.H. Wilenski's popular book *The Movement of Modern Art* (1927) in which the writer compares Wilenski's ideas with those of Clive Bell.

³⁰ Shelley was Professor of Education at Canterbury College. He had lectured on art at the University of Manchester before coming to New Zealand. Since 1921 he had been giving art lectures at the University.
This assessment offers a corrective to what might be seen as an unnecessary deprecation of Field's achievements in this discussion. The young artists that came in contact with his paintings were enchanted and intoxicated by them. It was only as other sources of art writing became accessible in New Zealand that artists looked for broader inspiration. Among younger artists there was a hunger for some theoretical understanding of the processes of art. The artist Marjorie Marshall —she was a student with Rita Angus in Canterbury between 1927 and 1931— recalled that she and her fellow students passed round copies of R.H. Wilenski's book *Modern Movements in Art* (first published 1927) in class. This was done secretly in case they should be discovered by their lecturers who thought that such works interfered with their proper study.

It is difficult to trace a detailed relationship between Field's painting and his writings about art —or, for that matter, those of Fry and Bell— but the ideas of transport and "aesthetic feelings" in the writings point to an art where there is a sympathetic relationship between painted means and subject. We have seen this already in what we have called the self-reflexivity that we have found in Rodney Kennedy's paintings —where the subject and the style seem to reinforce each other— and perhaps it is this that Toss Woollaston refers to as the "shy loveliness" he finds in the best of Field's painting. Woollaston however finds missing "the signs of strenuous anguish and great struggle" and is this he seeks to introduce into his own art.

32 From a conversation with Marshall Seiffert. For a wider discussion of the hostility to theory in New Zealand see Roger Horrocks "No Theory on these Premises" *And 2* Feb. 1984 pp 119-137.
33 In an unpublished essay discussed in the next section.
M.T. Woollaston and Cézanne.

Toss Woollaston famously claimed to have seen his first Cézanne reproduction in a volume of Arthur Mee's *Children's Encyclopedia*, yet it is hard to escape the conclusion that this precocious insight received later support from the fact that Clive Bell gave an entire chapter of *Art* to Cézanne, calling him the founder of the modern movement. In this section I want to examine the influence of Bell and Fry, mediated by Field, on Woollaston and then examine the ways that he freed himself and moved beyond these constraints to develop his own characteristic and, he would argue, native New Zealand, style.

Field's characterisation of the relationship of the artist to nature seemed to promote a freedom of technical approach that was controlled spontaneously in the moment of creation:

> The re-arrangement and rendering of things according to the spiritual urge is the mainspring of all art - the uprush of the mind and spirit, recklessly casting aside all previously accepted formulae, in an endeavour to make habitation for the exalted moment.

Woollaston, although at first challenged by it, revelled in this freedom. He followed Bell and Fry in seeing art as beyond the contingencies of daily life and quoted Cézanne as support: "The importance of art is not to be seen in its immediate results."

However, where Fry and Bell struggle with the similarities they perceive between the world of the spirit and the world of art, and where Robert Field talks grandly of the moment of creation as being a quasi religious experience, there is in Woollaston's philosophy an almost wilful rejection.

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34 Woollaston's preferred reading of Cézanne, however, was that of Fritz Novotny whose book was published by Phaidon in 1937. It is this edition that he refers to in his letters to Roderick Finlayson. Novotny's ideas of space relate closely to those of Hofmann's as they are reproduced in the notes of Flora Scales. Woollaston quotes freely from Cézanne's letters in his letters. The source of these seem again to have been Flora Scales.


36 MTW to MUB July 2 [1934]. Woollaston at this stage seems to have been getting his Cézanne quotations form the notes Flora Scales lent him.
of the separation between the two. Bell, for example, is equivocal on this point. He concedes that art and religion might be "for convenience sake" called manifestations of the "religious spirit" but what he means by this is not entirely clear. What, according to Bell, the spiritual and aesthetic realms have in common is a belief in universal principles but ultimately they are distinct, although analogous, conditions. Robert Field is also vague on the relationship between the aesthetic and the religious experience but somehow "the re-arrangement and rendering of things according to the spiritual urge is the mainspring of all art." Woollaston will have none of this equivocation. Not only is art congruent with spirituality, they are the same thing. He summons William Blake, whose visionary pronouncements would surely exclude him from Bell's Republic. "Do I harp too much on the Scriptures?" he writes to Roderick Finlayson. "I believe with William Blake:

The old and new testaments are the great code of art. The whole business of man is the arts and all things common. No secrecy in art."

In fact, Woollaston had been reading in Jacques Maritain's *Art and Scholasticism*. Maritain argues that science, philosophy, poetry, and mysticism are among many legitimate ways of knowing reality. In this Woollaston found justification for his conflation of spirituality and art. And, in Maritain's assertion that the individual person transcends the political community, he found confirmation for his own reluctance to engage in political activity at a time when international politics seemed to be invading the daily lives of everyone.

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37 Clive Bell *Art* pp 82-3.
38 *Ibid* p 194.
39 MTW to RF 4/6/38.
40 Jacques Maritain's *Art and Scholasticism* had been widely available in English translation since about 1930. We have already seen Rodney Kennedy lecturing the New Poetics discussion group on Maritain, a book which he had borrowed from Ursual Bethel, who freely dispensed books to her interested young people. Gerald Barnett *Toss Woollaston* refers to Woollaston and Maritain p 51. See also John Summers *Dreamscape* I p 46 for Woollaston and Maritain.
In an article published in 1938, he expounded his views on beauty in art. A work of art was not in imitation of "the appearance (to physical sight)" of an object in Nature. In fact, Art was, by definition, distinct from Nature, but only at the level of local appearance. Local appearance was merely a manifestation of deeper, more immutable laws to which both Art and Nature were subject:

There is then good reason for the law that a work of art must be a unit, complete in itself. It is, because it must be constructed in obedience to the law of harmony by which the universe is [as] a whole composed of none but necessary parts........What, then, must a picture look like? Identical with no other creature than itself, being created out of a particular and distinct act of creative will.........

The distinction here is that art is not a re-assemblage of Nature according to some laws of aesthetic rules or principles: it cannot, for example, be easily divided into the categories of Form, Colour, Line etc. Art is Nature, or at least they are both manifestations of something deeper and ineffable.

In Maritain he finds justification for his practice as an artist. In the notes of Flora Scales from the Hans Hoffman School and in Fritz Novotny's essay in the Phaidon book on Cézanne he finds direct instruction on how to construct pictures.

Novotny identifies various features of Cézanne's art. His use of colour, he argues, displays an "incomparable harmony" which many, he claims, find sufficient to explain the peculiarities of form in Cézanne. Novotny, however, points to the aloofness in the work which is most evident in his "almost puppet-like" representations of the human figure. This aloofness gives his pictures "for those that approach them for the first time, a cold, rigid almost repugnant character." It is also evident in Cézanne's landscape paintings:

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In his representation there is a lack of pleasure in the reproduction of substance, or at least in the direct reproduction of material beauties. The illuminating power of the colours of flower and fruit in Cézanne's still-lives is only to a slight degree effective as material beauty; similarly the clear landscape distance in many of his pictures cannot be felt as the clarity of determined meteorological conditions. In consequence his objects have a kind of immateriality; despite the solidity of their corporeal and spatial structure, they seem to be without weight, when compared, for example, with the sensuality of impressionistic rendering.\(^{42}\)

Cézanne's "aloofness" may have appealed to Woollaston's more grandiose side.\(^{43}\) It is certainly in contrast to the essentially sympathetic renderings of objects in, say, Rodney Kennedy's flower studies or in Field's work where the means and the image, however counter intuitive their use of colour may be, in some way reflect the represented object. Novotny's account of Cézanne offered a way past Field's achievements, and his limitations:

The phenomena of reduction and attenuation in the perspectival effects, in the reproduction of atmosphere and light, are derived from the comprehensive characteristic that space in Cézanne's pictures is not illusory space in the ordinary sense. The pictorial plane contributes too much as an artistic reality to the impression produced by this treatment of space. This, however, does not mean that Cézanne's pictures can be called "flat". They are not flat in the sense that they have only a limited extension in depth, nor do they give the flat impression of decorative painting. On the contrary space does exist in his pictures, but a form of space which despite its depth and intensity nevertheless makes it difficult for the beholder to enter into the spatial construction. The various kinds of sentiment-reduction, in the representation of human figures and objects, of superficial beauty and spatial perspective, find their counterpart in this characteristic of pictorial space.\(^{44}\)

Novotny's account of the construction of picture space is a complex reading but is sufficiently detailed that some sections can almost be used as an instruction manual. Woollaston is ever the practical man. He discounts any external difficulty such as financial hindrances or critical indifference and advises that the artist concentrate on the true business of art:

\(^{42}\) Novotny *op cit* p 9.
\(^{43}\) As exemplified by the title of a piece in *Art In New Zealand*: "Mr Tosswill Woollaston. a little known New Zealand artist interviews our reporter. *AINZ* 37 (September 1937) pp 7-13.
\(^{44}\) Novotny *op cit* p 11.
Our own difficulties are in art itself, not in other people's attitudes to it. Our only way of overcoming the difficulties we find in art seems to me to be the way of faith.\footnote{MTW to RF 4/6/38.}

This issue of difficulties met and overcome was his principal objection to the work of R.N. Field. This was expounded in a brief essay he wrote, at Rodney Kennedy's instigation, early in 1938. He begins by describing the "immediate authority" he found in Field's work when he first saw it and acknowledging the debt he felt to him as a teacher:

His is a light-hearted authority, and bloweth where it listeth, exempt from banalities that can be "taught."\footnote{MT. Woollaston, The Art of R.N. Field [1938] (Unpublished Manuscript. Holograph copy in the Correspondence file of Ursula Bethell Box 14 in the Macmillan Brown Library).}

However, with some pain, Woollaston finds he longer admires the work so unreservedly:

I miss in his paintings the signs of strenuous anguish and great struggle; but am aware of a continual exquisite grieving for more beauty. He is by no means exempt from failures but in an order of things where no painters are so exempt, those who seem to be are charlatans. The worst feature of R.N. Field's failures is that they can be successful sometimes from the point of view of colour, sometimes sentimentally, or a combination of both... Field's loveliest pictures.....have an unmitigated shy loveliness like wild things not knowing they are being observed. He creates from an intense inner privacy.............He is not a New Zealand painter, and does not pose as one.

........now he is painting subjects that have little to do with the New Zealand landscape, but seem to have much to do with the colours he is using in his pottery. I think he never believed in some primly violent experiments which were a reaction to this country's mountainous landscape when he first came here.\footnote{Ibid}

Woollaston goes on to praise Field's sculpture where "colour and sentiment can no longer easily carry off a work otherwise unimportant."

In retrospect, the article seems to be a fairly perceptive piece of criticism of Field's painting.\footnote{Field had, of course, returned from England much enthused about developments in studio ceramics influenced by Gilbert Staite-Murray and Bernard Leach and to some extent seems to have lost interest in painting.} Woollaston characterises the virtues of Field's work in terms of its quiet strength and
identifies an over-easy use of colour which distracts from the weaknesses of the images as one of its faults. The comments seem mild, just, and not without obvious respect and affection. However, this was not the sort of criticism that *Art In New Zealand* could easily accommodate. For example W.H. Allen's piece several times asserts the artist's "creativity" in somewhat vague terms and makes no real critical assessment of the work. It takes as its main theme an argument over likeness in art coming to a conclusion that will be drearily familiar to readers of Clive Bell:

A portrait, landscape or piece of sculpture that we can enjoy visually, irrespective of our acquaintance with the subject or place depicted, is verily a work of art. I do not mean to suggest that "likeness" is of no importance in art but that it is the "likeness to nature" expressed by the life and rhythm of the work itself that gives us enjoyment."40

Woollaston is by this time well beyond concerns about likeness. In his painting he is struggling with much more the complex issues of pictorial construction.

**The End of Painting.**

Woollaston's conception of painting had apparently outstripped all those around him. He read Hofmann and Cézanne (through Scales' notes), Maritain, Novotny and others and used their explanations of how art -and especially Cézanne's art- worked to make his own art work. His output was constant and considerable, especially given his responsibilities to provide for a family. Beside it Kennedy saw his own work as lacking in originality. His output was low and, although he was regularly mentioned as one of the bright stars of art in Otago, he rarely received any serious attention in reviews. He had exhibited twice in Christchurch with the New Zealand Society of Artists and received scant critical attention. He exhibited with the Otago Art Society in 1939 -this

was the year he led the walk-out of younger artists in protest at the removal of McCahon's first Peninsula painting- but he had not been mentioned in the newspaper reviews since the early 1930s, and even when Field described him as one of Dunedin's promising artists there was no discussion of his work. As late as December 1943 he was mentioned in an article as one of Dunedin's young promising artists. This is surprising since he had by this time been in detention for eighteen months.

By 1938 he had met not only Colin McCahon but also Doris Lusk and Anne Hamblett who were students at the Art School in Dunedin. In Christchurch he was familiar with the members of the Christchurch Group and was friendly with Olivia Spencer-Bower, Evelyn Page and probably Rita Angus. While the ties with British art theory and practice was by no means completely broken (and that theory had, anyway moved beyond Fry and Bell) there was a growing interest amongst many of these young artists in the art of other former British colonies. The work of the American Regionalist such as Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood was influential, for example, as was the work of the Group of Seven in Canada. These artists promoted content -the landscape as sign of national identity- in a way that clearly breached the doctrine of significant form (and may indeed be part of its attraction to the artists). In this new approach Kennedy must have seen his own work becoming increasingly irrelevant.

Like Woollaston he was experiencing financial and other difficulties. He was cramped at home, without a room of his own; his teacher and friend was removed into the bosom of the Oxford Group, a religious association which did not appeal to Kennedy; and his authority as an artist, at least as a painter, seemed to be on the wane. But where for Woollaston difficulties were a challenge, an incitement to work harder they served only to discourage Kennedy.

50 "Younger Dunedin Artists: By One of Them" Art in New Zealand 62 (Dec 1943) p 7.
Kennedy's last two landscapes seem to represent an attempt to come to terms with changes he perceived in the art world around him and particularly in the work of his friend Woollaston, perhaps to break with the British art tradition and get closer to the art of, say, Cézanne whose paintings had greatly enthused Woollaston, or to produce art that was identifiably from New Zealand. He was later to say he gave up painting after seeing Woollaston's work. He also claimed that he burned his old paintings before he went into detention. The Otago Peninsula and especially The Hill at Mapua are executed with some flair and perhaps more fluidity of line than Woollaston was using in 1938-39. Nonetheless, if these represented a late attempt to become an artist, then Kennedy lacked the conviction of his vocation. Furthermore other interests were arising in the promotion of other people's art and in the theatre.

The excitement that Kennedy experienced in collaborating on the costumes and set for The Insect Play is in contrast to the glumness with which he contemplated his future in other spheres. Unlike Woollaston he had not the resolve, nor the self-belief -or, in fact, the theoretical rigour- to persevere as a painter. When he was in the detention camp he was reported to have run some drawing classes but his main artistic interest then was theatre, and theatre was to fill his professional life after the war. His interest in art was transferred to the support of artist friends and the development of his unique collection of paintings and drawings.
In this chapter I want to consider the conditions that existed for the support and promotion of art in New Zealand first in the years 1946-1966 and then also from 1966 onward. This point of articulation around the mid-sixties is significant in a number of ways and they are noted in the text that follows. However, by way of introduction, I want to draw attention to a feature of the analysis which, since it is not the principal concern of this work, is not fully explored later.

In 1964 the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council was formed. Charles Brasch retired from the editorship of *Landfall* (1966). The Education Act of 1963 which brought the University Extension directly under the control of the University without any direct funding from Government. The first of the University Scholarships for artists were established between 1959 and 1966. In the 1960s dealer galleries became a feature of the art culture. In 1968, for example, Peter McLeavey opened his gallery in Cuba Street in Wellington. His was not the first dealer gallery but it became among the most significant. He consciously sought to develop an "art market". We might also note that at this period for the first time artists were graduating from art college and making their way simply as artists in New Zealand. Taken together these events represent a formalisation in the administration of art production that I have described as the professionalisation of culture.

