Changing the culture to lighten the footprint

Both are true of Dr Lesley Stone, Environmental Coordinator for the University.

The most exciting thing about her job, says Lesley, is that it gives “an opportunity to change the culture of this huge organisation”.

That means us: staff and students, everyone in the University community. And the changes Lesley is talking about and that we have already embarked upon will benefit not only the University but also the wider community and the planet as a whole.

In practical terms it means saving resources – we use as much electricity as all of the street lights in Auckland City, and a pile of paper as high as 23 Sky Towers in a year – and recycling waste from the 61,000 wheelie bins worth we dump each year (which, placed side by side, would stretch all the way to the airport and most of the way back).

It also means cutting down on carbon emissions, which could for example be reduced by our individual decisions to walk, bike, bus or carpool to work, or by reducing the 37 million work-related flying kilometres that take us collectively round the world more than 900 times a year.

The University has an environmental policy, Lesley explains, drafted in 1998 by a group of committed and enthusiastic staff. Her task is to implement and further develop the policy, engaging the aid and support of staff and students.

Initial areas of focus in making changes are recycling, transport, energy use, use of equipment (such as computers) and design and refurbishment of buildings.

Over many years some very fine work has been done by Denis Agate, whom Lesley describes as an “unsung hero”. Since he was appointed Energy Manager in the 1980s (the first to hold that position in any New Zealand university) Denis has achieved remarkable reductions in the use of water, gas and electricity, with environmental and economic benefits. (Without these improvements energy and water would have cost the University $10.58 million more this year).

However, much of Denis’s work has been concerned with changes that can be made centrally and has therefore taken place largely behind the scenes.

(continued page 2)

Chasing the Blues

Winners of Auckland Cultural and Sporting Blues Awards will be announced at the annual Blues Awards dinner, to be held on 21 September in the marquee near Old Government House. The evening includes entertainment, and the chance to hear guest speaker Rob Matthews MBE, one of the world’s finest paralympians, who has set 22 world records while running for Britain. Rob is now based in New Zealand and available to share his incredible story of success in the face of apparent setbacks. He hopes to represent New Zealand at the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

Key events

Bizet to Broadway

To enjoy a selection of riotous, charming, comical, eccentric and exhilarating scenes from opera and musicals, make a quick decision to attend a concert at 8pm on 14 September at the School of Music Theatre. Managed by coordinator of vocal studies, Glenese Blake, and showcasing the talents of Performance Singing students, the concert is directed by Aidan Lang of NBR Opera and Jason Te Ete, and features also Robert Wiremu, Richard Liu and Lee Farley. Tickets $15, seniors $10, students and children $5. Door sales or book at Ticketmaster 0800 111 999 or www.ticketmaster.co.nz

Stepping more lightly

The future of our society could depend on how we use our engineering knowledge and expertise to advance sustainability and mitigate climate change. At 6pm on 20 September Professor Quentin Leiper, President of the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) New Zealand, will look at sustainability as a key to finding solutions to climate change, and why we need to recognise key impacts and address them responsibly. The lecture will take place at Lecture Theatre 1.439, Level 4, School of Engineering, followed by refreshments in the Engineering Atrium. Contact Alison Wylds on a.wylds@auckland.ac.nz or ext 88119.

Chasing the Blues

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The University has, in the past year, embarked upon an ambitious programme to enhance our environmental performance by reducing wherever possible the unnecessary consumption of resources. This includes reducing our use of energy, water, paper and other materials, as well as reducing the wastes we discharge to sewers and send to landfills, and the carbon that is released to the atmosphere as a result of our activities.

We have already achieved considerable improvements in energy and water use – mostly as a result of behind the scenes work by our Property Services and Facilities Management teams. This year our Environmental Coordinator, Dr Lesley Stone, has also been running pilots that provide opportunities for staff and students to contribute. Recycling has been trialled in the main student quad on the City Campus and in offices in 22 buildings on the City and Tamaki Campuses. Teams of staff and post-graduate students from 16 departments have trialled simple actions designed to reduce electricity, water and paper use, solid wastes and CO₂ emissions. In computer labs in the Kate Edger Information Commons and Engineering, we are encouraging students to switch off computer screens when they are not being used, and to use double-sided printing.

The results of the pilots have been encouraging. In offices that are part of the trials, up to 16 percent fewer computers, 31 percent fewer screens and 67 percent fewer printers have been left on overnight. In computer labs, 34 percent more screens have been switched off when not in use, and double-sided printing has increased by 10 percent. Recovery of cans and bottles in the quad has reduced the amount of solid waste there by 10 percent.

