

Infinitely Varied

Prizewinning New Zealand Landscape Paintings
from the Kelliher Art Competition 1956-1977



A Kelliher Art Trust
Touring Exhibition
2018-2019

16. Rodger Harrison *Tokaanu, Taupo* 1965



“The Kelliher”- An Introduction

“To encourage artists to paint the essential character of the New Zealand scene and the ways of life of its people, and thereby to develop a livelier appreciation of the fine arts and of the infinitely varied aspects of our land.”

Sir Henry Kelliher

Students - in the widest sense of the word - of New Zealand art could be forgiven for not knowing about the Kelliher Art Competition (1956-1977). The Kelliher, as it came to be known, was not even mentioned in the two standard texts on New Zealand art, Michael Dunn’s *A Concise History of New Zealand Painting* (1991) and Gil Docking’s *Two Hundred Years of New Zealand Painting* (1971), although the latter’s additional chapter by Edward Hanfling in the current edition (2012) rectifies this omission.

Elva Bett’s admirable but less known *New Zealand Art: A Modern Perspective* (1986) does reference the Kelliher but only in the context of the later and very short-lived Hay’s Art Competition, which she describes as marking “the end of the romantic movement” of New Zealand landscape painting. It is true that Colin McCahon was one of the three winners of the first Hay’s (1960) but Bett neglects to mention that Peter McIntyre, a Kelliher regular, won the next in 1962!

Modernism or not, New Zealand landscape painting enjoys as much popularity today as it ever did and this is despite the neglect by most public art museums throughout the country



to display examples of the genre from the Kelliher era - if represented in their collections at all.

Henry Kelliher (1896-1991; knighted in 1963) the founder and Managing Director of Dominion Breweries, who established the Kelliher Art Competition in 1956, purchased Leonard Mitchell’s sole prizewinning painting in the first competition *Summer in the Mokauiti Valley* (No.1, 1956). However, he generously presented the subsequent four first prize getters - works by Arthur Hipwell, Mitchell, Peter McIntyre and

1. Leonard Mitchell *Summer in the Mokauiti Valley* 1956

3. Douglas Badcock *Boat Harbour, Nugget Point* 1959



4. Paul Olds *Wellington, 1959*

Owen Lee - to the National Art Gallery (subsumed in 1992 by the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa).

Yet while the very beautiful Hipwell of Mt Taratarā, for example, has appeared on a box of chocolates, it has not graced the walls of our national museum for many years; and there were no classic New Zealand landscapes included in the opening installation of the museum's new and enlarged art spaces in 2018.

So, as with its past exhibitions, the Kelliher Art Trust's primary objective in presenting this three-venue touring exhibition is to give the public an all too infrequent opportunity to view some classic New Zealand landscape paintings from the second half of the 20th century by some of the era's best-known practitioners.

The collection of the Kelliher Art Trust is based on award-winning paintings from the annual Kelliher Art Competition (later the Kelliher Art Award), which Sir Henry required to represent "the visible aspects of New Zealand's landscape and coastal scenes in a realistic and traditional way." The objectives of the competition were modified over the years as summarised by Richard King: "In response to suggestions made by visiting judges and local artists, the conditions... changed from time to time... Later entry forms included 'panoramic views of cities and towns, life and movement, agricultural and pastoral scenes, the activities of people...' as possible subjects." (What King refers to as "attempts to 'fill' the landscapes and broaden the scope of the Kelliher" are detailed in the Chronology which follows).

This selection of paintings from the collection spans the years of the awards but is devoted to "pure" landscapes only and features



5. David Barker *Beach Strays, Takatu 1960*

many but not all of the prize-winning paintings purchased by Sir Henry for his collection and subsequently given to the Trust he originally set up (1961) to continue the running of the competition.

At the Kelliher exhibitions, during the 1960s at least, sales of 40 or 50 paintings were not uncommon and as Richard King writes: "A win in the Kelliher brought prestige and full commission books." The Kelliher paintings were seen by many. The exhibitions received enormous publicity. In 1957 the Kelliher was exhibited at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts in Wellington, and was viewed by over 10,000 people. And although 20 years later the



8. Cedric Savage *Summer, Hawkes Bay 1961*

same number of people saw the exhibition in Hastings, it was the equivalent of almost a third of the town's inhabitants. Anecdotally, we know that for many people who visited the Kelliher over its two decades, it was their introduction to New Zealand painting.