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1 The Robert Burns Fellowship was created in 1959, the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship in 1966 and the Mozart Fellowship 1969, all at the University of Otago.
2 The first dealer gallery is usually agreed to be The Gallery of Helen Hitchings which operated in Wellington from 1949-51. In 1960 *The Gallery* (later *Ikon Gallery*) opened. *Barry Lett, 1965* (later *RKS Art*) and *New Vision Gallery* (1965 - 68) followed. Peter McLeavey had, for a time before he opened his gallery, operated out of his home on the Terrace in Wellington.
3 A good example is Phillip Tristium who graduated in 1964 and who was shown regularly at the *New Vision Gallery* in Auckland between 1964 and 1970. See Michael Dunn *A Concise History of New Zealand Painting* Sydney, 1991 pp 127 - 128.
4 Late in the composition of this essay I returned to Francis Pound's essay "The Words and the Art, New Zealand Art Criticism c. 1950 - c. 1990" in *Headlands: Thinking Through New*
business of art moved into the familiar capitalist arena of dealers and commercial transactions and away from the more informal networks in which Rodney Kennedy - and to a lesser extent Charles Brasch - operated.

This change in the production of art was promoted by Brasch, among others, in ways that I discuss below. The importance of this discussion for our purposes is that it creates a background against which the activities of Rodney Kennedy can be measured and assessed. The proposition that an individual functions as a supporter of the arts begs the question of the prevailing conditions which permit such support.

A discussion of Kennedy's role in this context leads naturally to a discussion of his donations to the Hocken Library at the University of Otago. A pattern in his donations suggests particular relationships with the original authors of the works donated, the artists. One artist more than any other is represented in Kennedy's donations to the Hocken, and in his private collection of art: Colin McCahon. The closeness between the two men is signified in the number of McCahon's works that carry the sobriquet "Kennedy." A discussion of the relationship between the two men precedes the final section where Kennedy's collection is discussed. Rather than discuss

Zealand Art Sydney, 1992 pp 185 - 202. There I discovered to that he too had made much of this concept of professionalism. In fact, he has found a similar moment of articulation (around 1970) in the life of criticism in New Zealand: between "The new Professionalism" of Nationalist critics and "Another new professionalism" of later critics, mostly academics. It is a concept that is clearly proposed in Peter Tomory's bracing essay "Looking at art in New Zealand" Landfall 46 vol 12 no 2 June 1958. Professionalism in the area of Gallery management, as I make clear, had been a constant theme to which Brasch returned over twenty years. I have proposed that this moment - the mid 1960s - be seen as a sea change in the administration of culture in New Zealand.

5 Peter McLeavey has commented that although his relationship with Kennedy was always cordial he nonetheless felt a reserve coming from the older man as if he he felt that McLeavey was exploiting Wollaston by functioning as his dealer. From a conversation with Peter McLeavey. June 1997

6 The Kennedy Crucifixion (1947); the Kennedy Otago Peninsula (1946-9); the Kennedy Waterfalls (1966). There are also a number of drawings specifically dedicated to Kennedy as well as the first of the Angel & Bed series. These works are discussed below.
particular works I have tried to achieve some sort of overview of the collection.

Support for Art in New Zealand up to 1946

An examination of Brasch's visit in 1938 reveals a network of what he calls "the gifted young and middle-aged". Support for Toss Woollaston's painting became something of a litmus test for this group so it is worth commenting briefly, for example, on some of those that Brasch mentions as showing an interest in Woollaston's art. George Gabites worked at the General Assembly Library in Wellington and went on to edit the School Journal. He went as far as to discuss the case of Woollaston who was "giving his life to art, living in poverty in order to paint" with the Member of Parliament for Dunedin, Dr Macmillan, who promised to raise it in Cabinet.8 Paul Gabites was civil servant who became a senior diplomat; Leicester (L.C.) Webb was a leader writer for the Christchurch Press who after the war worked with the Economic Stabilization Commission, a Government body that was set up to control the country's economy. Mrs Cochrane in Wellington had run a small gallery in Britain. Most of the work that Brasch bought was seen in Wellington at Mrs Cochrane's home.

By 1938 there was a growing acknowledgement of interested and increasingly influential people that Woollaston was a significant artist and worthy of support. Miss Bethell had a number of plans to provide him with financial help and when Charles Brasch saw the work, introduced to it by Kennedy who always had several pieces on loan, he visited the Woollastons in Mapua and bought some drawings. Other rising figures in the New Zealand scene also were showing an interest. Eric McCormick arranged for Woollaston to be included in the Centennial Exhibition of

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7 Brasch Indirections p 305.
8 Brasch Indirections p 307.
work that was sent to London. An enthralled Miss Bethell on a visit to Wellington had watched as he and George Gabites examined Woollaston's drawings and discussed them with considered seriousness. These people accepted and supported his ambition to be, simply, an artist. Sometimes they bought his paintings. None of this was sufficient to secure a living for Woollaston and his family. However, the interest shown by these men and women served to encourage his ambition and sustained him in moments of self-doubt and, importantly for this present line of thought, it represented the first stirrings of a movement to institutionalise state patronage for the arts.

This movement gained momentum and practical expression with the National Centennial Exhibition which was the first attempt to provide a comprehensive survey of the development of New Zealand Art: that is, art in the European tradition. The exhibition was organised by Dr A.H. McLintock and received government support from W.E. Parry and Joseph Heenan at the Department of Internal Affairs. At the opening McLintock made clear that the agenda was indeed the encouragement of local art:

I have been asked if there is a national art in New Zealand. To this question I must answer that I do not think so, and I doubt that such an aim will be attained till we realise the distinctive and peculiar characteristics which we have to express. It is local art that demands our support not that from overseas.10

As early as 1943 M.H. Holcroft had argued that a State Editorial Board be established11 and after the war individual interventions were made on behalf of writers. Most notably Joseph Heenan as head of the Department of Internal Affairs, after representations from E.H. McCormick, established a pension for the writer Frank Sargeson.12 In August 1947 a State Literary Fund was

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9 MUB to REK May 11 & 22, July 6 & 20 1938. Woollaston had visited McCormack on a trip to Wellington where the older man had advised him not to travel overseas to study.
12 In fact Heenan had a reputation for administering a "slush fund" and disbursing money
established. It was generally felt that visual culture was slower in developing than literary culture and certainly institutional support for the visual arts was slower in coming.

**Charles Brasch and Support of Art in New Zealand**

An independent nation, it seemed, needed its own artists and if individual patronage was not sufficient then support should come from public bodies. In this section I want to argue for Brasch's role in the creation of a "national" culture. In particular I am interested in his promotion, over a period of twenty years, of greater state support for the arts. I conclude that the success of this project represents the triumph of a bourgeois ideology that had been evident in the early supporters of Woollaston's painting but which comes into its own in the post-war period of relative economic prosperity. In following this argument I want to establish the background against which Rodney Kennedy's support for artists existed. In tracing Brasch's role in this cultural shift I want to underline how close Kennedy was to this project. However, despite the focus of my argument on these two men I am not claiming that Brasch, or for that matter Kennedy, was the sole architect of this cultural moment, although their contribution must be acknowledged as significant.

Brasch's promotion of artists was enacted in an extraordinary number of ways. He had an independent income which he used directly to support artists and writers - on occasions, he simply gave friends money. He made substantial purchases of art works from New Zealand artists - there were over five hundred paintings and drawings in his personal collection when he died in 1973 - and supported individual projects, most notably McCahon's trip to Melbourne in 1951 (and, we should remember, Rodney Kennedy's trip to Britain in 1955-56). Furthermore he was a sympathetic critic

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secretly in the minister's name.
and published many essays on the work of individual artists and often gave radio broadcasts on art. He financed at least one major commission in the University of Otago Library Mural in 1965. He encouraged other collectors, and when he sensed that friends were interested in art he made them gifts of art works. He used his personal fortune to underwrite the publication of *Landfall*, the journal he edited between 1947 and 1966. *Landfall* provided a forum for critical debate on issues of cultural importance. Its focus was mainly literary but it was concerned with the visual arts too. For example, the debate over the rejection of the Frances Hodgkins painting *The Pleasure Garden* by the Robert McDougall Art Gallery was canvased in the pages of *Landfall*, with Harry (T.H.) Scott contributing a lengthy essay on the subject.

Brasch was deeply involved in the management of the Hocken Library collection. He often bought works which were directly given to the Hocken Collection and helped with the management of the collection.

Art clearly gave him deep pleasure. It was a pleasure he thought everyone would learn to share and so he worked to create a wider understanding of art. He believed that artists were an important part of a developing culture and if given proper support would produce work that would represent New Zealand in a distinctive way. To this end he argued over many years for the establishment of an Arts Council.

Brasch was critical of the management of art galleries in New Zealand - he was a member of the Council of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. He visited this topic in *Landfall* in 1949 with an article entitled "Art Gallery Policy." where he discussed the rejection of the Frances Hodgkins

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13 I am grateful to Dr Roger Collins for this insight.
painting *The Pleasure Garden*. He was critical of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery who had also declined to purchase an example of Hodgkins late work. He analysed recent purchases for the gallery. He was unenthusiastic about the recently acquired painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds and was equally unimpressed with the works by Gainsborough and William Dobson, and concluded that money spent on a work by Hodgkins in her late style would have represented better value.

The article concluded with a plea for professional directors of art galleries whose judgement he believed would be more sound than that of the boards of trustees who at that time ran civic galleries throughout New Zealand. Brasch made repeated pleas for professional gallery staff in New Zealand. This was a constant theme over the next decade or so.\(^{15}\) This article was part of a campaign, almost a mission, whose aims were to extend the appreciation of the arts to a broader community. There were various ways that this was approached in the visual arts.

There were other ways in which Brasch sought to improve the conditions under which artists worked. He was a member of the Arts Council Visual Arts Committee from 1965-67 and during that time he argued for the institution of a civil list for distinguished artists.\(^{16}\) He also worked to place art, and particularly contemporary New Zealand art, before a wider public and at the same time to promote a wider understanding of contemporary art. And, finally, he looked to promote the careers of New Zealand artists thus making it possible for them to make a living from their art, or failing that, to receive state patronage to allow them to continue with their work unhindered by financial concerns.

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\(^{15}\) Twelve years later, in 1963, in a talk to the Visual Arts Association at the Dunedin Public Library Brasch revisited the theme and praised the work that Auckland City Art Gallery had done under successive (professional) directors. Brasch Literary Papers Ms 996 (typescript) "Memo for Visual Arts Committee."

\(^{16}\) Hocken Library Brasch Literary Papers Ms 996 (typescript) "A Civil List" inscribed in Brasch's hand "Memo for Visual Arts Committee."
He also contributed directly to public support of the arts in a very practical way. In 1959 the Robert Burns Fellowship, a literary scholarship, was established at the University of Otago by "a group of citizens" who wished to remain anonymous but Brasch's involvement as prime mover has become generally accepted. The Frances Hodgkins for artists was inaugurated in 1966 and the Mozart Scholarship in 1970. The terms of the Hodgkins Fellowship were similar to those for the Burns. The artists were provided with studio space at the University and were given a salary to permit them to work for a year. Again Brasch was the principal benefactor.

In his campaign to broaden the understanding of art and widen its audience—to create a public—Brasch engaged in a number of activities. He broadcast a series of three radio talks entitled "Approach to Modern Art" in which he argued that the painter's task was to translate a private vision or perception into a universal language. The talks assumed an audience which was wedded to a photographic sort of art. He gently argued against this: "I think the reason why we are often puzzled by modern paintings is that we come to them expecting the wrong things." Brasch regularly gave broadcasts on particular artists or reviewed particular shows.

In addition to this, Brasch worked in competition with the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. As we have seen he worked closely with Dr Skinner to develop the collection of the Hocken Library where a policy of collecting the work of contemporary New Zealand artists was pursued. He also

17 Rodney Kennedy told Robyn Notman that Brasch's cousins the De Beers (Esmond, Mary and Dora) had endowed the Otago University Fellowships. Robyn Notman: What influence did Esmond De Beer's philanthropy have on the development of the collections of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery...? Dissertation submitted for a Post Graduate Diploma in Museum Studies, Massey University, 1991 pp 2 & 6 (note 5).

18 In private correspondence Brasch noted that the Hodgkins Fellowship was designed for those artists who were not likely to win the Kelliher Prize. The Kelliher was a competition that was specifically for landscape painting. The winning works were characterised by a sub-Impressionist Romanticism and a remarkable homogeneity in appearance. See The Kelliher: 67 award winning paintings text by Richard King. (Auckland, 1979).

19 Charles Brasch "Approach to Modern Painting" Hocken Archive Ms 996 Brasch Literary papers 15/5.
co-operated in running exhibitions away from the Art Gallery. In 1948 he and Rodney Kennedy with the City Librarian, Archie Dunningham, organised an exhibition of Colin McCahon's paintings at the Dunedin Public Library. In 1950 he arranged to have work sent down from the Christchurch Group and exhibited in Dunedin. And in 1954 he organised another exhibition at the Dunedin Public Library, this time of New Zealand Art.

Institutional Support for the Arts

One man cannot, of course, subsidise and develop an art market by himself. It was clear to Brasch very soon after his return to New Zealand in 1946 that institutional support for artist and, in particular, State support was necessary to help artists survive.

The idea of institutional support for artists to study abroad had been current since the early 1930s when Mrs Rosa Sawtell, a Christchurch artist, proposed to finance a Travelling Scholarship. This operated fitfully over the next decade and became institutionalised in 1947 when the Association of New Zealand Art Societies created a travelling scholarship for artists. Woollaston

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21 CB to Leo Bensemann July 2 1950 Alexander Turnbull Library MS Papers 3983 folder 7, Bensemann.
22 All the work in this who was lent from local collections. Both Brasch and Kennedy contributed work to this exhibition. Brasch showed one work by Evelyn Page one by Woollaston, one by McCahon, one by Sam Cairncross and one by Geoffrey Fairburn, younger brother of the poet Rex Fairburn. The works from Kennedy's collection which were shown were Tobacco Field, Riwaka by Doris Lush, Hokitika and Lillian Ellice by Woollaston, Camp Fires, New Caledonia by W.J. Reed, Still Life at Window by Colin McCahon, and Man's Head by John Drawbridge. Brasch Literary Papers Hocken Archive MS 996 15/11. The list of contributors to this exhibition underlines the point made above about a group of professional men (and on occasions women) who were reaching positions of responsibility in New Zealand and were using these positions to promote the endeavours of local artists. Apart from Brasch himself (and Rodney Kennedy) a number of Brasch's family contributed works: his aunt Emily Forsyth and her daughter Ellespie Prior as well as Dorothy Theomin who was a cousin. Among the others Philip Smithells was to become Professor of Anatomy at the Medical School, Margaret Scott was a librarian, a long time friend of Kennedy and Brasch's and wife of Harry (T.H.) Scott and David Hall was head of University Extensions (and, since John Brailsford's retirement in 1947, Kennedy's immediate senior in the department.)
was to benefit from this in 1958 when he travelled to Australia.\textsuperscript{23}

The thrust of these scholarships was still that an artist should travel overseas and broaden his or her experience of international art. This was something that Woollaston had resisted in the past:

\textit{...the great problem I have in painting is not how to improve my technique but to wrestle with the fear to use it because it is small and desires great. Going to Europe will not help me there.}\textsuperscript{24}

The problem, as Brasch understood it, was not getting to see new art. The availability in the late 1930s of good colour reproductions -although well short of the impact of the original work- had nonetheless made international art more accessible.\textsuperscript{25} The principal problem was simple survival. Woollaston's experience demonstrated this well. During the 1950s he and his family lived in Greymouth and he made a living by selling Rawleigh's products door to door, and at one point considered giving up painting altogether.\textsuperscript{26}

The limitations of the travelling scholarship was that it was prescriptive of how it should be used. Woollaston, for example, would have preferred to stay in New Zealand and use the money to paint but was required by the terms of the scholarship to travel. Furthermore, the insistence on overseas experience was counter to the thrust of Brasch's ambitions: that New Zealand should

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{23} Brasch, as we have noted, had personally funded a trip to Australia by Colin McCahon in 1951.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{24} MTW to MUB Ang 16. [1938?]

\textsuperscript{25} This is a contentious claim, of course. Peter Tomory observed in 1958: "Reproductions, unhappily, are mostly reduced in size, and very inaccurate in colour, nor can printer's ink be substituted for oil paint." Tomory \textit{op cit} p 153. Nonetheless, it would be foolish to underestimate the importance of the colour reproduction and its influence on New Zealand art. Even the distortions of scale noted by Tomory were important.