Ten percent reductions in electricity, water and waste across the University would reduce our resource use per year by more than five million kWh of electricity, 33,000 cubic metres of water, and seven million sheets of A4 paper. We would send 6,000 fewer wheelee bins to be dumped in landfills, discharge 23,000 fewer cubic metres of waste water to the sewers, and result in 1,700 tonnes less CO₂ being emitted to the atmosphere. These seem like sensible and important targets to aim for.

My thanks go to staff and students who have been involved so far. We will be using what we have learned from the pilots to enhance and extend the programme. For further information, please see www.auckland.ac.nz/environment

(Story continued from page 1)

Lesley’s work has been, and will be increasingly more visible, based, as it has to be, on individual and organisational change. Already Lesley has gained a good idea of the dimensions of the task, by interviewing students and staff and by benchmarking the University’s environmental performance against its Universitas 21 and APRU partners overseas, and against the other tertiary institutions in New Zealand and Australia. The Talloires Declaration, an international action plan for incorporating sustainability and environmental literacy in teaching, research and operations in tertiary institutions, has also been an excellent resource.

Staff and students, Lesley found, most commonly want communication of information on what they can do to help the environment; leadership from the University in accomplishing change; involvement and support in making the changes; and recognition for successes achieved.

Lesley has organised and overseen trials in recycling and saving of resources, which have not only had promising results (as listed in the Vice-Chancellor’s column on this page) but are also providing valuable information on effective approaches to achieving change across the University.

Indonesians train in human rights

A group of 22 Indonesians was warmly welcomed onto Waipapa Marae to take part in a human rights training programme at Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga.

This was a reflection of Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga’s commitment to education across cultures and borders.

Participants in the two-week training programme – organised and delivered by the Human Rights Foundation of Aotearoa and its Indonesian partner, Komnas Ham (the Indonesian Human Rights Commission) – included national and regional government representatives, leaders of non-governmental organisations, and academics.

The programme covered many human rights issues, including indigenous rights. By using Ngā Pae as a venue, indigenous approaches within a tertiary institution in New Zealand were illustrated. The programme included work on human rights research methods, writing and implementing human rights policy, and human rights monitoring.

Lesley Elliott, a member of the Human Rights Foundation who has worked for many years with refugees and migrants, led a distinguished group of trainers including Professor Margaret Bedggood from the University of Waikato, Dr Clive Aspin of Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga, and Peter Hosking, Executive Director of the Human Rights Foundation. Also sharing their expertise were Human Rights Commissioner Joy Liddicoat, and experts in human rights education and race relations from the Human Rights Commission.

In addition to classroom sessions, the participants visited the Waitangi Tribunal, NZAID, Hoani Waititi Marae and the Office of the Community and Voluntary Sector to learn first hand how human rights can be approached, realised, and contested in various institutional contexts. As they learned about human rights approaches in New Zealand, the participants reflected on and discussed their relevance to Indonesia.

Among the issues of particular interest to participants were the long process of Māori reestablishing their language and cultural rights; the processes used in New Zealand to address past grievances, especially the Waitangi Tribunal’s ability and willingness to take oral evidence; and the processes developing to improve access to political rights.

The training in New Zealand was just one phase of a programme which will continue through to 2009. The participants prepared human rights action plans while in New Zealand, which they will implement in their agencies in Indonesia. In the next phase, the progress of these plans will be discussed at six-monthly seminars in Indonesia.

Funded by NZAID, the training for the group of officials, leaders and decision makers aims to have a positive impact on the protection, promotion and fulfillment of human rights in Indonesia.

Books to be won

The competition is still open to name the intranet, with the chance to win an exciting prize of recent books from Auckland University Press. Send your suggestions to Judy Wilford on j.wilford@auckland.ac.nz

Suggestions on content for University News or the intranet are also welcome.

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Silver for Auckland student

University of Auckland student Melissa Ingram was New Zealand’s only medal winner at the 24th World University Games in Bangkok last month. Melissa, who narrowly qualified for the final of the 200 metres backstroke, claimed the silver medal swimming in lane one. She is studying for a BA. The games were the biggest to date with more than 10,000 accredited competitors and officials from 163 nations. New Zealand had its largest ever delegation of 112 athletes (14 from Auckland) and officials competing in nine of the 17 sports.