Sir Henry ensured that many of the competition paintings found their way into the public rooms of DB hotels all over the country, where they could be admired by patrons, and in his company offices. Others he owned personally and were hung in his large home on Puketutu Island in the Manukau Harbour and it is these that formed the basis of the Kelliher Art Trust's collection.



The openings of the annual Kelliher exhibition, mostly held at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Art, Wellington, were black-tie affairs attended by politicians, community leaders and celebrities of the time together with that year's judge (usually an established Australian landscape painter) and the winners. The events were extensively reported in the press and the paintings of individual prizewinners were illustrated in newspapers and magazines throughout New Zealand, including Sir Henry's own monthly the *Mirror*.

Sir Henry once explained that it was his youthful appreciation of the Otago landscape that inspired the establishment of the competition but the immediate impetus came from a suggestion of his friend the Australian painter Ernest Buckmaster. Although apparently a supporter of the Auckland Society of Arts, of which his friend James Turkington was chairman, Kelliher was not interested in modern art as such; his focus was much more about the subject: he wanted to encourage artists "to record the beauty of the country for posterity." To put the Kelliher into its historical context, the ability to record landscapes in colour in the 1950s was extremely limited; there were virtually no colour illustrations in magazines and few photographers had affordable access to colour film, so most view or landscape photography was in black and white; and colour television only reached our screens in 1975.

Richard King, writing in 1978-9, concludes his essay with

6. Peter McIntyre *The Manuherikia, Central Otago 1960*

a passion that resonates today as he touches on another important but overlooked significance of the Kelliher:

"The landscape changes - particularly with mankind's growing demands and technical capabilities... already some of the scenes depicted ... have changed utterly and we have the artists to thank for preserving the pristine beauties and wild exuberance of these places....

Our respect for the environment, and ultimately our self-respect, is indicated by the way we use, or abuse the land. A painting can make a statement about our attitude to natural resources, indicate the devastation wrought by careless ambition and compare this to the slow cycle of changes worked by nature unhindered. Our artists have shown the way. The primeval glories of New Zealand must be revered and protected. This is, perhaps, the lasting impression gained from a collection of landscape paintings... By contemplating these tributes to a beautiful country, we can share the artist's passion for the scenes which inspired their work; their pride in being, uniquely, New Zealanders."

The Kelliher was not unanimously welcomed, especially by modernist artists and their supporters, because there was nothing in it for them; the conditions of entry were simply too restrictive. An example of an artist who was not impressed, to say the least, is Toss Woollaston, who, for whatever reason, attended the opening of the 1958 competition. His reaction says as much about the severely straightened circumstances in which he pursued his art as about the conservative



nature of the competition: “Saw the Kelliher thing last night - it is unbelievably barbaric (a whole turkey on the supper table) - just a monstrous set-up where the ruling philistines, for £2500 [total prize was actually only £925], get the artists to paint that their taste is right, in the hope of the prize”, the artist wrote to his wife Edith (13 August 1958). “Amazingly wrong judgement, astonishingly brutal speeches”, he raged. “Met this Paul Olds [No.4, 3rd Prize] who is trying along the right lines, but typically ‘one of us revolutionaries’ - only, there’s nothing in being revolutionary in such a set-up. I’m going to see if I can have a chat with the Listener, a paper which, from a non-competitor, might perhaps be able to hint that all is not well with the Kelliher.”

Despite the ongoing success of national art prizes in Australia for example, where the Wynne Prize for landscape has been continually awarded since 1897, in New Zealand the Kelliher was destined to end.



The final Kelliher Art Award was held in 1977 but it was not until 1983 that the trustees formally announced its conclusion: “That the project has been highly successful is beyond doubt”, the announcement stated. “As a result of successive competitions and exhibitions in various New Zealand centres [and] because the Kelliher Art Competition has fulfilled its purpose so well, the climate in which the original Competition flourished no longer exists. There are scores of skilled painters prospering and supported by an appreciative public.”