\textsuperscript{26} In the field of literature Brasch in 1950 began to make regular payments to Frank Sargeson. Michael King comments: "The quarterly payments, usually of £50 were not huge in themselves. But their regularity, along with his freehold property and literary pension, ensured that Sargeson had sufficient resources to support himself for most of the remainder of his life." See \textit{Frank Sargeson} p 303.}
create and sustain its own characteristic culture. A further limitation was that these scholarships were fixed to one particular project. An artist might go overseas and be stimulated by the art seen there, as were both McCahon and Woollaston, but the real problem for the artists was to support themselves and their families when they returned home and attempted to assimilate the experience into their own work.

The State Literary Fund provided a model for a more sustaining approach to State support for the arts. The way it was administered was by no means to Brasch's liking but it seemed, at least, to provide a structure on which proper support for the arts might be based. As early as 1955 he was arguing in a Landfall editorial for the foundation of an Arts Council modelled on the British institution that acted "as a channel for stimulating artistic life throughout the country, by subsidizing, guaranteeing and promoting a host of local enterprises, large and small, old and new, in all the arts." 28

Brasch got his wish in 1960 with the institution of the Arts Advisory Council which in 1964 became the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council. The QE II Arts Council was formed with the intention of increasing the level of professionalism in the arts as well as encouraging participation

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27 Landfall was given a grant of £50 for 1953 at the end of the year. A similar sum had been granted the previous year. Brasch thought this niggardly and over the next few years found the State Literary Fund ill-managed and inefficient. See, for example, his letter to Leo Bensemann 29/1/54 (Alexander Turnbull Library MS Papers 3983, Folder 2, Bensemann): "Am I sick of the Lit. fund and its rudeness and inefficiency!" See also Dennis McEldowney "Publishing, Patronage, Literary Magazines" in The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature (ed Terry Sturm) pp 574-579; W.H. Oliver "The Awakening Imagination" in the Oxford History of New Zealand pp 539-542. Similar problems were to develop later with the Art Council where the idea of such a body was not supported by its practice, at least in the eyes of some.

28 Ibid. The editorial ends with a familiar plea. He laments the loss of Eric Westbrook to Melbourne and comments: "The pity is that he has been alone here. What the country needs is half-a-dozen Eric Westbrooks, one at each of the four main galleries and two to sit on an arts council. Then the arts would really get a chance to show their vigour and their power to interest and delight." The apparent paradox of a Government institution enabling arts to demonstrate their independence and vigour is countered by the argument that an Arts Council would stimulate "local and private enterprise in the arts....and so .....find employment for the talents ....of our painters, sculptors, designers, and other artists."
in and audience support for the arts.

Brasch certainly approved of the changes wrought under the new Arts Council. The increase of institutional and especially State support for the arts was for him central to the development of a robust and independent culture that was identifiable as belonging to New Zealand. Writing in 1960 he noted that in the 1930s the educated people had naturally looked to England as "the source of all that makes life civilised." This attitude had changed and he identified two events which embodied the change in New Zealand society. These were the establishment, in 1947, of the National Orchestra and the Literary Fund. The moral he drew was that each of these events occurred as a result of "state action."29

A second change wrought under the new Arts Council was the increase in standards that the drive for professionalism brought in its wake. However, higher standards were achieved at a price. No longer would the New Zealand Ballet appear in a draughty hall in Gore or Balclutha, nor would New Zealand Opera, presumably accompanied by a pianist, perform tours of Central Otago. Art and culture became centralised, and this was counter to Brasch's expectation which was that through education more and more New Zealanders would enjoy the fruits of culture.

Furthermore, the intervention of the state into art patronage was to some degree contentious. A.R.D. Fairburn had published a piece of doggerel in 1947 called Note on the State Literary Fund:

Here is a piece of wisdom
I learnt at my mother's knee
The mushroom grows in the open
The toadstool under the tree.30


30 Quoted by Denys Trussell in Fairburn Auckland, 1984 p 218.
This, whatever it lacks in mycological accuracy, is a concise summary of the argument against state support for the arts. Fairburn, in 1947, questioned the independence of work produced under the pay of the state:

I can't very willingly accept the idea of the "artist" as a special being: abstracted from his human context of working, paying taxes, cricketing, boozing, tupping and all the rest of it. I'd take money from a friend... But not from the State... because that allows the State to get a foot inside my door. It destroys my right to criticise and oppose the Government...  

Brasch's view was always prospective: state support was priming the pump for the desired professionalism which then would liberate art and the artist.

In retrospect Fairburn, as is so often the case, seems like a discordant voice blaring in the wilderness. The twenty years between Brasch's return to New Zealand and the foundation of the QE II Arts Council was one of great prosperity in New Zealand. The prevailing ideology was of an emerging classless society although in many ways the new art was part of the capture by the emergent middle class of the political stage, and was an expression of the aspirations of this group. Nonetheless, for a time, especially in the visual arts, a certain sort of avant garde art was the official art of New Zealand. Brasch promoted a vision of a unitary culture that was consistent with this, and his patient explanatory broadcasts on art and artists have the air of missionary work,

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31 Quoted by Michael King in *Sargeson* p 283
34 Perhaps this movement reached its apotheosis in 1978 with the gift by the New Zealand Government to the government of Australia of the large McCahon painting *Victory Over Death*. 2.
bringing the people up to speed on culture. Everyone eventually would share the same value of art.

There was, however, a cost for this apparently classless society. It was predominantly male and essentially European, although distinctive enough to be regarded as independent and unique to New Zealand. These exclusions, of Maori and of alternative voices, while they may now look like deficiencies, had the virtue at the time of presenting a homogenous national identity which was robust enough to be sent out into the world as symbolising the nation's emerging identity, as belonging to New Zealand.

It was the existence of an advanced culture that was seen as signifying maturity, independence and all the other qualities implied in statehood. The content of the art was important in that it was unique to New Zealand, but its forms were necessarily internationally comparable. The work while identifiably from New Zealand had to be sufficiently alike the art of, say, Canada, to be differentiated from it. Furthermore, this work was, by and large, distinct from what Allen Curnow referred to as "Little-New-Zealandism" by which he meant, in the context of a selection of verse, that the mere introduction of local motifs was not sufficient to characterise poetry (or,

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35 "...a sexual politic by which a refusal to accommodate sexual otherness occurs as a pretence of androgyne (of not noticing the difference) yet covertly favours the male." Geraets op cit p 108. Geraets does note, however, that the single most published poet in *Landfall* during the Brasch years of editorship was a woman, Ruth Dallas.

36 As Francis Pound has pointed out the official view of Maori at this time was that they should be assimilated into mainstream Pakeha culture. See his discussion of the Rita Angus painting *Rutu in The Space Between* pp 149 - 151. As with gender difference, cultural difference within the body politic was ignored in favour of a unified identity. Significantly missing also were differences of sexual orientation. Identity politics began to appear in art in New Zealand in the 1980s.

37 Towards the end of this period 1946-1966 an alternative internationalism was beginning to emerge from a number of artists. Gordon Walters and Milan Mrkusich most immediately come to mind with Louise Henderson and John Weeks as less vigorous exponents of an international style.

38 Canada because it was also a Dominion undergoing similar political changes, but also because a touring show of Contemporary Canadian Painting had toured New Zealand in 1936 - 37 and created great interest among artists in this country.

we might argue, art) as being uniquely of New Zealand. This was logically something of a balancing act since:

The best of our verse [or we might say: painting] is marked or moulded everywhere by peculiar pressures - pressures arising from isolation of the country, its physical character, and its history. 40

And, as Peter Tomory argued, these pressures of isolation were more acute in the case of the visual arts since the highest quality poem or novel was readily available in a book while there was not "one single example of great European art in this country." 41 Yet the danger was that artists under the "peculiar pressures" Curnow identified would produce the artistic equivalent of Kowhai Gold, the anthology of New Zealand verse published in 1930 whose selection of picturesque verse scattered with local references had been excoriated by Curnow in 1945. 42

Among the artists that Brasch promoted, especially Woollaston and McCahan, the landscape was a sign of locality but this was to some degree subsumed by other concerns that made the work less illustrative. This was in contrast to the "subject" painters like Russell Clark or Eric Lee-Johnson. 43

In this model, then, a work of art signifies in at least three different ways. It exists within a given culture from which it has seemed to emerge naturally. In fact, not only is the work a

40 Ibid.
41 Tomory op cit p 153.
43 See Francis Pound The Words and the Art pp 190 - 192. It wouldn't do to overstate the degree of Brasch's prescience. In the collection of over 500 works that he donated to the Hocken Library on his death there are 38 by Lee-Johnson, 46 by Woollaston, 30 by McCahon and none at all by Russell Clark. However, the Lee Johnsons are all drawings or watercolours and, except for one oil painting from the Greymouth years so are the Woollastons whereas among the McCahons there are 15 oil paintings. Brasch felt that Woollaston lost his way in the 1950s and he may never have felt that his work advanced after that. On at least one occasion he acquired work by Lee-Johnson that he didn't like: "Eric L-J has sent down his portrait of me: 'between ourselves (because I wouldn't like this to get back to him) it isn't a bit good: there's no feeling of structure & stability about the head at all." CB to REK 5 October '55.
product of the culture, it has helped create it. This it does through its forms - the style of the painting and the theory that underpins the work. The radical form of the art -what McCahon referred to as its "toughness"- can signify both the struggle of the individual and the struggle of the state to individuate from its colonial past. Brasch argued the ideology of the non-conformity of the individual as necessary for a healthy society:

The individual who conforms wholly to society is thus betraying his nature, because he is surrendering......that part of himself which, if he is an integrated being, will not be satisfied with less than perfection in one form or another. Further, to conform wholly to society is to betray society itself, for if it can find no place for non-conformity and cannot always admit new energies into its order, it must necessarily harden and decline.46

Finally, the symbolic language that the artist chooses affects the reading of the image. For example, an aspect of art produced during this time was that it seemed natural to paint New Zealand landscape but whereas in, say, Eric Lee-Johnson's work there is a sort of anthropomorphism -a sympathetic identification with the "slain tree"- in Woollaston's paintings there is the aloofness -an insistence of art over emotion- that he seems to have learned from Cézanne through his readings in Novotny's book.46

Rodney Kennedy and Support for the Arts.

In this analysis we have put more emphasis on art as a process in a dialectic of power, and less on its appearance, its artefactual qualities. To put things in this order is to invert the importance that Kennedy, and to a lesser extent Brasch, attached to the significance of art. That

44 See, for example Brasch on McCahon Landfall 4:4 (1950) p 337.
46 Michael Dunn "Frozen Flame and Slain Tree: the Dead Tree Theme in New Zealand Art of the Thirties and Forties" in Art New Zealand 13, 1979, 64-71.
is to say, for Kennedy the important engagement was always with the art work and, of course, the artist. He preferred to be on the shop floor of culture amidst the chips of marble and the dripping paint rather than in the office planning the future. Nonetheless the questions that are implicit in our investigations concern his role in the creation of a New Zealand culture and the interventions he made in its forms. Consequently, I want to work from the top down starting with his relationship with the institutional structures that encouraged the development of art. This will lead naturally to a discussion of his own collection. Finally, I want to examine his relationship with the work of Colin McCahon, an artist who in one way or another has associated Kennedy's name with a number of his works.

Rodney Kennedy was in an equivocal position in relation to the institutional support for artists. Like his friend Ursula Bethell he believed in the right of the artist to practise. Grants, scholarships and all the other mechanisms of support seemed natural when they promoted the ability of the artist to function free from financial worries. Furthermore, institutional intervention in support of artists was a continuation of the cooperative view that had been part of the pre-war experience. Like many of the artists in the 1930s, Kennedy had been part of the theatrical activity of the WEA and other leftist organisations of the Popular Front where part of the justification of theatrical activity was that it was a model of cooperative action. The job he had after the war, as a community drama tutor, was based upon a continuation of this idea and, although it often came down to preparing one act plays for the latest British Drama League festival, the philosophy underlying the bringing together of small groups to work on drama projects had always assumed

47 Although he was egregiously non-political in his later life he retained some leftist sympathies. He was a member of the New Zealand Party in 1958. In a similar way he was non-religious but retained his membership of Quakers.
that cooperative action of any kind led to greater community awareness. However degraded that intention may have become in practice it had started out as a politically motivated activity.\textsuperscript{48}

Theatre was, of course, his chosen field and he argued for the importance of amateur theatre, although it was its role in keeping theatre alive in New Zealand that he identified as being its principal importance rather than its promotion of community cooperation. He acknowledged, however, that poor amateur theatre was marred by "coziness, self-satisfaction and complacency."\textsuperscript{49} In this analysis, professionalism was antithetical to complacency. However, there was not always a large enough audience to support a professional theatre. One of the stated aims of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council was the encouragement of professional theatre in New Zealand. This, as Kennedy observed, brought with it other problems when a single production during the first year swallowed up all the central grant.\textsuperscript{50}

In the visual arts the Christchurch Group seems to have successfully negotiated these murky waters between professionalism and amateurism. Having begun as an artist-run organisation it flirted, during the brief life of the New Zealand Society of Artists (1933-34), with a professional structure but returned to its more informal constitution with artist members inviting new artists to exhibit and, on occasion, to join. The Group functioned as a support for artists only in that it provided a sympathetic arena for artists to try out recent work and also an annual event where artists could meet socially.

Nonetheless, its formula of extending membership to those artists who were serious in their

\textsuperscript{48} In art, political content did not appear until the early 1960s when Colin McCahon expressed his concern about nuclear weapons in the \textit{Gate} series. Up till that time it was the radical nature of representation that signified political sensitivities.

\textsuperscript{49} Rodney Kennedy \textit{Adult Education Bulletin} (University of Otago Regional Council of Adult Education No 13 1952) p 4.

\textsuperscript{50} Rodney Kennedy "Professional Theatre Interim Report" \textit{Adult Education Bulletin} (University of Otago Regional Council of Adult Education No 41 1966) p 2.
work proved enduring. Rodney Kennedy and Charles Brasch were firm supporters of the Christchurch Group. Kennedy, of course, had been involved with the Group almost since its inception. During the 1950s they were regularly seen at the openings in November and generally bought a work from the show. During the 1950s they are listed in the catalogues formally among the "Friends of the Group." When Kennedy was in Britain on his overseas leave Brasch sent him an account of the show.

During those years when Brasch was arguing for an Arts Council Kennedy's engagement with institutional forms of support was limited to this local level. He contributed to the various exhibitions Brasch put on in Dunedin, and his own experience of mounting exhibitions and his flair for display were undoubtedly helpful with these. However, he did not engage much in the wider debate. It was Brasch, for example, who wrote the essay for the catalogue that accompanied the 1957 exhibition in Auckland of paintings from their collection.

In that essay he sketched out a three phase development of the truly New Zealand artist. The country was painted first by artists whose primary aim was descriptive, the surveyor artists. These were followed by artists who lived in New Zealand but whose cultural schema were still conditioned by European models, especially those of Britain. Finally came those artist who, born in New Zealand, were able to create a truly original art arising from the place they were born. This

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52 "The Group Show was livened by several guests, young painters just through art school; I bought a painting by one, a w.c. by Toss, & a lithograph; besides three paintings in the North Island. Olivia S.B. had a large panorama w.c. of river and mountains, quite impressive; Sutton marking time; Doris not very good; Toss rough and confused; Colin experimental; Leo B. & Douglas McDiarmid not showing- So you know now what NZ painting is really like! Did you see Sydney Nolan's show? The Australians (in spite of Colin) are plainly better than we are... CB to REK 22 November '55.
last trend had only emerged in the previous twenty years.  

Kennedy seems to have concurred with this view and, elsewhere, he added an interesting twist suggesting that the early surveyor artists in their concern with topographical accuracy were less hampered than those more self-conscious painters who followed and brought with them their cultural baggage:

The vision of the New Zealand artist was narrowed to the familiar barn, the familiar tree-relics of the home-sickness of his teachers. His subject matter was decided by formulas which made him insensitive to a large part of the world that lay about him. Most students were content with this. Only a few rebelled.

Echoing Brasch's ideology of non-conformity, rebellion was one of the keys to Kennedy's enjoyment of art. He explained it in terms of theatre in a letter to the artist, Patricia France:

I went to a coffee morning at the Glub [ie The Globe] to tell the old ladies about it and I saw Sadie..... moaning about good old Chekhov's days and I wanted to be very very rude. (I did manage to say that the Fortune [Theatre] future plays would make her blue hair white). She rather went on about the past programme (she is very easily shocked her middle name is Patricia Bartlett) and my plays always manage to rub her up the wrong way. I got bogged down in attempting to explain the deliberately salacious type of play and the plays that because they have a serious point might contain some idea that could be deemed shocking. I knew as I attempted to go into this it was futile.