General Staff Awards and Study Scholarships

Applications for the General Staff Postgraduate Diploma in Business Scholarships and the Excellence Awards opened on 10 September. Three Excellence Awards are made available to General Staff each year. These are awarded under three categories; Sustained Excellence in Performance, Excellence in Innovation and Excellence in Leadership. Each award carries a citation and a monetary grant of $2500. Up to six Postgraduate Diploma Scholarships are awarded to General Staff each year. Each Scholarship covers course fees for the full two years of part-time study within the Postgraduate Diploma in Business. Applications for Postgraduate Diploma in Business Scholarships close on 8 October; General Staff Excellence Awards applications close on 31 October. For further information and application forms visit www.auckland.ac.nz/sodu and click on the ‘Awards, Scholarships and Fellowships’ category. For general enquiries, please contact Jemimah Wilson on je.wilson@auckland.ac.nz or ext. 85070.

Karl Stead a Distinguished Citizen

Novelist, poet and academic Emeritus Professor C K (Karl) Stead has been honoured for his contributions to literature. Professor Stead was a Professor of English at the University for 20 years before retiring to write full-time in 1986. He received a CBE in 1985 and was admitted to the Order of New Zealand, in 2007. The Auckland Distinguished Citizen Award is Auckland City Council’s highest honour and past recipients connected with the University have included the late Sir Hugh Kawharu, Professor Peter Gluckman and Mrs Jenny Gibbs.
George Fraser Gallery enjoys new role

If you’ve ever walked past the George Fraser Gallery and wondered what goes on inside the small, red brick building, wonder no more.

Formerly known as the Stables Building on Albert Park, the dwelling serves as a public window onto the creative activities and learning programmes of the Elam School of Fine Arts in the National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries (NiCAI).

Thanks to a newly invigorated programme of events and activities the George Fraser Gallery has been re-launched as a hub of exhibitions, installations, public forums and open studio activities, all of which reflect the diverse range of programmes and projects at Elam.

A recent exhibition and award ceremony was testimony to the gallery’s new and vibrant role. Offering a warm respite on a late-winter evening, the gallery was packed with around 60 people who had come to admire walls adorned with the artworks of six Elam students.

The artists were finalists in the second-annual Henrietta and Lola Anne Tunbridge Scholarship, awarded for excellence in exploring contemporary themes in water colour. The audience applauded enthusiastically as two postgraduates, Boris Dornbusch and Trenton Garratt, were jointly awarded the $10,000 scholarship, New Zealand’s most generous prize for student artists.

For Head of Elam, Associate Professor Derrick Cherrie, the evening reflects the support that exists for a student-focused gallery, and bodes well for even bigger initiatives in the future.

Visitors to the George Fraser Gallery admire the work of Tunbridge Scholarship co-winner Boris Dornbusch

“The George Fraser Gallery has been a quiet presence on the campus for more than two decades, but its potential as a University and community-supported space has never been fully realised. With the new programme underway, the gallery promises to play an important part in promoting and strengthening the relationships between Elam, the University and the community at large,” he says.

Currently on exhibition at the gallery is “Public paces” which runs from 13 September to 22 September. The George Fraser Gallery (25a Princes Street) is open from 11am to 4pm Thursday to Saturday. For more information phone (09) 367 7163 (during opening hours) or visit www.georgefraser.auckland.ac.nz

Careers day resounding success

Visitors to the University’s Courses and Careers Day on 25 August were strongly positive in their assessment.

Their overall approval rating was 4.3 out of 5 with staff scoring 4.4 for their helpfulness and friendliness.

Scores of staff were involved in organising and fronting the Saturday event which drew more than 6000 visitors with numbers reportedly up across the board. A wider segment of the City Campus than previously was open with three faculties – Business, Law, Medical and Health Sciences – based in the striking new Owen G. Glenn Building.

Most who came were Years 12 and 13 students, 86 percent from Greater Auckland. Free buses brought hundreds of visitors – about a third of those attending – from all parts of Auckland as well as from places as far-flung as Whangarei and Tauranga, conveying them home from mid-afternoon.

Their favourable feedback was most gratifying, says Ken Rapson, director of the Schools Partnership Office who chaired the organising committee. “The enthusiasm of staff and their rapport with our visitors were highly evident.

“The day’s success owed everything to the skill and dedication of many people, and the way they all – in faculties, service divisions and as Student Ambassadors – worked together as a team.”

Ken paid special tribute to Lynda Ferris, Events and Project Manager at Communications and Marketing, whose “grasp of immensely complicated logistics, creative flair, calm demeanour and attention to detail ensured that all ran extremely smoothly.”