While this could be seen as retrospectively putting a brave face on an inevitable situation, all the points are true and to them could be added the huge growth of visual arts “infrastructure”

during the two decades of the competition. In 1956 when the Kelliher began the main centres' art museums were only just beginning to exhibit contemporary art of any kind. And there were only two commercial galleries in the country, both in Wellington, Leonard Mitchell's Lambton Galleries and the Centre Gallery of the Architectural Centre. The annual exhibition of the capital's New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts and the Auckland Society of Arts, and other local art societies, were the only other selling opportunities open to artists around this time.

Nevertheless, by the late 1970s it had become difficult to find suitable venues for the Kelliher in the main centres, especially because paintings were for sale, albeit for the benefit of the artists. But by this time New Zealand's art museums, following international precedents, had become more professional and codes of ethics outlawed selling exhibitions. Paintings also had to be in oils when many artists had by now turned to acrylics.

In contrast with Toss Woollaston's aggrieved and impassioned response to the Kelliher six decades ago, it is refreshing to read a recent take on the Kelliher. One of the very few contemporary commentators on the Kelliher and its significance is Chris Corson-Scott, in an essay about his father (No.17) for an Art + Object auction catalogue in early 2018: "Ian Scott: Modernism, Landscape and the Kelliher." Interestingly, Corson-Scott alludes to a similar point to King's when he writes:

"Aside from the importance of the Kelliher works in New Zealand art and their unique position in the modernist debate here, it is their conception of New Zealand as Godzone - as a place filled with beauty and possibility - where a large part of



12. Austen Deans *Kea Hut, Mt Sefton* 1962

13. Derek Ball *Morning, Matahiwi* 1962

15. Douglas Badcock *Head of Wakatipu from Bennetts Bluff* 1965

their significance lies. Whether or not that conception was true at the time, I don't know." He goes on to say that it must have been for those artists returning from the World War II or for those who emigrated from post-war England. "Yet the strength of these Kelliher landscapes", he concludes, "is that more than 50 years later, in the best of these works those feelings of optimism remain resolutely tangible, though perhaps now through a kind of nostalgia for a New Zealand that may no longer exist."



It seems that the Kelliher Art Competition will always generate a lively debate but it is hoped that one day a dispassionate and balanced assessment of its impact and influence will be written. Meanwhile, when the opportunity presents itself, we can enjoy the paintings that the competition engendered, confident that there will always be an audience for and admirers of what could be called, without an iota of irony, a golden age of New Zealand landscape painting.

End Note: The Kelliher Art Trust today

In 2006 the board of the Kelliher Art Trust updated the objectives of the original trust deed to reflect not only the demise of the annual art competition itself but also the momentous changes in the New Zealand visual arts sector since that time, in particular its growing professionalism, both of artists and galleries, in part, stimulated by the success of the Kelliher Art Competition.

Following on from this the Trustees took steps to update the collection through the purchase of a variety of contemporary landscape paintings by New Zealand painters. More recently, the acquisition strategy was modified to focus on adding to the collection by commissioning paintings by emerging landscape painters. In doing this the Trust is continuing to support Sir Henry's original objective which was to encourage the painting of New Zealand landscape.

Christopher Johnstone
Curator, Kelliher Art Trust

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- 17. Ian Scott** *Low Tide, Anawhata* 1965
- 19. Robert Watson** *Winter Feed, Central Otago* 1957
- 21. Brian Halliday** *The Outlet, Lake Wanaka* 1967
- 22. Rodger Harrison** *Morning Light, Tauherenikau Valley* 1968

“The Kelliher” - A Chronology

1956

A panel of three judges chose the sole winner of the inaugural Kelliher Art Competition from the 201 entries for the best oil painting by a New Zealand artist to paint “the visible aspects of New Zealand’s landscape and coastal scenes in a realistic and traditional way.” The £500 prize is the equivalent of around \$25,000 today.

1957

The Competition moved to the New Zealand Academy of Fine Art, Wellington, until 1971. The entry conditions now explained that subjects “may include panoramic views of cities or towns. Though not essential, most landscapes and coastal scenes are enhanced by judicious inclusion of “incident” - some representation of life and movement which will add vitality to the painting.” First, second and third prizes were awarded, continuing until 1971.