In fact, it was the University that provided a natural refuge for Kennedy's best work in theatre. The Otago University Drama Society (OUDS) aimed to produce plays each year that were of a high level of seriousness. Like the Christchurch Group in the field of the visual arts, these productions traversed the boundary between professional and amateur. For example, during the late 1960s when Kennedy produced his most innovative work he was on paid leave from the

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54 Ibid pp 5 -7.
55 R. E. Kennedy review of "A Century of Art in Otago" in Landfall 6 (June 1948) p 43.
56 REK to PF 14th August [1974].
Department of University Extensions for eight weeks to allow him to cast and direct the plays. However, it is significant that all his major productions were of either European or American playwrights. There was none of the collaborative closeness that Patric Carey, for example, had with James K. Baxter. In fact, despite a friendly relationship with Frank Sargeson, Kennedy seems not to have pursued the opportunity of producing *A Time For Sowing*, his play about the missionary Thomas Kendall. This interest in international work rather than local product is a striking feature of his work in theatre, especially since he was alert to new work being written in New Zealand and closely allied with new art. The reason for this seems to be that he clearly identified himself with the amateur theatre movement despite all its perceived limitations. Much of the new writing that emerged from the mid-1960s onward -here Baxter's work is an exception- was associated with the emergence of what became known as the Community Theatres which brought with them an attendant expectation of professionalism. The first of these was *Downstage Theatre*, founded in 1964. The *Fortune* in Dunedin followed on this model but, perhaps because of the strength of the *Globe* under Patric Carey, was not founded until 1973.

Kennedy didn't engage with the management of culture in the way that Brasch did. His role is much more as a producer of art (in the domain of theatre), and as a consumer of art through his attendance at exhibitions, his purchases of art works and his friendships with artists. However, the new era of professionalism that began around the time of the foundation of the QE II Arts Council brought with it new institutions that were to recruit Kennedy seeking from him precisely his more

57 Patric Carey founded the Globe with his wife Rosalie in 1963. He was an innovative producer of drama who worked closely with James K. Baxter during the two years of his tenure of the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship.
58 CB to REK 4 September [1955]
informal qualities, that is, his familiarity with New Zealand art and with the artists who produced it. For example, he was a member of the Art Advisory Committee of the Dunedin Hospital Board where he argued successfully that the committee purchase only original works of art.  

The most important of these was new structures, however, was the Hocken Library Pictures Sub-Committee. Kennedy was a member of this between 1965 and 1982 and most active with the Committee in the years 1966 - 1976. The committee was an advisory group of interested citizens established to advise on purchases. Despite the sometimes strenuous efforts of the committee to change this situation, it had no money under its control. A further function of the committee was to act as a point of intersection between the interested Dunedin community and the University collection. Its aim was to encourage donations and bequests to enhance the Library's collection of art.  

His relationship with the Hocken Library's pictures collection went back as far as 1956 when he received practical instruction in collection building from his friend Brasch. Kennedy had acquired McCahon's painting -the Kennedy Otago Peninsula (1946 - 1949)- some time around  

60 Derek Ball op cit p 49.  
61 He joined the committee in September 1965 but missed the first four meetings. His activities with the committee therefore start in 1966. From 1967 to 1976 he was a active member of the committee. His membership was interrupted in October 1976 after a disagreement between Kennedy and the University Librarian W.J. McEldowney which caused Kennedy to resign. Some reports suggest the breach was over a matter of principle concerning the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship. There was some debate at the time whether the award could go to a photographer when the terms of the bequest stated clearly it should go to a painter or sculptor. Another account suggests the disagreement between McEldowney and Kennedy was a personal falling-out. Kennedy was persuaded to return but his enthusiasm was clearly diminished and in the last years of his membership he attended less than half the meetings of the committee, his final apology being noted in the minutes in March 1982.  
62 In 1963 Esmond De Beer had completed a review of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery's collection recommending that it continue to buy old master works, that it set aside a sum for the purchase of works by Frances Hodgkins and that it buy some work by contemporary British artist and that it coordinate its efforts with the Hocken in buying contemporary New Zealand art. Robyn Notman: "What influence did Esmond De Beer's philanthropy have on the development of the collections of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery ...?": Dissertation submitted for a Post Graduate Diploma in Museum Studies, Massey University, 1991 p 12.
1950. While Kennedy was away in Britain, McCahon sent down the preparatory drawings for this work. Brasch received them and was firm in his ideas for their disposal:

"Colin has sent down drawings and studies for his Peninsula paintings which I proposed should go to the Hocken; but he thinks you might like one or two, \& I've told him I shall keep the group intact till you come back and we can go through them together." 63

The drawings did indeed go to the Hocken at this time, although Kennedy kept the two that were designated by McCahon as being specifically related to his painting. One is inscribed: "Rodney, I promised you these quite some time ago, as they really belong with your painting...Colin." This pair of drawings finally entered the Hocken collection in 1978.

These donations in 1956 were the first in what came to be known as the Kennedy Gift. In that year he donated in all twenty-three drawings by Colin McCahon including twenty-one sketches for the Peninsula paintings and a preparatory drawing for the painting *Dear Wee June*. This gift was followed in 1958 by a work of the artist Rhonda Haszard who had died in 1931. The painting, a watercolour, was one of Haszard's last works before her untimely death.

Having made these two gifts, there were no others for almost ten years. The rest of Kennedy's gifts were made in two relatively concentrated periods rather than regularly over the span of years from 1956 to 1989. The principal period covers twelve years from 1968 to 1980. This coincides with period that he was a member of the Hocken Library Pictures sub-committee.

In 1968 he donated twenty-six works or sets of works, mainly drawings and works on paper by Toss Woollaston but also including work by W.H. Allen, John Drawbridge, Colin McCahon and Hugh Scott. These works were presented during his second or third year on the committee and seem to represent both the existing collection of the donor and also the fruits of his

63 CB to REK 16 July 1955
soliciting work from his artist friends.

Most of the Woollaston work derives from the period of the 1930s and 1940s, the time when Kennedy was most closely associated with the artist's struggle to continue working. The painting from Hugh Scott is inscribed: "to Rodney from the artist, Hugh Scott" and is likely to be a gift from the years 1938-9 when Kennedy and McCahon cycled up to Mapua. After working all day they sometimes cycled down to Ruby Bay to visit Scott and his wife. Among the works by McCahon given during 1968 there are three drawings from around 1940 including a Portrait of Rodney Kennedy (1940). Another drawing Figure and Cross (1947) is inscribed by the artist: "For Rodney, one of the drawings for your painting. McCahon."

The pattern that emerges from Kennedy's gifts to the Hocken is that many of the works gifted were acquired through personal association with the artist. This is evident in these works from Woollaston and McCahon and also in paintings from his teachers W.H. Allen and R.N. Field. His friendship with, for example, John Drawbridge, Anne Hamblett, Jeffrey Harris and Ralph Hotere is reflected in his donations over the years. One of the duties that members of the committee undertook was to write personally to friends and other members of the community inviting them to take an interest in the Hocken Library's collection. The significant donation of work by Kennedy in 1968 a year or so after he joined the Hocken Pictures Sub-Committee suggests that Kennedy, indeed, had canvassed his friends asking for suitable work.

In 1972 Kennedy deposited a drawing McCahon had made for a production of Swan Lake in 1954, and two pieces of juvenilia from McCahan's art school days. In 1977 there were stage designs and costume designs from various stage productions from the 1950's: Peer Gynt in 1953, Festival Ballet (1955), The Glass Menagerie (1956). Along with these came the costume designs by Anne Hamblett for Peer Gynt.
Given his interest in theatre and the visual arts (and, in fact, his particular love of costume and set design) Kennedy was a natural repository for these theatre drawings and he collected and duly deposited a number over the years. In 1976, for example, there are two drawings for James K. Baxter's *The Temptations of Oedipus* (1970) and in 1978 five drawings by Linden Cowell of costume designs for the Otago University Dramatic Society production of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, which Kennedy had assisted on.

Most of this work, and possibly all of it, was given to Kennedy rather than purchased by him. If some of the gifts were clearly destined for the archives and were of historical interest, then others were purely tokens of friendship and affection. On occasion the work was inscribed in a way that made this clear. For example, a Ralph Hotere pencil drawing *Vence, Alpes Maratine, France* (1962, deposited in the Hocken in 1976) was inscribed "Rodney, happy birthday, Ralph & Maree VIII '71". Another piece (deposited in 1977) was a lino cut by Anne Hamblett from 1939. It was inscribed "Rodney, with best wishes for Xmas and New year, Anne."

Kennedy treasured these personal gifts. An early example of which he was very proud was the drawing by Toss Woollaston of his mother *Lillian Kennedy* (ca 1935). This hung prominently in his High Street house alongside another Woollaston drawing, a *Self Portrait* from 1942.

These last two works entered the Hocken Collection in 1988. In all there were eight works donated to the Hocken that year including a further Woollaston drawing, *Edith Sketching* from 1940. These deposits have a distinctly different character to the work donated between 1968 and 1980. They came after an eight year hiatus in donations which followed his retirement from the Hocken Library Pictures Sub-Committee. They were the last he deposited with the Hocken. Many of these works, like the portrait sketch of his mother, were among the most personal of his collection. This might be said of, for example, the portrait of him by Doris Lusk the full title of
which is *Rodney Kennedy with "Vicarage Bed", painting by Anne Hamblett McCahon (circa 1937)*. This image from 1979 may well have commemorated Kennedy's impending seventieth birthday (it was painted in June, his birthday was in August). It certainly tied together many of the threads that bound his friendship with the artist. It shows Rodney sitting in a favourite chair beside a favourite painting by Anne McCahon from the days in the late 1930s when they were part of the "art crowd" in Dunedin. The painting generally hung in his bedroom.

This last deposit of work with the Hocken has more the flavour of a personal statement, a summing up of a life. This is most evident in that the two remaining paintings of his own that he had retained, *Flower Piece* (1933) and *Homage To Virginia Woolf* (1933), were among this last set of work. These two pieces had remained in his possession for over fifty years and had survived not only the usual depredations of time but also the assault that Kennedy made on his own art production when he destroyed his own paintings. This last set of works was donated in 1988 but remained in his possession until after his death the next year.

While many of these donations represented gifts from the artists Kennedy was always aware of the importance of supporting artists by making actual purchases of work even if his budget often restricted him to the less expensive works on paper or to student works. He knew what it was like to struggle with little money and understood the importance to an artist of selling work and bringing in a little cash. In later years he applied this sense of obligation to the Annual Exhibitions of the Art School in Dunedin. Sometimes he gave these away to friends or, on at least one occasion, the work he purchased was deposited directly in the Hocken collection.

As Derek Ball has noted, not all the artists whose work he bought went on to have successful careers as artists. The purchase and subsequent gift to the Hocken that same year of
a work by the sculpture graduate Graham Walker probably reflects his friendship and affection for Ball as much as Kennedy's pleasure in the work. Ball had come to Otago in 1968 as the Frances Hodgkins Fellow and stayed on as a lecturer in sculpture at the Art School. Much has been made of Kennedy's prescience in purchasing an early work of Richard Killeen's, an unusual work on glass. Again it must be noted that not only Kennedy's taste is being exercised here but also his friendship with Colin McCahon. Killeen had attended Elam in Auckland during McCahon's spell as a teacher there. He helped McCahon in his studio and with the painting of the clerestory window at the chapel of the Sister of Our Lady of the Mission in Upland Road, Remuera.

The Christchurch Group had disbanded in 1977 and Kennedy had transferred his attention and patronage to the Annual Exhibitions at the Art School. But now he was buying the work of students, and occasionally the students of friends, rather than the work of friends. His interest in the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship kept him in touch with practising artists and some enduring friendships developed there. Nonetheless, his relationship with artists as a group had changed over the years. His beginnings with Woollaston, McCahon and Doris Lusk had been in a shared conviction of the possibility of life as a practising artist. It had involved them all in personal difficulty and sometimes extreme hardship. Later he became a consumer, a supporter but no longer a collaborator.

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64 Derek Ball "Rodney is Dunedin" *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History* Vol 12 (1991) pp 47-49.
65 See, for example, Ball *op cit* p 49. The painting is entitled *Figure on Road* and was dated January 1968.
66 The chapel was opened in November 1966. Gordon Brown *Colin McCahon* pp 141-2.
67 Most notably Derek Ball (Hodgkins Fellow in 1968), Ralph Hotere (1970), Marté Szirmay (1973), Jeffrey Harris (1978). Marilyn Webb (1975) was also well known to Kennedy. They had met first when Webb exhibited with the Christchurch Group in 1970.
Rodney Kennedy and Colin McCahon

More so than with any other artist, even Toss Woollaston, Kennedy's relationship with Colin McCahon illustrates the range and complexity of his engagement with artists and their art. Kennedy was a loyal friend and supporter of McCahon over the years. He seems to have quickly acknowledged the young McCahon's ambitions as an artist. During the years 1938-1942 the two were very close friends. They cycled to Nelson in 1938 and at the 1939 Otago Art Society it was Kennedy who led the walk-out of younger artists in protest at the removal of McCahon's painting. They were part of the "art group" in Dunedin before the war. Kennedy together with Doris Lusk and Anne Hamblett bought him Fritz Novotny's book on Cézanne as a twenty-first birthday present in 1940. McCahon and Kennedy walked the hills together in Otago and in Nelson and discussed art and painting. They shared an interest in theatre and in poetry.

Sometimes the closeness between the two men can seem to have an effect on the content of the paintings. As in his relationship with Woollaston Kennedy was licensed to offer detailed criticism of the artist's work. In a letter of 1946, for example, he wrote about the painting I Paul to You at Ngatimote (1946), commenting favourably on the figures but criticising the background which was "crowded with too many afterthoughts". Sometimes the preoccupations that the young friends shared seemed to be used as testing grounds for ideas that emerged later in McCahon's work. We can see how this might have worked in relation to the three early paintings of the Otago Peninsula, the last of which - painted between 1946 and 1949 - became the property of Rodney Kennedy.

In 1941 Kennedy wrote to Ursula Bethell describing a walk that he and McCahon had

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68 Gordon Brown Colin McCahon p 333. Like Brown I was unable to gain access to Kennedy's correspondence with McCahon.
taken to the top of Takaka Hill:

...It was a lovely afternoon after rain and a thrilling experience for me (Colin having been before). From there you get such a vast panorama. The whole of the Nelson bite [sic] on one side...all of the plains and valleys, the chain of mountains to the top of the sounds—and of the other side the Takaka Valley, the Cobb going back to the Alps and the long chain of mountains to Farewell Spit.69

From Takaka the viewer can see great distances and the elevation compresses great expanses of landscape into a single view which seems to sum up the region in some way from Nelson Bay on the one hand up to the heights of Takaka and down to Farewell Spit. Furthermore, the view as described has a sort of symmetry arising in sea, through hills and back down to the sea again. With very little effort we might imagine a McCahon painting of this scene: a large horizontally aligned canvas with the great sweeping rhythm of the hills moving across the surface. In fact, the Nelson hills were to appear in McCahon's paintings over the next decade. However, he had already sketched and painted a similar scene in Otago.

The three paintings of the Otago Peninsula from Peggy's Hill all use this compositional structure. They are painted from a high place, the land masses are compressed into the scene and they form the central part of the image. And there is in these works a panoramic quality that leads the eye across the painting.