The event offered 160 lectures and hands-on activities with faculties and service divisions erecting eye-catching displays and demonstrating all manner of equipment and facilities. Prospective students and their families could find out how to tame a tornado, learn Māori pronunciation, hear how environmental engineers are “needed to save the planet”, and enjoy live theatre, dance and music.
Large issues left hanging

Our report “Pacific Consumers’ Behaviour and Experience in Credit markets, with Particular Reference to the ‘Fringe Lending’ Market in South Auckland” (Anae, M., and Coxon, E., et al.), submitted to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs in April this year and only just released by Government has created vigorous reaction both from Government (Ministry of Consumer Affairs) and John Minto (Global Peace and Justice).

The Ministry of Community Affairs launched a 27-page official response to the report simultaneous with its launching on 17 August, and a scathing piece attacking the Government’s response as “all spin and no substance” appeared in the NZ Herald on 21 August (“John Minto: Life Jacket needs to be thrown to loan-shark victims”).

The report was produced by the MCA as part of its monitoring of the Credit Contracts and Consumer Finance Act (CCCFA), 2005. In essence, the report highlighted four main findings:

There is clear evidence that the CCCFA does not provide sufficient protection to credit consumers dependent on “fringe” lenders and that New Zealand credit legislation must be tightened and more strongly enforced in order to better control operations of the fringe credit market place.

In the context of Pacific people’s accessing of cash loans for everyday household expenses, cars, and sociocultural obligations (in descending order of priority), the unavailability for them of cheaper credit options leaves them exposed to high cost and exploitative credit contracts from fringe lenders.

The notion that if certain information is available consumers will use it to make decisions that will shape the development of a healthily competitive credit market (the underpinning assumption of the CCCFA) is challenged.

The need to engage in first, second- and third-priority borrowing has produced an environment of continuing pressure and stress in the lives of Pacific consumers. Many Pacific consumers acknowledge the need for “fringe” lenders; however the confusion and stress caused by hidden costs and exploitative credit contracts exacerbates their already vulnerable positioning, with negative and sometimes dire consequences in many cases. Amidst the flurry of activities which has informed the Government’s so-called response strategy, the bigger issues which the report highlights are left hanging.

What the report is really about is how the credit market is stimulating economic development in New Zealand in unevenly shared ways for various cohorts of the New Zealand population; it provides clear examples of how the availability of credit is connected to the financial well-being or not of Pacific peoples in New Zealand.

Yes, many Pacific people in South Auckland are victims of loan sharks, but on the other hand it is clear that other Pacific people are becoming financially literate as well, in their successful negotiation of the credit system to suit their immediate household needs, their purchase of wanted as opposed to needed goods, and the meeting of their cultural financial roles and obligations.

But the fact is, however, that even for these apparently “successful” cases, the CCCFA allows them to be exploited in the process. The CCCFA does not offer protection to low income consumers dependent on the fringe lending market and this cohort is therefore subjected to ill-defined, non-transparent, unreasonable and oppressive contracts.

While the research has enabled the identification of some illegal practices, most of the fringe lender practices highlighted by the research that produce detrimental outcomes for Pacific and other low income credit consumers are perfectly legal under the CCCFA. It does not appear that the Government response strategy is addressing this.

Dr Melani Anae and Dr Eve Coxon Centre for Pacific Studies

Outrageous premier

Robbie Ellis, composition student at the School of Music, will have his musical theatre piece And The Rest is... premiered at 8pm on 28 September at the School of Music.

It highlights outrage and the outrageous in moments of history. Also being premiered are Joseph Owen’s Entering the Subconscious and Kristy Griggs and Jared Marshall’s Submersion.

Tickets are $15, seniors $10, students $5. For tickets phone Ticketmaster on 0800 111 999 or visit www.ticketmaster.co.nz

For more information check www.creative.auckland.ac.nz

Food for health

One of five recipients of Fulbright New Zealand Senior Scholar Awards for 2008 is Dr Cameron Grant (Paediatrics), who will conduct research at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, USA, on the importance of nutrition to the health of children. Check the intranet for more information about his research.
Books

Colin McCahon: The Titirangi Years, 1953-1959

This book by Associate Professor Peter Simpson (English) explores the life and work of Colin McCahon during his years in Titirangi in west Auckland.

Published by Auckland University Press, it covers the period in the 1950s when McCahon and his family lived in French Bay, a haven of beach and bush that featured in many of his works.