1958

Instead of a third prize 10 Merit Prizes of £25 were awarded and subsequently Merit Prizes were awarded in addition to first, second and third.

1959

Entrants were encouraged to depict “the normal activities associated with life in New Zealand.”

1960

Subject matter was widened “to depict landscapes or coastal scenes, agricultural or pastoral scenes, and if possible

should include the representation of such activities as would normally be associated with the scene chosen.”

1961

On the opening night Sir Henry announced that he had established and funded a charitable trust to administer the Competition to ensure its continuation. A Special Prize of £100 was introduced to be awarded for the best entrant under 21, won by David Barker [No.5].

1962

This was the last Competition administered by the New Zealand Fellowship of Artists and the Kelliher Art Trust now assumed control.

1964

Due to the lack of venue the Competition was not held.

1965

The objective of the Competition was restated “To encourage artists to paint faithfully the beauty and the essential character of the New Zealand scene and thereby develop a livelier appreciation both of the fine arts and the infinitely varied aspects of our land.” Acceptable subject matter was also redefined: “Competitors should submit characteristic New Zealand subjects. These may include for example not only the natural features of our landscape, but also urban, rural and maritime subjects, including the activities of the people normally associated with such scenes.”

1966

The Special Prize was dropped due to lack of interest from young artists. 14 paintings from the award, together with 10 by Competition judges joined 20 previous awarded winners in the United Kingdom to form a travelling exhibition "The New Zealand Landscape."

1967

The range of subject matter was further widened: "to paint the beauty and essential character of the New Zealand scene and the ways of life of its people in a naturalistic manner..."

1968

A portrait prize of £500 was introduced and the stated objective of the Competition was modified to require artists "to paint the essential character" (dropping "the beauty") "to develop a livelier public appreciation... of our land."

1969

A figure study category was added: "Each portrait shall be of a New Zealand citizen and each figure study should depict the activity of a New Zealand citizen, or citizens, in their normal daily pursuits in work, sport, or form of relaxation."

1971

The Kelliher was shown at the Canterbury Society of Arts, Christchurch.

24. Colin Wheeler *Cattle Muster, Lake Hawea* 1969

25. Brian Halliday *Skippers Canyon, near Queenstown* 1970





1972 and 1973

Competition not held.

1974

The name of the Competition was changed to the Kelliher Art Awards and five equal Awards of \$750 were offered. The exhibition was held at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

1975

The Award was not offered.

1976

The exhibition was held in Hastings.

1977

The last Kelliher was held at Massey University, Palmerston North.

1983

The Kelliher Art Trust board formally announced the conclusion of the Competition: "That the project has been highly successful is beyond doubt. As a result of successive competitions and exhibitions in various New Zealand centres [and] because the Kelliher Art Competition has fulfilled its purpose so well, the climate in which the original Competition flourished no longer exists. There are scores of skilled painters prospering and supported by an appreciative public."



27. Graham Braddock *In the Stillness* 1976

28. Robert McDowell *From the Lighthouse Road, near Akaroa* 1976

Exhibition Checklist*

1. Leonard Mitchell (1925-1980)
Summer in the Mokauiti Valley 1956
Oil on canvas, 915 x 1150mm
1956 Kelliher Art Competition,
1st and only prize

2. George Packwood (1916-1991)
Quiet Waters, Hutt River 1958
Oil on board, 740 x 895mm
2nd Prize 1958 Kelliher Art Competition

3. Douglas Badcock (1922-2009)
Boat Harbour, Nugget Point 1959
Oil on canvas, 680 x 875mm
2nd Prize 1959 Kelliher Art Competition

4. Paul Olds (1922-1976)
Wellington 1959
Oil on canvas, 820 x 715mm
3rd Prize 1959 Kelliher Art Competition

5. David Barker (1941-)
Beach Strays, Takatu 1960
Oil on board, 670 x 900mm
2nd Prize 1960 Kelliher Art Competition

6. Peter McIntyre (1910-1995)
The Manuherikia, Central Otago 1960
Oil on board, 710 x 910mm
3rd Prize 1960 Kelliher Art Competition