Kennedy is closely associated with these Otago paintings. He was there in November 1939 when McCahon made the first sketches for the scene. He may even have suggested the location:

While he was staying at the farm one weekend we went to Peggy's Hill (that is near Larnach's Castle and a very high tableland from which a magnificent view is obtained) He did some sketches of Harbour Cone and lower harbour and started a painting interrupted by a hailstorm from which we had to seek shelter very hurriedly the painting being abandoned there. He later did a huge

69 REK to MUB 12th Feb 1941.
landscape from drawing made that day.\textsuperscript{70}

McCahon was to paint that scene twice more. The second of these works was commissioned by the Dr Mario Fleischl and Hilda Fleischl in 1946. Even as it was being completed the third painting was being planned. It was painted in Nelson from drawings that McCahon made at Peggy's Hill in the years 1945-6 and from photographs taken by Ron O'Reilly at the same time. As notes that accompanied the preparatory sketches made clear, this third painting was a special commission for Kennedy.\textsuperscript{71}

Rodney Kennedy claimed to have paid McCahon £100 for this painting which, if true, must have represented a substantial sum of money for McCahon (and for Kennedy) at the time.\textsuperscript{72} By comparison, in 1946 the Fleischls had offered McCahon £20 plus the cost of materials when commissioning their work.\textsuperscript{73}

Although there is no supporting evidence for Kennedy's claim there are some reasons for accepting it. He was generous in his support of his friends and their children when they were in difficulty. Furthermore, the date of the painting is suggestive. It was completed in 1949 by which time Kennedy had been for some time in permanent employment and earning a salary and although

\textsuperscript{70} REK to MUB November 9 1939. In 1952, after his appointment as director of the Auckland City Art Gallery, Eric Westbrook toured New Zealand under the auspices of the British Council. He met Charles Brasch and Kennedy who shared the house at Royal Terrace at the time and saw their collection of a paintings, including the painting of the Otago Peninsula. He was scheduled to attend a function at the Art Society but was late because he and Kennedy had climbed Peggy's Hill, looking for the place that McCahon located his painting. There after some scrambling around they found the remnants of the painting that McCahon had abandoned in preparing the painting: a large board that Colin had "lugged " up there. On Westbrook see: Gordon Brown \textit{New Zealand Painting 1940-1960: Conformity and Dissension} (Wellington, 1981) p 30 & Regional Council of Adult Education, University of Otago, Annual Report 1950 p 14. Hocken Archive 95-184 box 19. For the trip up Peggy's Hill see: Kennedy talks to Tony Mackie 30th March 1984 pp 3-4.

\textsuperscript{71} The Fleischl painting was exhibited in Otago by Charles Brasch in 1948. It was displayed alongside the O'Reilly photographs and a note from McCahon that a further painting, this for Rodney Kennedy, was in preparation.

\textsuperscript{72} Conversation with James Mack, 1997.

\textsuperscript{73} Gordon Brown \textit{Colin McCahon} p 212.
his income was not huge he certainly had more money to spend than ever before in his life. Furthermore it is true that Kennedy's support did, on occasion, take on a very practical aspect. In 1953, for example, McCahon and his family moved to Auckland believing that there was a job for him at the Auckland City Art Gallery. No job awaited him, however, and he and his family were stranded in Auckland with no money. Kennedy sent them money to help them survive. He told this story of financial help to explain how he came to own so many McCahon paintings, many of which were gifts.74

Some of this history occurred well after the hills in Otago and Takaka were climbed but it serves to illustrate Kennedy's consistent engagement in the life of a body of work.75 This engagement is demonstrated in another way. In the letter he wrote about that day on Takaka Hill he described the sort of painting such landscape might make:

....so strange one has seen it before in Breughel and in Italian painting behind a Madonna...76

Written in 1941, there is an intriguing connection here between Kennedy's observations and a work like, for example, McCahon's *Entombment after Titian* (1947, Te Papa Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand). In this work Christ is laid in his tomb within sight of the cross. The entombment is enacted against a backdrop of the Nelson Hills, recognisable from other paintings of this period by McCahon.

Christian teaching was a regular part of schooling when Kennedy and McCahon were

74 See Gordon Brown *Colin McCahon* p 51 and Brown & Keith p 151 for the McCahon's arrival in Auckland. The detail about Kennedy sending money is from a correspondence between Professor Anthony Green and Ron O'Reilly (then at the Govett Brewster Gallery) from October 19 1977. Hocken Library Misc Ms 1063, Green Letters.

75 This history extends into the present. The painting now hangs in the Dunedin Public Library where it commemorates Kennedy's friendship with the former City Librarian, Archie Dunningham.

76 REK to MUB 12th Feb 1941.
Figure 29
The "Kennedy" Otago Peninsula, 1946 - 49
by Colin McCahon

Figure 30
Otago Peninsula Landscape: preliminary drawing
by Colin McCahon
growing up. This was something that the young McCahon had at some point taken very seriously. Kennedy had in his possession a New Testament that had belonged to McCahon. Its pages are annotated with numerous texts underlined as if it had been given great scrutiny. Furthermore, one of the ways that pacifism was given expression was through a renewed interest in religion to express opposition to war. Kennedy had joined Quakers in 1937 under just such a pressure. There has been a tendency to deprecate the importance of the religious content in McCahon's work yet it seems at this time there was a strong search for meaning that seemed to find natural expression in the forms and language of Christian art.

This search for meaning is seen in a number of ways on the Peninsula paintings. McCahon claimed they were based on the use of the Golden Section, a system of proportion that establishes a harmonic relationship between two unequal parts of a painting. These relationship are hard to discover although in one of the preparatory drawings for the Kennedy *Otago Peninsula* he is clearly dividing the spaces into rhythms of three thus establishing a ratio of 2:1 among some of the parts. This search for essential structures is also found in the influence of Cotton's *Geomorphology* with its use of spare line drawings to illustrate the structure of land forms. Most of this seems to suggest a concern with formal relations. Among the preparatory drawings for the Kennedy

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77 Hocken archive Kennedy Collection 37/89. Inscribed Colin McCahon 1940.
78 Kennedy too was later to dismiss the importance of religion. In a letter to Pat France he makes fun of his friend Margaret Scott's gift to him of a Bible: "...I am amused about the Bible on the table. Don't tell me I have been given another by Margaret it would have been better with a bottle of gin - probably she couldn't find the last one she gave me. I would love to be able to tell you that I consulted it with a pin on an auspicious day to travel and made decisions but alas this would not be true." REK to PF 26th September. [197?] Nonetheless his correspondence with Ursula Bethel from the 1930s is full of discussion of religious matters relating to her Anglicanism and his search for faith. Despite this later indifference to organised religion he was insistent that he should remain on the mailing list and wanted to receive all recent publications from the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).
79 The book *Geomorphology of New Zealand* (1922) by Professor Charles Andrew Cotton was a wedding gift to the McCahons from the artist Patrick Hayman. See Brown p 32.
Figure 31
Peninsula painting there are a number that suggest a link between formal harmony and religious belief. One of these shows on one side the radio towers at Highcliff (in Dunedin) and on the reverse a Peninsular landscape with lamp. The drawing dates from 1940 and anticipates by eight or so years one of the most accomplished of these early religious paintings *The Virgin and Child Compared* (1948). Another, from 1947, shows a figure and a cross in a landscape and is inscribed "for Rodney, one of the drawings for your painting." The painting referred to here is probably a *Crucifixion* (for Rodney Kennedy) (1947). Also among the 1940 drawings is one which is a sketch from Peggy's Hill. It is inscribed on the back with verse two of Psalm 125:

As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people [omitted: from henceforth even for ever].

So, while in the *Takaka Night and Day* (1948), for example, the use of landscape becomes frankly symbolic an underlying symbolism seems to have been present even in the Otago Peninsula paintings especially the later two, the *Fleischl* and the *Kennedy*.

The importance of this is to locate more exactly Kennedy and McCahon as they stood on their hilltops in Otago and Nelson. We can characterise them as seekers. They came looking for a good view, for the subject for paintings, but also looking for meaning. The Peninsula paintings become a hymn to that moment when it was possible to describe the world in an orderly way, to efface the excrescences of human existence and even the effusions of nature, trees, and other vegetation, leaving a smooth untroubled, balanced vision. It was this that Kennedy proposed as a suitable setting for a Breughel or an Italian Madonna and he seems to have in mind that tranquil sense of order that he clearly feels on top of the hill in Takaka. Yet for McCahon the introduction of figures proposes the sort of doubt that was to dominate his art. He had recognised this as early as 1942 when he wrote to Kennedy about his desire for perfection in painting but his decision to
settle for "present reality":

Geometric perfection seems to lack tension, it lacks being human so it lacks God's share.\textsuperscript{80}

With "being human" comes the possibility of diversity that would lead to the late work that seems to lead into a modern world beyond the unified monocultural vision that Brasch proposes. I am thinking here particularly of the intrusion of Maori themes into his art, but the disturbance is present in the number paintings and in the use of language.

Kennedy was never able to follow McCahon through all the windings of this journey. His vision of art remained as of a single image, as a sensuous experience where each new work added to the cultural stockpile and if the work was good then the stock was considerably enriched. McCahon increasingly created work that provided a critique on the culture and how it was constituted. This move from the purely visual took the art outside Kennedy's experience. Yet for a time they shared this possible vision of a world whose underlying harmony could be matched in an harmonic art.

Of all Kennedy's artist friends, McCahon was the most systematic in his use of him as a conduit for depositing material in the Hocken.\textsuperscript{81} For example, among the donations of 1968 were the set of twelve \textit{Waterfall} paintings sometimes known as the \textit{Kennedy Waterfall Series}. These were produced in association with the invitation McCahon received in 1965 to submit a design for a mural in the Otago University Library. McCahon had been one of five artists approached and had

\textsuperscript{80} Quoted in Brown & Keith p 186.

\textsuperscript{81} His use of Kennedy is symbolic of the friendship between the two men. McCahon, however, always had a greater sense of posterity than any of his colleagues. The art dealer, Peter McLeavey, once complained mildly to McCahon about a large multi-panelled work (possibly \textit{The Wake} from 1958, now in the Hocken Library Collection) that it was too big. Not only did it spill out from the gallery space and down the stairs but there was no prospect of selling such a large work. McCahon replied, half seriously, that he was not painting for the moment but for history. (From a conversation with Peter McLeavey, June 1997).
initially intended submitting a complex number painting but "some of his Dunedin friends who knew about the competition insisted that he provide a design based on the Waterfall paintings."
McCahon reluctantly acceded to their request and was duly awarded the commission. In this context it is not hard to imagine who these Dunedin friends were; people with an interest in art and connections to the University such as Rodney Kennedy and Charles Brasch.

The actual project seems to have become something of a chore for McCahon and, perhaps consequently, things went wrong. One of the panels for the finished work was so badly damaged in transit that it had to be repainted and McCahon was unable to complete it to his satisfaction. His remarks in retrospect may be seen as a comment not only on the difficulties of repainting a completed work but also on the forced return to a theme that seemed to him at the time to have exhausted itself: "Second versions never have the innocence of the first."

The Kennedy Waterfall Series (1965 -6) is not in any formal sense a set of preparatory works for the mural. Rather they represent a parallel working through of the ideas which had been the subject of paintings over the previous year or so. The mural itself is in two sections. One is designed to be seen across the top of the desks and the lower section with text can be read close up. The upper section uses forms that had occupied him since 1963 such as in the Four Waterfalls (1964). The water is seen as if from side on as it flows over the drop describing a white curve

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82 Gordon Brown Colin McCahon p 106. This series had been prompted by seeing works by William Hodges (1744-97) who had been Cook's artist on his second Pacific voyage. Stylistically it had drawn more on Japanese and Chinese art. See Brown p. 104.
83 Brasch apparently funded this project. Michael Hitchings who took up his post as Hocken Librarian around this time comments that McCahon was much more friendly with Kennedy than with Brasch at this time. Significantly, Kennedy also owned two other Waterfall paintings and it may have been a favourite theme with him.
84 Brown Colin McCahon p 106.
85 These dates are according to Gordon Brown (McCa hon p 109). The Kennedy Gift (p 26) suggests circa 1960 but given Brown's account of their origins this seems unlikely.
86 Collection of Manawatu Art Gallery. See Brown Colin McCahon colour illustration no 23.
Figure 32

*Numbers. Sketch for University of Otago Library Mural 1966 by Colin McCahon*
against the dark background. There is a naïve directness about the representation. In contrast the small paintings are notionally more frontal and more radical, the strongest of them being a single broad brushmark across a black ground. Nonetheless these paintings represented the end of a phase for McCahon and he was happy to deposit them in Dunedin with Kennedy and they were transferred almost immediately to the Hocken Library.

The alternative design for the University Library was for a number painting. It represented the most complex working out of ideas that had interested McCahon since the previous year. The work had a direct connection with University life in its theme. McCahon, after seeing computer printouts (something of a novelty in 1966), had become interested in the way numbers signify human activity, implying calculation and commerce as well as analytical activity. Furthermore, the stark white letters on black had obvious echoes of those most basic of teaching aids, blackboard and chalk.

For the artist, the number painting was a natural progression from ideas that had been developing for as many as seven years. Its association with the University must have seemed obvious to him, and the request for an alternative design a distraction. The design for the library was unambiguous in its representations. With the waterfalls the viewer once orientated knew that, however abstracted, the painting was a re-presentation of an object in nature. The work evoked an object in another place and the distance between the painted surface and the represented object

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87 The maquette for this work is in the Hocken Collection. See also Gordon Brown Colin McCahon p 136.
89 Gordon Brown dates the first number paintings to 1958 although probably the first in the series that the mural project was designed for was Numerals (1965). Colin McCahon pp 132 - 136.
90 Or in art if we remember that the first waterfall came after looking at William Hodges painting. See Gordon Brown p 103.
gave the imagination space to play. In the number painting no such space existed. The image was the subject and the subject the image. 

Several points can be made about the response of his friends to the proposed design. First it is clear that Kennedy and Brasch were keen that McCahon should be awarded the commission. It seems likely, however, that they found the numbers conception difficult. That in itself was not a discouragement. Difficulty was something that both Brasch and Kennedy welcomed. However, in a public commission the difficulty would occasion a much wider and more acrimonious debate. Such was McCahon's capacity to pursue an idea that he didn't always recognise just how radical this could be to a local audience and how controversial. McCahon took this sort of criticism very personally and often expressed hurt and astonishment at the vehemence with which his work was criticised. So it was conservatism mixed with a protective loyalty that led the friends to ask for the waterfall design to supplement the number painting.

In 1976, when Kennedy was in hospital after his fall from a ladder at the Globe Theatre McCahon painted the first of a new series of paintings Angel & Bed which was specifically dedicated to his friend and inscribed with the message: "For Kennedy", and, in smaller lettering: "You come & get it, I'm not sending it". Kennedy had written to McCahon describing "nights of pain & driving the bed to eternity." These images were references to the Ibsen play Peer Gynt for which McCahon had designed sets in 1953 for a production in Christchurch. (Anne Hamblett had

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91 Through his readings in magazines and, of course, his 1958 trip to the United States, McCahon was aware of the work of artists elsewhere. For example, the American artist Jasper Johns in his painting Flag (1954-5) had reduced the imaginative space in his work in just the way that McCahon's number paintings did. Later Johns work of the 1960s, in fact, employed numbers. Another American, Cy Twombly, had employed a cursive graffiti-like mark, sometimes even working in white on black, in his paintings from the mid 1950s. This is not to claim specific "influences", merely to argue that McCahon's antennae were more highly attuned to recent developments in art internationally than many of his contemporaries.

92 Brown Colin McCahon pp 182-3 & p 231 n 14.
designed costumes for the same production). The specific reference is to Act 3 Scene 4 of the play where Peer to relieve the suffering of his dying mother pretends to her that her bed is a sleigh drawn by two horse which will take them to a feast at a nearby castle. As they draw near to the castle the gate keeper is revealed as St Peter and the Lord of the castle is transformed into God the Father. Peer Gynt then realises that his mother is dead.

Angels are not mentioned specifically in the Ibsen play but, in the title of the painting and in the McCahon cosmology, they function as an image of characteristic, and almost childlike, simplicity:

Who other than horses or reindeer pull the sledge to heaven? Angels. Rilke somewhere calls a gumboot an angel -had he not tripped over it he would have been run down by a milk cart. Angels are very humble souls. I know angels when I see them. 93

Angels, then, are agents of transition as well as powers for good. They are humble but they are effective. The symbol slides around somewhat, as does the best of McCahon's imagery, but in one of its aspects we can read this as Kennedy not only pulled on his bed of pain by the angel, but as the angel, pulling, providing relief and friendship from his humble position. The painting, then, is McCahon's helping hand to a friend who had so often helped him in the past.

The use of the imagery from Ibsen is part of a correspondence between the two, its darker resonances moderated by the familiarity which the two men brought to the work. (McCahon told Ron O'Reilly that the imagery derived from the scene but wasn't really about it). 94 The inscribed injunction to come and fetch the work serves as an encouragement to health and mobility rather than a rebuke to hunt Kennedy out his Dunedin lair and stands as a testimony to the robust

93 Green Letters, October 19 1977 Hocken Library Misc Ms 1063. A version of this letter was published in the New Zealand Listener. The quotation cited is slightly longer than the published version.
affection that the two men had for each other which was sustained all their lives.