Leaving the South Island in 1953 to take a job as curator at the Auckland City Art Gallery, McCahon and his family spent seven years in the modest Titirangi dwelling. His new environs, dense with kauri and pohutukawa trees, strongly influenced McCahon’s painting style, which radically changed from sweeping landscapes and biblical references to cubist-inflected interpretations of the surrounding land and sea.

Colin McCahon: The Titirangi Years, 1953-1959 provides a comprehensive overview of this crucial period in the work of New Zealand’s greatest painter. Six chapters with accompanying photographs and colour reproductions cover McCahon’s job at the Auckland City Art Gallery, the Titirangi house and setting, the progressive changes in his art practice, and the career-changing visit to the United States. The text is followed by full-colour reproductions of 80 of the most important paintings of the period.

Some of McCahon’s paintings from this period can be seen in a special exhibition at the Gus Fisher Gallery until 15 September.

The book will be available from 10 September and will be publicly launched during the session “A Wee Taste of McCahon” at the Going West Festival in Titirangi on 15 September.

Oceanic Music Encounters

Recently released is the latest externally-refereed monograph in the Research in Anthropology and Linguistics (RAL) series, produced by the Department of Anthropology at The University of Auckland.

Edited by Associate Professor Richard Moyle, Director of the Archive of Māori and Pacific Music and Director of the Centre for Pacific Studies, this monograph, entitled Oceanic Music Encounters: The Print Resource and the Human Resource, Essays in Honour of Mervyn McLean, is a festschrift volume.

It honours the contributions to ethnomusicology of Dr Mervyn McLean, whose academic reputation has focused largely on the recording, preserving and study of Māori waiata, and the establishment of the Archive of Māori and Pacific Music at The University of Auckland.

Mervyn McLean has continued to publish prolifically since retiring from the University in 1992.

The variety of academic interests stimulated by his teaching and publications is reflected in the wide range of topics in the volume, which include an investigation of the existence of the Melanesian nose flute, three essays on individual songs, two on song performance as a tool for Christian evangelisation, one on the 2000 Festival in Noumea and another on the hula as danced within the islands of Torres Strait.

Richard Moyle contributes a biography of Mervyn McLean and an essay on songs in quintuple metre on the Polynesian outlier island of Taku.

In this series preference is given to research undertaken by staff and students of the Departments of Anthropology and Applied Language Studies and Linguistics at The University of Auckland but other manuscripts are also considered.

Postfoundationalist Themes in the Philosophy of Education

This volume, published by Blackwell Publishing, is a festschrift for Emeritus Professor James Marshall, a former head of department and Dean of Education at The University of Auckland, and now an honorary research professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the United States.

The word “festschrift” comes to us from German as a combination of fest meaning “festival” and schrift meaning “writing”.

Edited by Michael Peters, Professor of Education at the University of Glasgow in the UK and an Adjunct Professor of Education at The University of Auckland, with Professor Paul Smyers from K. U. Leuven in Belgium, the book includes papers by scholars from Australia, Brazil, New Zealand, the UK and the US.

James Marshall has been active in the philosophy of education for three decades. This collection takes his work as a starting point. It contains essays dealing with various aspects of his work, particularly his long-standing criticism of the “performativity” of the public education system of New Zealand, and his work considering the relevance of Wittgenstein and Foucault for various problems in the philosophy of education.

It includes tributes to James Marshall in the form of interviews and testimonials, and brief biographies by Paulo Ghiraldelli Jnr, Michael Peters, Kevin Harris and Colin Lankshear, as well as a comment by Denis Philips – one of James’s oldest friends – on his marriage with Lynda Stone, at which Denis officiated. It also includes a bibliography and remarks from James himself in response to the commentaries of his colleagues.
Rangitoto plant life surprises investigators

Rangitoto Island – one of Auckland’s most treasured landmarks – is the home to over 1000 kinds of plants. Not bad for an island only 600 years old with no soil and with lava slopes still in the process of colonisation by vegetation.

This unexpected biodiversity is highlighted in a book on the island’s natural history, just produced by the Auckland Botanical Society.