7. Owen Lee (1918-2002)
Evening Shadows, North Auckland 1960
Oil on canvas, 830 x 1080mm
Purchased. Not in Kelliher Art Competition

8. Cedric Savage (1901-1969)
Summer, Hawkes Bay 1961
Oil on canvas, 710 x 910mm
1st Prize 1961 Kelliher Art Competition

9. Don Neilson (1924-2013)
Near Paekakariki 1961
Oil on board, 700 x 900mm
2nd Prize 1961 Kelliher Art Competition

10. Peter McIntyre (1910-1995)
Canterbury Shearing Shed 1961
Oil on board, 700 x 820mm
3rd Prize 1961 Kelliher Art Competition

11. David Barker (1941-)
Maori Fishermen, Matauri Bay 1960
Oil on board, 700 x 900mm
Special Prize 1961 Kelliher Art Competition

12. Austen Deans (1915-2011)
Kea Hut, Mt Sefton 1962
Oil on board, 715 x 855mm
1st Prize 1962 Kelliher Art Competition

13. Derek Ball (1944 -)
Morning, Matahiwi 1962
Oil on board, 595 x 780mm
Special Prize 1962 Kelliher Art Competition

14. John Horner (1944-)
Sunlit Boats 1963
Oil on board, 490 x 635mm
Special Prize 1963 Kelliher Art Competition

15. Douglas Badcock (1922-2009)
*Head of Wakatipu from
Bennett's Bluff* 1965
Oil on board, 600 x 800mm
1st Prize 1965 Kelliher Art Competition

16. Rodger Harrison (1931- 2012)
Tokaanu, Taupo 1965
Oil on board, 645 x 840mm
3rd Prize 1965 Kelliher Art Competition

17. Ian Scott (1945-2013)
Low Tide, Anawhata 1965
Oil on board, 700 x 905mm
Special Prize 1965 Kelliher Art Competition

18. Peter Mardon (1937-)
Lyttelton Harbour 1966
Oil on canvas, 585 x 885mm
1st Prize 1966 Kelliher Art Competition

19. Robert Watson (1911-1980)
Winter Feed, Central Otago 1967
Oil on board, 595 x 900mm
1st Prize 1967 Kelliher Art Competition

20. Peter Williams (1934-2018)
Paua Picnic, Wainui Beach 1967
Oil on board, 595 x 745mm
2nd Prize 1967 Kelliher Art Competition

21. Brian Halliday (1936-1994)
The Outlet, Lake Wanaka 1967
Oil on board, 495 x 670mm
3rd Prize 1967 Kelliher Art Competition

22. Rodger Harrison (1931-2012)
Morning Light, Tauherenikau Valley 1968
Oil on board, 640 x 900mm
1st Prize 1968 Kelliher Art Competition

23. Austen Deans (1915-2011)
Glacial Remains 1969
Oil on board, 700 x 905mm
2nd Prize 1969 Kelliher Art Competition

24. Colin Wheeler (1919-2012)
Cattle Muster, Lake Hawea 1969
Oil on board, 660 x 890mm
3rd Prize 1969 Kelliher Art Competition

25. Brian Halliday (1936-1994)
Skippers Canyon, near Queenstown 1970
Oil on Board, 585 x 740mm
1st Prize 1970 Kelliher Art Competition

26. Peter Brown (1921-2005)
Sefton 1974
Oil on board, 500 x 610mm
1974 Kelliher Art Award

27. Graham Braddock (1942-)
*In the Stillness ('The Anchorage'
North Harbour, Kawaii Island)* 1976
Oil on board, 675 x 905mm
1976 Kelliher Art Award

28. Robert McDowell (1937-)
*From the Lighthouse Road,
near Akaroa* 1976
Oil on board, 600 x 905mm
1976 Kelliher Art Award

29. John Clifford (1932-)
Beached, Maraetai 1977
Oil on board, 590 x 1055mm
1977 Kelliher Art Award

30. Violet Watson (1906-1992)
Maratoto Hills, Paeroa 1977
Oil on board, 595 x 900mm
1977 Kelliher Art Award

*Not all paintings can be
shown in each venue

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30. Violet Watson *Maratoto Hills, Paeroa 1977*

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