Conclusion

Rodney Kennedy's engagement with a particular moment in New Zealand's cultural history was based on his experience as an artist and, later, on his experience as an art practitioner in theatre. It was this direct personal involvement with the problems of making art, of being an artist, that helped make him such a congenial companion for other artists. These qualities were particularly potent in shaping and supporting the work of artists in the twenty years after the Second World War. After the mid sixties his role began to change, and he became more involved in institutional forms of support for artists such as the Hocken Library Pictures Sub-Committee. His relationship with Charles Brasch was mutually instructive. Brasch had a sense of the value of the archive and the museum in preserving and promoting culture and this he communicated to his friend. Kennedy was more comfortable with art appreciation as a purely sensuous experience. Brasch's enjoyment of art always seemed bound up with a sense of duty whereas Kennedy bathed unashamedly in the sensual experience. This is demonstrated in the collections of the two men and is discussed in the next chapter.
5. KENNEDY'S COLLECTION

On Collecting

It is matter of debate whether Rodney Kennedy's assemblage of paintings, drawings and the odd piece of sculpture is a collection in any formal sense. It can be argued that the haphazard way he acquired his works -and the fact that he sometimes gave them away- disqualifies his artworks from consideration as a collection. Here I'd like to argue that it was indeed a collection, and one about which we can make certain observations.

There has been considerable recent interest in the collecting process. Much of this has come from within the disciplines that encompass Museum Studies but the focus has not been merely institutional but has included the individual collector.\textsuperscript{1} Susan Pearce, in particular has worked exhaustively to theorise the collecting process within a post-structuralist context. In her book\textit{Collecting Processes}\textsuperscript{2} she offers a schematic representation -essentially a flow diagram- of the way an object gains importance as part of an individual collection. Pearce is seeking to construct a theory that encompasses any sort of originating material, from old master paintings to bus tickets, and she argues that a collection can have coherence either solely in the mind of the collector or in that of a wider audience.\textsuperscript{3} The ordering process, she argues, proposes a notional point of completion, when the entire set is collected. Jean Baudrillard has pursued this theme of completion. The objects collected, he suggests, are divested of their original function and the collection becomes the perfect pet, a substitute for human relationships. The collector has an ambivalence to completion in the collection. The presence of a set, however arbitrary, drives the collection

\textsuperscript{3}\textit{Ibid} p 27.
forward but completion would become a sort of death. In the end, Baudrillard concludes that "he who does collect can never entirely shake off an air of impoverishment and depleted humanity."  

Underlying such analyses is the view that the content of a collection is less important than the ordering process. It is in its systematisation that the material acquires significance, and it is this order that distinguishes the true collector from the mere accumulator. Yet this deprecation of the content in favour of the processes seems particularly unsatisfactory when each object was apparently chosen not merely for its function of advancing a set or series, but either for some intrinsic reason such as aesthetic value, or to commemorate a sentimental attachment, friendship.

An alternative approach to a collection is provided by John Forrester in his analysis of Sigmund Freud's collection. He borrows the analogy of the scrapbook from Susan Stewart who argues that in a scrapbook:

...the whole dissolves into parts, each of which refers metonymically to a context of origin or acquisition....In contrast each element within the collection is representative and works in combination towards the creation of a new whole that is the contest of the collection itself. The spatial whole of the collection supersedes the individual narratives that "lie behind it."

This view of the collection as scrapbook makes the collection seem a less pathological activity while retaining some sort of psychological explanation for the collecting activity. It also allows the collected object some significance as a single entity as well as contributing to accumulative significance of the collection. In fact, the scrapbook is antithetical to the closed collection that Baudrillard proposes. There are always empty pages and completion is not part of the project. The collection's open-endedness is significant of its life-enhancing qualities. As Freud

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5 Susan Stewart On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection Baltimore, 1984 quoted by John Forrester: "Mille e tre: Freud and Collecting" in Elsner & Cardinal op cit pp 224 - 250, p 244.
observed: "...a collection to which there are no new additions is really dead."\(^6\)

It is important, nonetheless, that the collection be seen to have some sort of meaning. Forrester, for example, argues that Freud's collection of objects from antiquity without its association with psychoanalysis would be merely a collection of old objects.\(^7\) The association is marked by the fact that Freud's collection was restricted to his consulting rooms only - the rest of the house being a model of bourgeois respectability.\(^8\) Furthermore he used the collection sometimes in his work and seemed to have an archaeological view of the unconscious.\(^9\) In his work with the patient known as 'The Rat Man', for example:

I then made some short observations upon the psychological differences between the conscious and the unconscious, and upon the fact that everything conscious was subject to a process of wearing-away, while what was unconscious was relatively unchangeable; and I illustrated my remarks by pointing to the antiques standing about my room. They were, in fact, I said only objects found in a tomb, and their burial had been their preservation: the destruction of Pompeii was only beginning now that they had been dug up.\(^10\)

In fact, as Forrester makes clear, Freud was aware of the limitations of this archaeological model.\(^11\) What is interesting about this account, however, is the suggestion that the collected objects, despite their vulnerability to the ravages of time had qualities that allowed them to survive. Freud's collecting, as Forrester notes, can be explained in psychodynamic terms. There was a close connection, for example, between the death of his father and the beginning of his collection.\(^12\) Freud, nonetheless, was not jealous of his collection. He impulsively gave pieces away and was happy to offer objects in collection in part payment for a new piece.\(^13\) Yet despite these personal

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\(^6\) Letter from Freud to Jeanne Lampl-de Groot (October 8 1938) quoted by Forrester p 227.
\(^7\) Forrester *op cit* p 248.
\(^8\) Ibid p 230.
\(^9\) Ibid p 224.
\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^12\) Ibid pp 230 - 233.
\(^13\) Ibid p 230.
aspects to his collection he saw it as a scientific project, as serious as was his discovery of the unconscious.

I have spent some time on this analysis of Freud's collection because it offers a way in to the cheerful chaos that characterises Rodney Kennedy's collection. This is somewhat paradoxical since it is as easy to find differences between the collections of the two men as similarities. Freud's collection was of objects from Classical antiquity, Kennedy's was of contemporary art; Freud's collection was restricted to his consulting rooms and was closely linked with his practice of psychoanalysis where Kennedy's collection spilled out all over the house. Nonetheless, both men are open-hearted enthusiasts about their collections and it is this feature of Forrester's work that has been useful. Collections, can be life-affirming, open-ended, and spring from delight rather than fear.

The Collection

Already, from our survey of the *Kennedy Gift* at the Hocken Library we have a strong sense of how the collection was built up through purchases at exhibitions and gifts from artist friends. There are fifty seven works listed in the catalogue of his estate. This represents the major part of the collection. In addition to this several important paintings went to friends as part of his will. These included a 1947 *Crucifixion* by McCahon, one of McCahon's *Kauri Tree* paintings of the mid fifties and a painting by Frances Hodgkins. In addition a number of pieces of sculpture

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14 By the collection I mean principally the works that were part of his estate. We have already examined the Kennedy Gift and, as we have seen, there are good grounds for dealing with it separately because much of it was always destined for the Hocken Library.

15 Probably the *Crucifixion with Ladder* illustrated in Luit Dieringa's catalogue for the exhibition of McCahon Religious works Manawatu Art Gallery, 1975. The work is described and referred to as the "Kennedy Crucifixion in Brown Colin McCahon" p 32.

16 Probably purchased for him by Brasch in 1957 when he was in the Britain. See CB to REK June 22 1957. Details of other work from James Mack.
went to the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. During his lifetime a number of works were given to friends. This brings the collection at it largest to perhaps around seventy.

Nevertheless, from a scrutiny of the catalogue we can make several observations about the works that Kennedy collected. During the 1950s and early 1960s Kennedy acquired a new painting by Colin McCahon virtually every year. Most of these paintings were probably gifts although some may have been purchases. There is only one painting by Woollaston from this period, a painting of Greymouth from the 1950s. The rest of the Woollaston work in the collection all dates from the pre-war period when they were constant companions. In contrast Colin McCahon is represented by some of the best work from the period of his early maturity and his middle years as an artist and there is a consequent continuity in the McCahon works that is absent from the Woollastons. Part of this discontinuity may be linked to the fact that Woollastons own resolve seems to have faltered for a while during the Greymouth years of the fifties and contact between Kennedy and Woollaston seems to have been less intense during this period.

This period (from the early 1950s to the mid 1960s) forms a distinct period within the collection. In total, the balance of works on paper (ie. watercolours, drawings and prints) is similar to the number of oil paintings but if the McCahon work is subtracted then quite a different picture emerges. First, the balance swings considerably round to works on paper. Furthermore, it is only after 1965 (when the flow of new work from McCahon is interrupted) that Kennedy starts to acquire work by other artists on a regular basis. These later acquisitions reflect his relatively limited budget and tend to be the less expensive works on paper. The principal exceptions to this are a large Black Painting (1968) by Ralph Hotere and a number of early works (from the period 1973 -
A number of events might help to explain this change in the collection. First Kennedy's life had changed around 1963 with the changes in the Adult Education system. He was no longer going off on tours round Otago helping small theatre groups to work up a play for the next competition. His work was based much more on Campus at the University. He was, therefore, home more often and able to enjoy his collection, and consequently more inclined to augment it. Secondly, with this change he became a lecturer and became paid as such. The position of tutor with the WEA was not well-paid and not particularly secure (although Kennedy had held the post for fifteen years in 1963). Around this time, then, he had a greater disposable income and was more inclined to spend some of it on buying paintings.

The interruption of work from McCahon can only be speculated upon but there are a number of factors that may be significant. First, although the two men remained close friends, the problems with the University of Otago Library mural may well have caused some awkwardness for a time. Whatever the cause McCahon felt deeply any interruption or frustration of his work. Secondly, McCahon's work, since his visit to the United States had become larger. He had moved away from the easel painting and began to paint on unstretched canvas. As well as this, in 1965 he took on a commission to paint the clerestory windows of the newly-built convent chapel of the Sisters of Our Lady the Missions, Upland Road, Auckland and so, for a time, was not painting at all. This project seems to have stimulated a fresh interest in religious imagery, and in particular Roman Catholic imagery, with which Kennedy not much in sympathy. Furthermore, the change in representational style in the number paintings signalled a change in McCahon's work and

17 This analysis is not much changed if we add in the works donated to the Hocken. The large donation of 1968 included the "Kennedy" Waterfall paintings. These, of course, dated from 1965 and the University mural project. Most of the other Hocken donations of McCahon's work during Kennedy's lifetime were historical works often with a strong connection to the theatre.
Kennedy may have no longer felt able to offer useful criticism in the way he had in the past.\textsuperscript{18} Around 1969 too, an interest in Maori themes entered the work which again used material beyond Kennedy's ability to comment. He did, however, retain a close interest in McCahon's career. For example, on a visit to Archie Dunningham, the former Dunedin City Librarian, who had moved to Matakana north of Auckland, the two travelled to the city and to visit the library and find out about St. Veronica who was featuring in McCahon's paintings at the time.\textsuperscript{19} Finally, McCahon at about this time was moving to a more stable financial position and, like Woollaston, beginning to earn enough from his painting to support himself. It may be that the work had become too expensive. Furthermore both these artists had entered into contracts with Peter McLeavey who required that he be the exclusive agent for their work. While McLeavey did not expressly forbid McCahon from giving works to close friends he has said that Colin knew his view that if he wanted to make a living from his art then the marketing of it had to be on a professional footing and that this may have influenced the artist.\textsuperscript{20}

Following the pattern of his life Kennedy's collection changed in the mid-1960s. he purchased more work directly from exhibitions and these purchases often reflected his limited budget. Despite these changes in the composition of the collection we can offer some sort of interpretation of its composition based around the insight that it is closely associated with the life of the collector.

Rodney Kennedy And His Collection: A Life In Art

To end, let us return to the beginning, to the breakfast with the Woollastons, the

\textsuperscript{18} See note 89 above.
\textsuperscript{19} REK to PF Monday 6th March [probably 1978].
\textsuperscript{20} Interview with Peter McLeavey May 1998.
Figure 33

Figure 34
*View of the Otago Peninsula* from Rodney Kennedy's living room. Photo by Gary Blackman
McCahons and James Mack. The room in which they sat was Kennedy's creation, his long gallery, in which his collections could be seen at their best. Art works were not the only thing he collected. He collected books in the same way as he collected paintings. It was the content (and the person that had recommended the book) that was important. He also collected plants.

Kennedy's ability in the garden was perhaps his least regarded accomplishment yet it was his most enduring. One of the most striking images of a day time visit to Kennedy at High Street was the exuberant garden, overgrown through the exercise of artful neglect, out of which would emerge this "extraordinary little man". The garden was, in fact, very impressive. Kennedy had a talent for arranging plants harmoniously, balancing colour and form. His garden was a sort of horticultural art work even though he was content to let the recalcitrant oxalis flourish where it had taken control on the Alva St. side.

Despite his short stature and his childhood illnesses Kennedy was a tough little man who from time to time relished physical work. Furthermore he had, as we've already noted, a strong sense of location. Dunedin was his diocese and the Peninsula was his domain. Standing in his garden on a Saturday, on a clear day looking down to the Peninsula he must have experienced a strong sense of being in his natural territory. Gardening was a part of that experience. It was a territorial claim.

Furthermore, gardening was a gift he gave. The letters that he exchanged with the poet Mary Ursula Bethell, author of From a Garden In The Antipodes (1929), routinely contained gardening comments, hints and advice. And in 1936 he wrote acknowledging her gift of "your Garden poems" and thanking her for her friendship:

You have been so good to me. Giving me all these books and others on loan. I was glad you were a little pleased with the labouring in the garden. It gives
tangible form to gratitude. 21

Again, after Kennedy had retired in 1971, when he went to Nelson one of his oldest friends, Toss Woollaston, was in hospital. While regretting his friend's illness he also regretted that the time spent travelling to the hospital was time lost in the garden. 22 At other times he raked mown grass at Muriwai with Colin McCahan, and, from Matakana, comically complained about the labour involved in looking after Archie Dunningham's low maintenance garden.

For Rodney Kennedy, then, the garden represented a connection with his childhood on the Peninsula with hard days of physical labour and long days in the sunshine; it was an exercise of ownership and it was a gift to his friends. Finally, just as the long gallery in his house was constructed in anticipation of those glorious mornings when Toss Woollaston would read from Sage Tea over breakfast, the garden also formed a sort of stage set. The careful disorder of his garden was a much modified and domesticated version of the English landscape tradition with its inherent theatricality. The walk from Alva St. to the back door meandered through the garden and the visitor who was surprised by Rodney popping out of the undergrowth was enacting a role already assigned to them.

With the Otago Peninsula in their view (at either end of the room), the garden all around them, the friends eating the special breakfast completed Kennedy's collection of collections: the garden, the books, the people and the artworks. It is this context, as part of a larger set, that Kennedy's collection of art gains its significance.

In 1937 Kennedy had written to Ursula Bethell after a visit to the ballet:

...All week the last few lines of your letter have been running through my head "Oh if we could stay in the calm international realms of art". It was a lovely

21 REK to MUB 1936 [?July] c/o Highcliff P.O.
22 Hocken Archive Patricia France Collection MS 95 -053 50 REK to PF 29/3/76
cry but I hope I shall return something more concrete than just a memory of the Ballet - I wonder- Does Beauty fade! And where is its abiding place? In or without us. I remember feeling so intensely alive within that space because of oneself. 23

Miss Bethell, in reply proposed art as a refuge from the uncertainties of a world on the brink of war. Art (Beauty) endured, she claimed and referred him to the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. 24 Rather like Freud's funeral objects from Pompeii, art has stability, even if the objects themselves are subject to decay which, in this context, can mean either physical deterioration or a loss of cultural or personal significance. 25

What, then does the collection mean beyond the sum of its accumulated parts? What is the significance of this enduring quality of art that Kennedy treasured and dedicated his life to? First, and it is so obvious that it seems hardly worth mentioning, it was a collection of contemporary New Zealand art. It was not definitive in this but most of the work was collected close to its time of purchase and came either directly from the artist or from exhibition. The collection was, therefore, ideological in its content. It supported living New Zealand artists. 26 Furthermore, although it was a private collection it was available for interested people to see. One of the attractions of a visit to the Alva St house was to see Rodney's paintings. It was a living resource and part of the collective memory of a generation.