The book has many University connections, with ten of its alumni represented among the contributors including its editor, the society’s president, Dr Mike Wilcox. There have been numerous MSc and PhD thesis projects conducted on Rangitoto by students of the University and these studies have greatly contributed to understanding the island’s ecology – John Carnahan (MSc Hon 1948) on seaweeds, Robert Oliver (MSc 1973) on sea gulls, Diana Whiting (MSc 1986) on crevice colonisation, Melinda Szymank (MSc 1987) on the rock wallaby, Christine Ols (MSc 1987) on the possum, Andrea Julian (PhD 1992) on vegetation patterns, Andrew Merrill (MSc 1994) on hydrology, and John Nowak (MSc 1995) on lava flows.

Rangitoto has been used for generations of geology, botany, zoology and ecology students as an outdoor classroom, says Mike Wilcox. Associate Professor Laurie Millener (1914-2000) was perhaps the most famous teacher in this regard, “more or less adopting the island as his favourite botanical haunt” and becoming involved in campaigning to get rid of the pine trees, recording the native flora, and researching the history of the vegetation. He is one of three people the book is dedicated to.

A former senior lecturer in Botany, Dr John Braggins, is one of the authors in the book, and among staff to receive acknowledgements or mentions are Dr Alwyn Rees (Leigh Marine Laboratory) and Dr Neil Mitchell (Geography and Environmental Science).

Mike Wilcox says the team from the Auckland Botanical Society set out to record every kind of plant on Rangitoto, including seaweeds, mosses, liverworts, lichens, fungi, and ferns, as well as flowering plants. The project took two years and the survey revealed impressive numbers of lichens, fungi, mosses and liverworts, and several fern species not previously known from the island.

The team explored the island thoroughly in every month of the year, so as to capture the seasonal changes in the vegetation and document the reproductive cycles of all the main species that make up the island’s flora. The ecology of Rangitoto Island is recognised nationally as being so distinctive that the island is classed as an Ecological District on its own. As a result of the survey Mike Wilcox says this designation is fully endorsed.

“Are there many things unusual about Rangitoto,” says Mike, “but the most distinctive feature is the dominant forest cover on the volcanic lava fields, made up of scattered pohutukawa trees, with several characteristic associates such as puka and astelia which have proliferated dramatically since the final elimination of wallabies and possums from the island in 1996.”

The book is aimed at nature lovers, biology and geology students, and professional biologists, ecologists and conservation managers. It is available from booksellers or from the Auckland Botanical Society, PO Box 26391, Epsom, Auckland (email: mike.wilcox@xtra.co.nz).

From the collection

The upheaval of moving from Christchurch to Auckland in 1953 meant a break of six months in Colin McCahon’s work while the family resettled in Titirangi.

Rejoicing in the warmer climate, McCahon wrote to his friend Charles Brasch in Dunedin that he was moving “towards warmth – the most lacking quality in NZ painting and one which I feel can only grow out of disorder in painting but the contrasts found in disorder can be built on for good”.

One of the contrasts he delighted in was between the built and natural environment and this is seen in The Titirangi House from the Garden, 1953, charcoal on paper. Kauri were abundant around his house at 67 Ottori Bay Road in French Bay and were a compelling species which he encountered at Titirangi for the first time.

Agathis australis came to preoccupy him as a subject for painting and drawing, as he felt his way towards abstraction. Working at the Auckland Art Gallery, he described in the Quarterly that “Kauri trees dominated my work for quite some years”.

Calling the regenerating bush that grew on the section around the house his “domestic landscape”, he made many intimate charcoal studies of the little dwelling and surrounding trees throughout the early summer months of November and December.

In depicting this environment he fought against his own literalist instincts: “am doing the bush, hard, must come to some solution of the domestic landscape before I can start using it in any way. So far nothing wholly satisfactory but parts of things not so bad. All very crude and rough, still too descriptive...”

By December, his understanding of analytical Cubist techniques where fractured lines were used to divide space had developed, and abstraction was ascendant in his work. As Peter Simpson points out in his book on McCahon’s Titirangi years, McCahon dispensed with a conventional horizon line, crowding up his picture space with vertical shadings and the occasional sinuous line suggesting the pattern of light through the trunks of trees to create a Cubist, “all-over” composition of geometric shapes and patterns.

This work is one of two McCahon drawings purchased with considerable foresight by Professor Keith Sinclair from Barry Lett Gallery in 1966 two years after McCahon had begun teaching at Elam School of Fine Arts. These two drawings began The University of Auckland Art Collection, which has now grown to over 800 works. This work will be on display with other works by McCahon at the Gus Fisher Gallery to celebrate the launch of Associate Professor Peter Simpson’s new book on McCahon, Colin McCahon: The Titirangi Years, 1953-1959, published by Auckland University Press.

Linda Tyler