This is its point of connection with Charles Brasch. (Brasch was surely the absent friend of the breakfast feast; James Mack, as a representative of the official world of culture, can be seen

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23 REK to MUB (ad. 1937)
24 MUB to REK Trinity Sunday 1937.
25 Kennedy was notoriously casual about the treatment of even his most treasured possessions. Not only did the Otago Peninsula painting hang over the gas fire but it had been damaged by his efforts to porce it into a frame. (Interview with Tony Mackle). Furthermore, he was fond of painted frame for some of his paintings. These he painted with the work still in the frame so that the paint leaked onto the work. (Interview with James Mack).
26 The most notable exception to this generalisation was the painting by Frances Hodgkins which was purchased for him by Brasch in 1957 during a trip to Britain. The work cost 60 guineas although he only paid Brasch £60 for it. CB to REK June 22 1957.
Figure 35
Rodney Kennedy at Home circa 1975.

Figure 36
Photo David Lloyd.
as his deputy.) The difference between the two men, however, is in that to Kennedy this aspect of his collection would have seemed natural—there was no alternative—whereas for Brasch to collect New Zealand art was a calculated intervention.

If the placing of the work in the collection is important then contrast between the way the two men displayed their respective collections illustrates the way each man viewed the art. A photograph of Brasch's sitting room at Heriot Row shows a modest display of art. A single framed drawing leans on the mantelpiece and in the corner, between the window and the bookcase a painting by Rita Angus hangs from the picture rail. In a photograph taken at roughly the same time Kennedy stands in front of his gas fire at his home in High St, the McCahon *Otago Peninsula* behind him. The mantlepiece is cluttered with photographs, postcards, an ashtray, and other tiny *objets d'art*. On Kennedy's right the portrait of him by Woollaston, on his left Indonesian or Balinese puppets occupy a shelf. In the Brasch photograph we get the sense that the bulk of the collection, which after all was considerably larger than his friend's, was hidden from view as surely as if it were in a museum. In the Kennedy photograph we sense that everything that could be shown was actually on display. This was a collection to be seen.

A second aspect of the Kennedy collection is the way that the enduring qualities of art stood for something enduring in his life. It symbolised the degree to which the friendships which these works signified had replaced his family. After the death of his aunt in 1959 Kennedy had no family members with whom he was in regular contact. It was the McCahons and the Woollastons and James Mack who helped him celebrate his seventieth birthday.

The art collection had a number of distinctive features. Its geography formed a sort of mental map of Kennedy's affectional ties. Significant works such as the *Otago Peninsula* or Woollaston's drawing of *Lillian Kennedy* were displayed in important positions and remained there
Figure 37
Rodney Kennedy with "Vicarage Bed",
by Anne Hamblett McCahon (circa 1937)
(June 1979) Doris Lusk
over long period of time. The display of other works varied as new acquisitions were given an airing. Relegation to the hall placed the work in an equivocal position in the pecking order. In the bedroom the work had a more personal aspect. Above the bed hung the favourite work by Anne Hamblett, itself a painting of a bed, and this was added to by the portrait of Kennedy by Doris Lusk which included Hamblett's *Vicarage Bed.*

This collection, then, formed a sort of psychological portrait of its owner. It was founded on taste and on loyalty to the artists. Many of the works were gifts and therefore visible tokens of the mutual affection between Kennedy and his artists friends. Furthermore, just as he did with people, Kennedy had favourites. Works (and people) were either in or out with Kennedy and the status of either could change radically and without much warning.

Continuing this analogy between artwork and people for a little longer, Kennedy enjoyed meeting new people. And he liked to cement friendship with gifts from his collection. So friends from time to time received small paintings as presents, even when there was no particular occasion to mark. The work was used as a currency of affection.

The collection, then, was not closed nor was it moving towards some sort of closure. There was no drive, for example, to illustrate each facet of McCahon's work, nor to trace the advance of Woollaston as he developed his larger canvases. Whatever he was collecting he was not collecting sets.

Freud's collection was limited to the consulting rooms. Kennedy's collection was the exact opposite. It was everywhere. It spilled into every aspect of his life. Freud's collection was inextricably linked with the theory of psychoanalysis but also, in a less intellectual way, to his

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27 Kennedy recounted how W.H. Allen had given his students the task of painting something at home to encourage a sense of intimacy in the work. This painting was Anne Hamblett's response: "Rodney Kennedy talks to Tony Mackie" 29/3/84 p 1. Hocken Library Artist's file: Kennedy.
relationship with his father. Kennedy's collection represented the extent to which he had reinvented himself through art, both, as Charles Brasch had it, as a painter and as a friend of painters. Art for Kennedy did endure. It was his life. He replaced the ties of family with those of art. That is the ultimate meaning of the Kennedy Collection. It is a testimony to a life in art.
Appendix I: Paintings and drawings listed in the estate of Rodney Kennedy.  
18 December 1989

Don Binney

*Untitled* (1966) oil on hardboard: 914 x 568 mm

Olivia Spencer Bower *[Love Story of Chichester]* (1966) watercolour; 400 x 500 mm

Anna Caselberg

*Harbour Scene* (1976) watercolour; 228 x 302 mm

Anna Caselberg and Ralph Hotere

*Stage Set For 'Exit the King'* watercolour and ink on paper.

Tom Field

*The Last Summer Of Andrew Green No 1* (1984) woodblock on handmade paper: 553 x 395 mm

*The Last Summer Of Andrew Green No 2* (1984) woodblock on handmade paper: 553 x 395 mm

Patrick Hanly

*Love Each Other* (1970) print and paint on paper 188 x 250 mm

Jeffrey Harris

*Crucifixion* black ball point pen on paper; 188 x 250 mm

*Family Portrait* from the *Icon* series, oil on hardboard; 142 x 226 mm

*[Figure before Crucifixion]* oil on canvas, 342 x 240 mm.

*Figures in Landscape* (1973) etching; 183 x 245 mm

*Painting* oil or acrylic on paper, 717 x 1054 mm

*Still Life with Roses*" (1974) pencil on paper; 355 x 427 mm.

Ralph Hotere

*Black painting* (1968) lacquer on hardboard; 904 x 605 mm.

*Dignum in Excelsis Deo* (1973) being a stage set study for *"The Devils"* watercolour.

*Dignum et Justum Est / Gloria in Excelsis Deo* (1973) being a stage set study for *"The Devils"* watercolour, 332 x 455 mm.


*Mungo at Aramoana* (1982) oil on hardboard; 549 x 442 mm.

*Small Black Painting* mauve paint on inscribed black formica; 152 x 97 mm.

*Window in Spain* (1978) watercolour, 323 x 232 mm.

*Untitled* (1965) screenprint; 1083 x 722 mm.

*Dunedinite* (1980) coloured woodblock; 400 x 195 mm.
Richard Killeen  
*Figure on 'Road* (1968) oil on glass; "497 x 345 mm.

Morgan Jones  
*The Fall of the Palace Guard* (1975) Leather assemblage on plywood; 625 x 772 mm.

Doris Lusk  
*Dark Stream, West Coast, NZ* watercolour with gum arabic highlighting; 624 x 470 mm.  
*Nude* (1977) watercolour; 485 x 222 mm.  
*Young Boy (Derek)* (1961) watercolour; 302 x 238 mm.

Eileen Mayo  
*Sunflower* screenprint; 531 x 265 mm.

Quentin Macfarlane  
*Snow Painting* (1960) oil on harboard; 915 x 544 mm.

Colin McCahon  
*Angel & Bed* (1976) oil on hardboard; 720 x 1090 mm.  
*Anne Bathing in Riwaka River* (1943) Suite of four drawings, ink on paper.  
*French Bay* oil on canvas (7-paper) on hardboard; 455 x 656 mm.  
*Kauri* (1954) oil on canvas: 695 x 537 mm (stretcher)  
*Landscape* oil on unstretched canvas; 929 x 464 mm.  
*Landscape* from the *Truth from the King Country/ Load Bearing Structure* series; oil on canvas board; 222 x 304 mm.  
*Landscape* (1953) watercolour; 188 x 242 mm.  
*Muriwai Beach* (1976) black wash with white highlighting on Steinbach; 718 x 1054mm.  
*Pohutukawa Tree, High Tide* (1958) oil on board; 594 x 442 mm.  
*Waterfall* (1964) oil on hardboard; 304 x 302 mm.  
*Waterfall* (1962) oil on unprimed hardboard, 283 x 298 mm.  
*Waterfall* (1964) oil on hardboard; 225 x 220 mm.  
*The Window* (1947) oil on rough gesso 604 x 460 mm.

Evelyn Page  
*At the Coast* (1950) oil on canvasboard; 216 x 344 mm.

Sharon Painter  
*Untitled* transparent & coloured perspex construction; 597 (max) x 561 (max) x 98 (max) mm.
John Robinson
*St. Francis* (1985) diptych: acrylic on hardboard; 180 x 344 mm (total).

Marté Szirmay
*Wheel of Life* (1985) lithograph on handmade paper; 326 x 465 mm (paper size)

Phillip Trusttum
*Untitled* (1976) oil on hessian on canvas; 419 x 350 mm.

Unknown Artist
*Bird* black ink, gold paint & gouache on paper; 181 x 263 mm

Unknown Sculptor
*Study for Slate Sculpture* black chalk on paper; 368 x 160 mm

Sir Mountford Tosswill Woollaston
*Landscape, ?Greymouth* oil on paper on board; 281 x 396 mm
*Landscape,* (1944) watercolour on gesso on Whakatane board; 187 x 243 mm.
*Mapua Landscape* oil on paper on Whakatane board; 446 x 398 mm.
*Portraits of Lillian Kennedy* black ink on paper, 192 x 133 mm.
*Portraits of Rodney Kennedy* (1935) oil on paper on Whakatane board;
361 x 245 mm.
Appendix II: Works donated to the Hocken Library by Rodney Kennedy (alphabetically by artist).

**William Henry Allen, 1894-1988**
*Study of Tui Northey, Dunedin.* (c. 1928)
*Rain over Auckland.* (1937)

**John William Coley, b. 1935**
*Russian Child Prodigy.* (1961)

**Pam Cotton**
*A Boy in striped jersey.* (n.d.)
*Sleeping man.* c. 1960

**Linden Richard Cowell, b. 1933**
*Costume designs for O.U.D.S. production of Dr Faustus.* (1972)

**John Drawbridge, b. 1930**
*Figure drawing.* (c. 1950)
*Avenue near St Andre; France. 2/50.* (1960)
*A man looking out a window.* (c. 1950)
*Rockpool. Artist's proof.* (n.d.)

**Jan Eskett, b. 1938**
*Untitled.* (1976)

**Robert Nettleton Field, 1899-1987**
*Landscape with cottage.*

**Grete Graetzer, 1901-68**
*It is time to go home.* (1957)

**Anne Hamblett, b. 1916**
*Blue Lake, St Bathans. 1/6.* (c. 1939)
*Green woman. Costume design for Peer Gynt.* (c. 1953–4)
*Three women. Costume design for Peer Gynt.* (c. 1953)
*Trolls! Troll's!* (n.d.)
*3 Troll King. Costume design for Peer Gynt.* (c. 1953–4)
*Troll King* (n.d.)
*Rose. 1/2.* (1939)

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1 For donations organised by year of gift and further details of the works see *The Kennedy Gift* pp 23–45.
Patrick Hanly, b. 1931
*Girl and umbrella.* (1960)

Jeffrey Harris, b. 1949
*Birth.* (ca 1971-73)
*Crucifixion in landscape.* (1969)
*The entombment.* (1972)

Rhona Haszard, 1901-31
*Alexandria. Feb.* (1931)

Ralph Hotere, b. 1931
*Black painting. Blue/indigo no 5.* (1969)
*Drawing 1.* (1969)
*Profiles.* c. (1969)
*Drawing.* (1969)
*Drawing for black painting.* c. (1969)
*Drawing for Requiem Series.* (1974)
*The temptations of Oedipus by Baxter - costume design. Ismene 1.* (1970)
*The temptations of Oedipus by Baxter - costume design. (Two figures.)* (1970)
*Vence, Alpes Maritaine, France.* (1962)

Mamie Jackson,
*Portrait of a woman.* (n.d.)

Rodney Kennedy, 1910-89
*Flower piece.* (1934 or 1936)
*Homage to Virginia Woolf* (1933)

Doris Lusk, 1916-90
*Rodney Kennedy with "Vicarage Bed", painting by Anne Hamblett McCahan,* (circa 1937).

Colin McCahon, 1919-87
*Drawing for 'Dear Wee June'.* (1945)
*Marge in the Maitai Valley, Nelson.* (1947)
*Working drawings for three paintings of the Otago Peninsula. A set of 21 drawings* (1938)
*Composition.* (1938)
*Drawing of Rodney Kennedy.* (1940)
*Kennedy Waterfall Series; 12 drawings.* (c. 1960)
*Sketch of Ruby Bay house.* (c. 1945)
*Gay Nineties Soirée. Dunedin Left Book Club, Saturday Nov. 18.* (1938)
*Swan Lake stage design 1.* (1954)
*Swan Lake, stage design 2.* (1954)
*Untitled.* (c. 1938)
*Cover designs for Peer Gynt.* (1953)
Festival Ballet for the Girl Sally. (1955)
Stage designs for Girl Sally Ballet. (1955)
Stage designs for Peer Gynt. Series 1.1-13. (1953)
Stage designs for Peer Gynt. Series 3. (1953)
Stage designs for The Glass Menagerie. (1956)
Otago Peninsula landscapes - two drawings. (1947)
The Mount Arthur Range, Nelson. (1946)

Stewart B. MacIennan, b. 1903
Path through trees. (n.d.)

L. Morrell
Out of tune. (1979)

John Lysaght Moore, 1897-1965
Rimu. (n.d.)

Hugh Scott
Entrance to Nelson Harbour. (c. 1925)

E. Mervyn Taylor, 1906-64
Kowhai. (n.d.)

Graeme Walker, b. 196?
Chair. (1979)

Mountford Tosswill Woollaston, b. 1910
A. Prior. (c. 1956)
Anna Woollaston. (1944)
Study of a head. (n.d.)
Artist's daughter, Anna Woollaston. (1948)
Drawing of Beatrice Wells. (1936)
Drawing of Decimus Wells' family. (1936)
Sketches of faces. (n.d.)
Drawing of Edith Woollaston. (c. 1941)
Figure study. (1956)
Joe's exercises in Dr Washbourne's old chair. (c. 1946)
Lyttelton Harbour (c. 1936)
Mapua landscape no 1. (c. 1940)
Mapua landscape no 2. (c. 1940)
Nelson landscape. (1930)
Portrait Mrs Hickford. (c. 1941)
Portrait of Rodney Kennedy. (n.d.)
Study of artist's son, Joe. (c. 1946)
Study of Charles Brasch, Esq.
Study of reclining boy. (c. 1938)
Study of son of Decimus Wells. (c. 1937)
Tasman Bay. (1961)
Edith sketching. (c. 1940)
Lillian Kennedy. (c. 1935)
Self portrait. (1942)
Sketch of head (c. 1942?)
Appendix III: Rodney Kennedy's Art work
Hocken Library and Personal Collection
First I would like to express my thanks to the Regional Council for granting me this leave of absence and for their generous financial assistance.

**Australia and the Voyage to England**

I arrived in Melbourne on June 3rd with a day and a half's wait before my boat sailed. On a previous visit I had contacted the director and some of the staff of the Adult Education Department so on my first morning in Melbourne I paid them a courtesy visit. The afternoon was mainly spent at the excellent Art Gallery which I think compares very favourably with most of the smaller galleries in England. In the evening I had the choice of two plays or an Italian Opera Company which were later to tour New Zealand, so I went to see Rattigan's *Deep Blue Sea*, thinking I would not have the opportunity to see one of England's more famous young actresses while overseas.

At Perth I called at the Adult Education office to make myself known to the staff and enquire about their Drama activities. I found that they mostly subsidised the local efforts in the city of Perth and occasionally imported a star player. The extent of the travelling was limited by lack of a professional company and by the fact that most available talent were amateurs with other employment. There was no demand for Drama tutors in the country, but they were slowly building up an audience for Drama.

On the journey I was fortunate to have contacts in each port that enabled me to see a little more than the usual tourist sightseeing, as in Bombay where I was taken to the film studios to see an Indian film in the making and met some of the people concerned in the making of these films which were cheap simple romances for the Indian population. In Egypt I saw the Cairo Museum. At a stop in Marseilles I was most interested in the new housing schemes and to see Corbusier's mammoth blocks of flats.

I arrived in England on July 10th in the midst of a heat wave and the best summer for several years. I spent the first week in a frenzied whirl of play going at night and making plans and contacting useful sources and people by day. I went to the British Drama League Headquarters and the British Council.

**International Theatre Institute Conference on Theatre History**

My first commitment from July 17 - 23 was to attend the International Theatre Institute's conference at the British Academy as an observer from New Zealand, along with Miss Ngaio Marsh and Sir James Shelley the delegates.

Delegates from twenty two countries attended this conference on Theatre History and briefly statements and discussion took place on the following subjects:

**One**    The national contributions to the art of the theatre. (Each delegate gave a short statement
on the period in which his country made an outstanding contribution to the development of the theatre).

Two  Source material, its preservation, recording and dissemination with special reference to international cooperation.

Three  The influence of research on the practice of the contemporary theatre.

The important outcome of the conference was the establishment of international machinery for the exchange of historical information. America generously donated a sum of money for the microfilming of documents and drawings and theatre design held in accredited museums. The only dissentients, and the richest in source material seemed to be Italy. Its delegates seemed very reluctant to make any concessions to international theatre history.

Papers were read by Miss Marsh and Sir James Shelley, but as you can imagine there was little New Zealand could contribute to the conference. In fact, we were very like the charming delegate from Ireland, who blandly remarked "We don't have any historical theatrical material or records, they just get burnt."

This conference occurred when European Russian tension started to ease, and Russia sent three last minute delegates armed with a magnificent collection of films and books as a gift. This was the first of the cultural exchange between the U.S.S.R. and Britain. Some of the films we saw at a special showing at the Russian Embassy on the last day of the conference were of unique interest: scenes of Olga Knipper, Chekhov's wife, playing in *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Seagull*, an early production of Gorki's *Lower Depths*, and of Stanislavsky directing. This was only one reel of the thirteen presented and left me with quite a longing to see the rest.

Four exhibitions were arranged in conjunction with International Theatre Institute London office to exhibit the theatrical resources of the Royal Institute of British architects; the Department of Engraving Illustration and Design of the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Department of Prints and Drawings of the British Museum. The fourth at the Festival Hall illustrated the history of the American Theatre. Special visits were arranged and private facilities for overseas visitors and delegates, and it was through these facilities I was introduced to James Laver,, Keeper. of the Department of Engraving, Victoria and Albert Museum, V.C. Clinton-Baddeley, the Keeper of prints at the British Museum, and Mr Richard Southern of the I.T.I. Later in the winter months I was more free to make many visits to these institutions and they were most helpful.

As part of the programme for the conference we were taken on a visit to see the oldest theatre in England, the Theatre Royal at Bristol, and to see the Experimental Theatre at the University designed by Richard Southern. That day we were the guests of the Drama Department of the University of Bristol. As many students on Drama Bursaries from New Zealand have lately taken the course there, I was most interested and impressed, both with the facilities and the quality of the work there, and incidentally both Mr Ross and Dr Wickham of the School and University spoke quite highly of the New Zealand students they had there. Subsequently I paid many visits to Bristol to follow the productions of the Bristol Old Vic as part of a programme of seeing the work of the major Repertory Movement, and it was always with the keenest pleasure that I sat in the audience of that lovely theatre. On these visits to Bristol I saw something of the work of the
School and one production in the Experimental Theatre. The conference week was rather crowded by entertainments and receptions at which I had the opportunity to meet many specialists in the theatre at the outset of, my visit and make a number of very valuable contacts.

**B.D.L. at Chichester**

My next important engagement was to attend a British Drama League school for acting and production held at the Bishop Otter College at Chichester. This was from July 29 to August 14th. I had made enquiries at the B.D.L. headquarters about such schools and although I would have preferred to have gone to a more specialised school on production, the only one on their list was being held over the period I had booked for the Edinburgh Festival. It was extremely fortunate for me that this School was held in such a lovely place and in such a pleasant college, because it was my first introduction to a small cathedral city of quite unique architectural quality, ranging over many periods. I became sadly aware of how much we in New Zealand are starved of beautiful architecture.

In many ways the school was very elementary and I must say I didn't get very much out of it, except some very good classes in movement and period dancing, also the chance to work with Miss Nora Lamboume, a specialist in theatrical property making and costume.

I had the chance to compare how such schools are run in England with New Zealand summer schools run by the Drama Council, and I would say the New Zealand variety I have attended produced in their ten days duration as much in results and of a better standard. The attitude of the staff in the English school was, I think, a little school-marmish for New Zealanders to take, and as there were three of us there in this school to compare reactions, this was the general verdict. Part of the programme for the school was a visit to the Duke of Norfolk's Castle at Arundel, and a visit to the Earl of Bessborough's seat at Stanstead Park, and it was for me an interesting experience to see a perfect Medieval castle and a very beautiful 18th century country house with landscape gardens by Capability Brown.

During the next fortnight while waiting to go to Edinburgh I took advantage of the summer to pay brief visits to Oxford, Cambridge, Bath and Brighton. At Oxford I saw my first play done by a reputable Repertory Society: I was later to see two more plays there before this company folded up through lack of support.

**Edinburgh Festival.**

I left on September 1 to spend the next three weeks in Edinburgh. I had applied for seats for most of the major attractions at the festival listed in the programme before I left New Zealand, as this was an assured way of getting tickets for them, only to find on arriving in Edinburgh that what is known as the fringe activity offered me an opportunity of seeing in addition quite an extensive number of amateur productions. By cutting out all the concerts, I found that I could manage to see at least two plays per day, and sometimes three and on one heroic day, four. The major attractions were the two Opera Company Glyndebourne presentations of the late Verdi operas *Falstaff* and *La Forza del Destino*, the French Company's production of *Camille* with Edwige Feuillère, Thornton Wilder's commissioned play *A Life in the Sun*, the kabuki dancers from Japan, and the Old Vic Company's production of *Julius Caesar*.

The fringe attractions I saw were five university student productions. Oxford, Durham,
Birmingham, Edinburgh and Dublin University Drama Societies being represented. Each group presented quite an interesting choice of play. Birmingham's *Two Noble Kinsmen* I thought quite the best and I was particularly delighted to have the opportunity of seeing this rarely produced play.

Only the Edinburgh University had the advantage of playing in a well equipped and comfortable new theatre in Adam House which is an extension of the English Department there. Most of these productions were in make-shift halls were quite an endurance feat for the audience as well as the players and so engendered a mutual spirit of camaraderie which I found rather pleasant. It could be said generally that the International Festival at Edinburgh is sorely in need of adequate space to feature their main attractions. The Assembly Hall in which I saw *A Life in the Sun* is much more a burial ground than a theatre. Every little church hall is in use for the fringe activity.

Quite the most interesting attraction for me was to see the work of the Scottish Community Dram Association. This group, which has the equivalent status of the B.D.L. in England, and I think was once the B.D.L., Scotland, presented at the Pleasance Trust Community Centre three plays by country groups. Unfortunately I was only able to see two of them. These plays were produced by the two country drama tutors doing much the same work as I am doing, employed by the S.C.D.A. I met one of the tutors, Mr Callum Mill, and later through an introduction to Dr C. B. Childs of Edinburgh University, I became better acquainted with the work of S.C.D.A., which unfortunately was then in summer recess.

I was fortunate in seeing two productions of the Edinburgh Gateway Company which is subsidised by the Arts Council of Great Britain, memorable for the most musical speech I heard overseas and very fine acting. This company is doing good work in presenting Scottish drama to the people. It is rather nationalist in outlook but apart from that limitation they are forging a style in harmony with writer, actors, and national temperament which on reflection I feel is important to us here in New Zealand.

Often in England I felt the lack of a unified style of acting that even in Stratford and the Old Vic where one would expect to find some sort of unity in the actor's approach to his art, the producer was sacrificing everything to some fashionable whim.

One interesting thing about the Gateway Theatre is that the theatre licensee is the Church of Scotland Home Board and the theatre café or buffet is run by the Women's Church Guild most impressively. I ate very well there.

Another national figure in Scottish drama the actor Duncan Macrae I saw in a simple home grown fantasy with some members of the Glasgow Citizen's Theatre. At that time he was conducting a vigorous campaign in the press for a more national flavour to the Drama part of the Festival programme. There were three other groups presenting plays of interest to me because they were by new playwrights.

The major art exhibitions were the International Gauguin exhibition, a selection of the French Impressionists from the Glasgow Gallery, and a small collection of Poussin paintings. During the third week I was able to see a little of the countryside of Scotland by sightseeing tours, and to pay...
a visit to the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum.

I returned to London on September 16th and then settled down to a routine of attending theatrical performances, a systematic tour of Museums and art exhibitions, with visits to Bristol and Birmingham to follow the progress of the two major repertory societies in their change of programme. I selected these two as they had a consistent policy of performing the works of the younger English playwrights not seen on the commercial stage in London.

I applied to the Central School of Speech and Drama attached to the London University for private tuition and was fortunate in being able to get private lessons from Mr Clifford Turner whose work I already knew of through his book on the subject. He arranged to take me from mid January to May.

**Europe**

Denmark. I was particularly glad that I was urged to go to Denmark by friends made at the I. T. I. conference in London and on the boat crossing to England. I was impressed with the architecture, the housing, the cultivation of the land and everywhere the civic responsibility of the Danes. I was fortunate in that I was taken to quite a large area of the country, its museums and historic monuments, Kronberg Castle better known to us for its associations with *Hamlet*, Rosenberg Castle, Fredericksborg, now a national history museum supported by the profits of brewing. But it was at the Christianborg castle in Copenhagen that I spent a great deal of time, through the courtesy of the Director Dr Robert Noiemand, paying many visits to the delightful eighteenth century court theatre, now a theatre museum, unfortunately little known and difficult to access to the tourist. In all I spent a week in Denmark and saw two performances at the Royal Theatre, a ballet and a performance in Danish of an Eugene O'Neil. This theatre is in every sense a state theatre, honouring both its royal patrons and the artists who have contributed to its glory, so that to walk round the foyers is to be made conscious of the history of the theatre in Denmark.

I went to see a Danish commercial theatre production of the *Teahouse of the August Moon*, and I thought that it was much superior to the London production, which I had recently seen. At the National Radio Concert Hall, prototype of the Festival Hall, London, I heard a magnificent Brahms concert. Everywhere at the theatre and in excellent attendance at private art exhibitions and museums I had the impression of being in a civilized and vigorous community.

From Denmark I travelled down through Switzerland to Italy. Without many contacts there I was forced to be a slave to the Blue guide and Baedeker. I was conscious of doing the place or city I was in at the moment with a concentrated fury. I was a month in Italy and visited first Milan then Verona, Venice, Florence, Siena and Rome.

Unfortunately the theatre season was in recess and apart from the magnificent costume museum in Venice and a rather wistful look at the empty interior of the theatres of Rome I saw only one indifferent performance at Florence that was of direct theatrical interest, but everything I saw in that most memorable month was indirectly a most exciting stimulus.

From Italy I travelled up via Marseilles to Vichy for a few days to see Mr and Mrs Reno Thevenot
and with them I spent a week in Paris. If in Italy I saw a country impersonally through the direction of a guide book, France was in the eyes of friends who happened to have a great deal of experience of New Zealand and New Zealanders. I had to insist that the nights were sacred to the theatre and drag them away from their meals which, though delightful, seemed also to be interminable.

The theatre season had not, I was told, got fully into swing but there were at least twenty-seven shows to choose from, seventeen of them being either English or American plays in translation. I chose to see French plays I knew in translation or particular artists and their work such as Pierre Bracera in a new Anouilh play, the Jean-Louis Barrault Company at the Marigny in Giraudoux's *The Enchanted*. I managed to see three productions at the Comédie Francaise and a new programme of the Azuma Kabuki Dancers.

**England**

I returned to England on November 21st going immediately down to Stratford as I had booked that last week for the Stratford on Avon season, not having been able to get a complete week's theatre bookings earlier in the year. It was interesting to contrast the impeccable style and discipline of the Comédie Francaise and the lack of tradition and style at Stratford. The Stratford season had depended on reflected radiance of the Oliviers. This might safely be said to count commercially but it has a limiting effect artistically. I saw the season's quota of plays and the best of them twice. In that category I would place the exciting production of *Titus Andronicus*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Olivier's performance of *Macbeth*. I was able to see a play in rehearsal at the theatre that was later to appear in London and the provinces after I left England. This was produced by Michael Dennison, the actor, and was cast from among the younger members of that season at Stratford. Unfortunately the play was rather a women's magazine story written by the producer's wife, the actress, Dulcie Grey.

In the weeks before Christmas I spent a fortnight at Lime Grove Studios becoming familiar with television technique and watching the rehearsals and televising of a play for telecast and also the weekly puppet show of Sam Williams, a children's hour feature.

**Holland**

On Christmas Eve I left England again to spend three weeks in Holland and over that period I saw most of the important Art Museums and cities. I was able through friends to see and meet many important people in the arts. At the Hague I saw rehearsals and shows of a small conference of puppeteers and the excellent costume museum which was then closed to the public, as it was in the process of being transferred to a larger building. I was particularly impressed with the Museum of Folk Culture at Leiden and in retrospect with all the museums in Holland where Museum display is brought to a very fine art. In Holland I was impressed with the very high standard of modern architecture, both domestic and civic, especially in Rotterdam where I saw the new city taking shape out of the war ruins.
England January 13 - April 13 1956

England, when I returned, was in the grip of the pantomime season and a hard winter and the snow which seemed only a delightful decoration in Amsterdam was in London infinitely dreary.

During the next four months I had to settle down to my class at the Central School and take up the life of a voyeur in the arts and theatre, only breaking this round to take in the successive productions at Bristol and Birmingham. I had joined most of the reputable theatre clubs when I arrived in England and except for the Arts Theatre had seen very little of their work, and as most of these functions are at the weekend, it meant that I could attend the theatre seven nights a week.

Early in February I had caught up for the first time on all the plays in London and was able to see a little of the Opera at Covent Garden, Sadlers Wells and also the Ballet.

Theatre décor and costume design has always been a specialised interest of mine and these ballet and opera performances gave me an opportunity to see the work of many artists in the theatre in a new sphere with different problems to contend with.

About this period I was delighted to have the chance of seeing some of the work of the stage design class at the Slade School of Art.

During the periods when I was living in London I made a consistent endeavour to see most of the art exhibitions in London and follow the work of British Artists and Sculptors, and I found that statistically on counting catalogues I attended over 230 exhibitions in England and Europe. I had also seen over 150 plays, some of them several times.

In the last two weeks I was in London the theatre season opened again with a flourish, and I often had to attend performances twice a day to cover the new plays. The important development in that period was the forming of the English Stage Company under the direction of George Devine for the encouragement of new playwrights and the presentation of pieces of merit not acceptable to the commercial theatre. It opened with Mr Angus Wilson's play rewritten since I had seen it at Bristol I felt that here was some growth and vigour at last in a season that most of the critics had agreed was not very good.

The outstanding plays had been foreign works by Ugo Betti, and Giraudoux and American playwrights; the outstanding production had been two Shakespeare productions, The Rivals and The Wild Duck and except for the Gielgud production of Enid Bagnold's Chalk Garden, superbly acted by a star studded cast, there was hardly a new play of distinction.

If anything I find I have become a little more critical of standards and what I will accept in the theatre, and it is probably a bit too soon to know how that will apply to my work, but I think I have become more aware of how necessary it is to encourage New Zealand writers to write for the theatre so that they may express our life in this country.

R. E. Kennedy 9th July 1956.
Appendix V: a survey of Rodney Kennedy's theatrical career showing dates and place of performance and his role in the production.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TITLE OF WORK</th>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
<th>REK ROLE</th>
<th>PLACE</th>
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<td>King Lear's Wife</td>
<td>Gordon Bottomly</td>
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<td>1945</td>
<td>The Beautiful People</td>
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<td>1948</td>
<td>Six Character...</td>
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<td>actor</td>
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<td>1949</td>
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<td>An Inspector Calls</td>
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<td>Time and the Conways</td>
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<td>Next Time I'll Sing To You</td>
<td>James Saunders</td>
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<td>Lysistrata</td>
<td>Aristophanes</td>
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<td>Eh?</td>
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<td>The Inhabitants</td>
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<td>Wind in the Branches...</td>
<td>R. de Obaldia</td>
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<td>1976</td>
<td>The Sea</td>
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**Performances dates unknown**

- Chalk Garden
  - Thornton Wilder
  - producer
  - Alexandra
- Our Town
  - producer
  - Balclutha
- Christmas at the Market Place
  - producer
  - Balclutha
- House of Bernarda Alba
  - design
  - 
- After October
  - Rodney Ackland
  - producer
  - Taieri
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